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The Invention of the First Century Synagogue:

A Critical Examination of the Archaeological Evidence

by

Lidia Domenica Matassa
Student 01170368

A dissertation submitted to the School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics,
Trinity College Dublin, in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy.

13 October 2010

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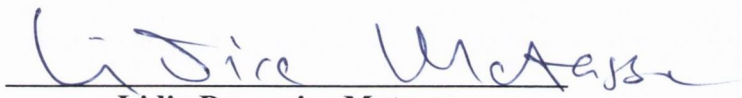
Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of research undertaken by me for the purpose of the award of the degree of Doctor in Philosophy. The work is entirely my own and has not been undertaken in collaboration with any other individual or group. I also declare that this work has not previously been submitted and I herewith grant permission for this dissertation to be copied and/or distributed.



Lidia Domenica Matassa
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Abstract

This dissertation deals with the processes by which five sites at Delos, Jericho, Herodium, Masada and Gamla were identified as first century synagogues. The five sites were chosen for study in this dissertation because they are consistently used in modern scholarship as comparators for *all* other early synagogues and are the archaeological foundation upon which the chronological development of the early synagogue stands. Understanding the assumed links between these five sites, as well as the material that was used to identify them, is a vital component of the study of early synagogues as a whole and it is the purpose of this dissertation to take a fresh look at the material that has been taken for granted in their identification. Chapter 1 contains the introduction, definitions and a literature review, as well as an outline of the methodology and sources used. Chapter 2 is the case study of building GD 80 on the Greek island of Delos which was identified as a synagogue in 1912. This building has been dated to as a early as the third century BCE. Chapter 3 is the case study of the courtyard house at Hasmonaean and Herodian Jericho which was identified as a synagogue, perhaps dating from the second century BCE. Chapter 4 is the case study of building 1042 at Masada identified as a synagogue dating to the period of the first Jewish rebellion against Rome in the first century CE. This was the first building in modern Israel to be identified as a first century synagogue. Chapter 4 is the case study of the triclinium at Herodium identified as a synagogue. Its dating is somewhat more problematic, but it dates at least in part to the period of the first Jewish rebellion against Rome in the first century CE. Chapter 5 is the case study of the purpose-built assembly hall at Gamla identified as a synagogue. This structure dates to the first century CE. Chapter 7 contains my conclusions that in the cases of Delos, Jericho, Masada and Herodium the synagogue identifications

are incorrect and were made on scant evidence, but that in the case of Gamla the identification *may* be correct.

Methodology

Each of the case study sites has been approached in the same way: by gathering every possible excavation detail, as well as literary, epigraphic and other sources and material evidence. Each site has been painstakingly and closely examined so as to illustrate the specifics of the excavations, the known history of those sites, and any literary, epigraphic or other information that might cast light on their function in their ancient context, as well as at specific problems with excavations and subsequent analyses over the years.

I have visited and photographed each site, drawn plans showing the relevant contexts and the relationship between elements of the sites, as well as the locations of artefacts, inscriptions, and architectural and other physical elements and have analysed the individual elements that led to each identification. This methodology has had a completely unexpected benefit in that it has enabled illustration of the points at which scholarly opinion and interpretation of the archaeology has departed from fact (and sometimes reason!), and where this has been built on, over time, to produce the identification mythologies that we now see in relation to these five sites. As a consequence of this, it also became necessary to separate out some of the more specific claims made in relation to each of the individual sites and to locate them within the case studies. Therefore, in each chapter, there is a recitation of the main scholarly interpretations of the particular site, showing where these have relied on previous scholarship, or on misinterpretation rather than on the reality of the archaeological, epigraphic or textual evidence.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father, Maria Nardone and Antonio Matassa, whose support has been constant.

Abbreviations

ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
AJSR	*Association for Jewish Studies Review*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römische Welt*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BAIAS	*Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*
BCH	*Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique*
BIOSCS	*Bulletin of the International Organisation for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*
BJPES	*Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
BMC	*British Museum Catalogue*
BSP	*Black Sea Project*
BT	*Bible Today*
CBQ	*Christian Biblical Quarterly*
CIJ	*Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*
CIL	*Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*
CIRB	*Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani (Moscow: Academina Scienetiarum, 1965)*
CIS	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*
CPJ	*Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*
DJD	*Discoveries in the Judæan Desert*
EI	*Eretz Israel*
EJ	*Encyclopaedia Judaica*
FRLANT	*Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IMJ	*Israel Museum Journal*
INJ	*Israel Numismatic Journal*
ISBE	*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAS	*Journal of Archaeological Science*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JJA	*Journal of Jewish Art*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JPOS	*Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRH	*Journal of Religious History*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*

JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSP	*Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha*
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LA	*Liber Annus* (Franciscan Biblical Centre, Jerusalem)
MGWJ	*Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*
NEAEHL	*New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*
PBSR	*Papers of the British School at Rome*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*
POC	*Proche-Orient Chrétien*
POXY	*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*
RA	*Revue archéologique*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
REJ	*Revue des Études Juives*
RPh	*Revue Philologique*
RQ	*Revue de Qumran*
SCI	*Scripta Classical Israelitica*
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift für Deutschen Palästina Vereins*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Acknowledgements

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Hebrew University of Jerusalem and explaining the processes involved in their manufacture.

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Sources and Translations

Ancient Sources

The sources used in researching this dissertation were the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible, the Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo and other Graeco-Roman writers who make any relevant reference (even if only in passing), including Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Suetonius, Tacitus, Juvenal and others. I have also consulted, where available, epigraphical material, ancient texts, ostraca and graffiti from sites.

Translations

Throughout this dissertation, quotations from and references to Josephus, Philo or any other Graeco-Roman writers, are taken from the Loeb Classical Library translations (see Bibliography for specific details). Where I have quoted Greek inscriptions, I have produced the texts as they are inscribed on stelae, without diacritical marks and accents.

The bible used throughout this dissertation is *The Jewish Study Bible*, Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation, Oxford University Press, UK (2004). I have also used the *BibleWorks 7* programme to search for terms in Hebrew, Greek and English, which I have then cross-checked against the *Jewish Study Bible*. For New Testament material, I have used *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, *New Revised Standard Version*, but have then cross-checked via *BibleWorks 7* to search for terms in Hebrew, Greek and English.

Images and plans

Other than five photographs and one map (Figures 4a, 4b, 11, 17, 49 and 50), all illustrations used in this dissertation are my own. For ease of reference I have integrated all illustrations into the body of the text.

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

This dissertation deals with the processes by which five sites at Delos, Jericho, Herodium, Masada and Gamla were identified as first century synagogues. *The five sites discussed in this dissertation were chosen for the simple reason that they are consistently used in modern scholarship as comparators for all other early synagogues and are the archaeological foundation upon which the chronological development of the early synagogue stands*. Understanding the assumed links between these five sites, as well as the interpretations of the material that led to their identifications, is vital to the subject of early synagogue studies as a whole, and it is the aim of this dissertation to take a fresh look at the material that has been used in this way.

The identification of pre-70 CE synagogues in the land of Israel and the Graeco-Roman diaspora is fraught with difficulties, but this has not prevented new identifications being made every year.[1] The material evidence contributing to

[1] For example, in September of 2009, a synagogue identification was made in a Jewish village at Magdala in the Galilee. Having seen some photographs and media coverage of the site, as well as receiving some photographs from the site from colleagues, it seems clear that what has been found is indeed an early synagogue. However, I am certain it will be dated to the second or third century on the basis that the style and execution of the carved decorative elements is not the norm for the first century and that the excavators themselves are not yet sure that it can be safely dated to the first century. The excavations are being conducted along the northern fringes of Magdala, along the shores of Lake Kinneret. Pottery fragments were found which the excavators think are dated to the early Roman period, but they are somewhat equivocal about this and say that these pottery fragments are no later than the second century CE). The site is being excavated by Dina Avshalom-Gorni and Arfan Najar of the Israel Antiquities Authority. See http://www.antiquities.org.il/Dig_Item_eng.asp?id=1290 and http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3775237,00.html) (accessed 21.10.2009); see also B. Zissu and A. Ganor (2009), "Horvat 'Ethri – A Jewish Village from the Second Temple Period and the Bar Kokhba Revolt in the Judaean Foothills", *JJS*, Vol. LX, No. 1 Spring 2009: 90-136, in which there is a discussion about whether the public building 'M' is a prototype synagogue dating to before 70 CE. The excavators argue that it is a pre-70 CE synagogue, despite the fact that they say remodelling work in the third century CE, removed features such as stone benches, *for which there is now no evidence*; and see also Y. Magen, D.T. Ariel, G. Bijovsky, Y. Tzionit and O. Sirkis

those identifications has frequently been meagre and interpretations of that material evidence has tended to be speculative, because often there have been no archaeological reports to support the identifications, either because those reports have not been published or because they have never been written.

In this dissertation, we will see that there have been substantial errors in both the analysis and transmission of archaeological and historiographical information in relation to the five case study sites and how this has resulted in the generation of a flawed process that has allowed identifications of first century synagogues based on broad and simplistic assumptions that have not been established. Of course, none of this is to say that the five sites discussed in this dissertation could not have been synagogues; only that we shall see that there is little or no evidence that they were.

The five case studies of this dissertation are ordered so as to show the progression of specific identification errors, rather than on the basis of any internal or external chronology because, as it turns out, a chronology of the sites from earliest to latest date is not particularly helpful. Moreover, while it might seem obvious that Masada could have been used as the first case study, because it is the most famous of the sites to have been identified as a first century synagogue, this would have presented its own set of problems since the site is often, in effect, used as a comparator for itself as well as for the other four sites discussed in this dissertation. As will be illustrated in the case studies, each of these five first

---

(2004) *The Land of Benjamin*, JSP 3, Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, Israel Antiquities Authority , Jerusalem (about the village and 'synagogue' at Kiryat Sefer). The publication of the Kiryat Sefer material is not a full excavation report, consisting instead of a descriptive and assumed historical context for the site as well as some archaeological details. It is not clear when the site will be fully published, but there is certainly no evidence that the building identified is a synagogue at all, much less that it is a first century one.

century synagogue identifications has become caught up in a web of scholarly, epigraphical and archaeological tautology.

Because of the paucity of literary information on synagogues in the land of Israel in the first century BCE/CE (the only contemporary works that mention the synagogue in a Jewish context are Josephus, Philo and the New Testament and occasional references in the Latin and Greek literature of the era (such as in Juvenal's *Satire 3*[2]), it is impossible now to recover precisely how the early synagogue functioned or indeed how it developed.[3] This has resulted in a substantial disconnect between the terminology and definitions used in modern discussions about early synagogue identification and the archaeological and material record. In recent years, academic understanding has purposefully deconstructed the physical institution of the early synagogue into a multipurpose communal assembly space which is used for everything from commercial trading to threshing floor, from school to law court and, of course, to locus of religious activity in some form or another.

Broadening the criteria by which the theoretical – but potentially physical – first century synagogue is defined has been necessary to mainstream scholarship, because otherwise identification is all but impossible (or has been so far). However, broadening the definition has also had the effect of making it harder to make a physical identification of a first century synagogue – on the basis that any

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[2] Juvenal. *Satires* (translation by S. Morton-Braund), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England (2004): 3.296: "He stands facing me and tells me to stop. I've no choice but to obey. After all, what can you do when a lunatic forces you, and he's stronger as well? 'Where have you been?' he yells. 'Whose sour wine and beans have blown you out? Which shoemaker has been eating spring onions and boiled sheep's head with you? Nothing to say? Tell me or you'll get a kicking! Say, where's your pitch? Which *proseuche* shall I look for you in?' ["in qua te quaero proseucha?"] Whether you try to say something or silently retreat, it's all the same. They beat you up just the same and then, still angry, they sue for assault."

[3] All excerpts from Philo, Josephus, and other Graeco-Roman authors, in Greek or English, are taken from the Loeb Classical Library editions (see bibliography).

building in a demonstrably Jewish setting with a reasonably large internal space with benches around its walls could be a synagogue and, simultaneously, easier to make an identification – on precisely the same basis. As a result, evidence for first century synagogue identifications is non-specific and is riddled with inaccuracies and presumptions which have been built on over time and have been accepted almost without question into scholarship on the subject. This process will be illustrated in the case studies contained in this dissertation.

We can define and identify later purpose-built synagogues easily enough as spaces in which liturgy and prayer are used in the pursuit of worship, and where the space may also be used for other communal activities including teaching. These (late Roman/Byzantine period) synagogues contain a physical focal point, such as a raised platform (a *bema*) on which a reader stands so as to be both visible and audible, and are designed to facilitate reading to a gathered congregation and participation in prayer by that congregation. Moreover, there can be decorative, architectural and storage elements used in these later structures that have a specifically Jewish character (such as Torah shrines, *menorahs*, *ethrogs*, *luvavs*, and other motifs we now associate with the synagogue). We also see dedicatory inscriptions[4] and, certain decorative features on columns and door lintels.[5] We can see instances and combinations of all these elements in later

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[4] M. Hengel, "Proseuche und Synagoge: Jüdische Gemeinde, Gotteshaus und Gottesdienst in der Diaspora und in Palästina", in *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture*, The Library of Biblical Studies, New York, KTAV (1975): 27-54; A. Kasher, "Synagogues as 'Houses of Prayer' and 'Holy Places' in the Jewish Communities of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt", in D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher, (eds.) *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Vol. 1, New York, E.J. Brill (1995): 205-220; C. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen (2001): 397-413; L. Roth-Gerson, *Greek Inscriptions from the Synagogues in Eretz-Israel*, Jerusalem, Ben Zvi Institute (1987); J. Zangenberg, H. Attridge and D.B. Martin (eds.), *Religion, Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Galilee*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen (2007); Huettenmeister, F. and G. Reeg, *Die Antiken Synagogen in Israel*. 2 vols. Wiesbaden: Reichert (1977).

[5] Danny Syon and Zvi Yavor, "Gamla 1997–2000", in *Atikot*, Volume 50, Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem (2005): 16–23; Orit Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements", in

synagogues in Israel, such as those at Nabratein, Kfar Baram, Hammat Tiberias, Capernaum, Khirbet Shema, Gush Halav, Sepphoris, Beth Alpha, Meiron (all in the Galilee and the Golan), En Gedi, Eshtemoa, Na'aran, Ma'on, Ma'on Nirim, (all in Judaea), and in the Diaspora at Priene and Sardis (Turkey), Dura Europos and Apamea (Syria), Ostia (Italy), Stobi (Macedonia), Aegina and Miletus (Greece), Gerasa (Jordan), as well as many others, all dating to the late Roman/Byzantine period.[6] Certainly, by the Byzantine period, Torah shrines in purpose-built apses have become a common fixture of the architecture of the synagogue, as have raised speakers' platforms (*bema*) and orientation towards Jerusalem.[7]

Our problem only becomes fully apparent when we try to identify the first century architectural precursors to these later well-established and identified synagogues. None of the foregoing architectural or decorative elements are present in any of the five case study sites, with the *possible* exception of the purpose-built public building at Gamla which is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 herein.

Delos, the first study in this dissertation (and the earliest of the sites to be identified as a first century synagogue), is sometimes dated to the mid-third century BCE. As we shall see, beginning with the case of Delos, but in common with the other three of the four case study sites, there is a trail of epigraphical and

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Danny Syon (ed), *Gamla* II: *The Shmaryah Gutman Excavations, 1976-1989 - The Architecture* [IAA Reports], Jerusalem (forthcoming); Lee I. Levine (ed), *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society: (1982): 106, 108, 95-97.

[6] S. Fine (ed.), *Sacred Realm. The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford (1996).

[7] R. Hachlili, "The Niche and the Ark in Ancient Synagogues", *BASOR*, 223 (October 1976): 43-54; R. Hachlili. "Torah Shrine and Ark in Ancient Synagogues: A Re-evaluation", in *ZDPV* 116 2 (2000): 147; R. Hachlili, "Aspects of Similarity and Diversity in the Architecture and Art of Ancient Synagogues and Churches in the Land of Israel", in *ZDPV* 113 (1997): 92-115 ; L.I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue. The First Thousand Years*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London (2000): 213-222.

archaeological evidence that has been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and these errors are still being transmitted and built on by modern scholars as though they represent established fact.

There is no safe way to identify a first century synagogue. There is no canonical architectural style; other than a central open space, a feature common to many buildings, both public and private. There are otherwise few commonalities, and there appears to be an unbridgeable gap between the five case study sites of this dissertation and the sites that can be unequivocally identified as synagogues, all of which date to at least the late Roman-Byzantine period. Moreover, there is no useful comparison to be made between other contemporary structures, in Jewish contexts or otherwise, and the five case study sites. Where there are even superficially comparable structures, they are discussed in the context to which they directly relate in this dissertation but, even then, they are largely unhelpful, as the case studies will show.

And there is also something of a curiosity here, and it is this: why are encircling benches (around the walls) of an assembly space taken as indicators of synagogue usage? I have been unable to find where the suggestion originates. In an assembly space such as a council chamber, encircling benches are useful. They become less useful in terms of cultic function, that is, where movement of objects in and out of the space is required. It seems that the presence of benches in assembly spaces has entered the scholarship as a *factoid*; without support. It makes far more sense, in a public building designed and/or intended for religious use to have a long central space with moveable seating or no seating at all,

whereas encircling benches make perfect sense within the context of a public building designed to accommodate discussion and debate.

A good example of how the argument about benches tends to lead us nowhere is the cautionary tale of the little structure at Magdala identified in 1974 by Corbo and Loffreda as a first century synagogue on the basis that its layout, with encircling benches around the walls and a central open space, is the same as that of the public building at Gamla (publicly identified as a first century synagogue by Shmaryah Gutman in 1976.[8]) Closer and later examination of the Magdala site revealed its dedicated and extensive water systems and shortly thereafter that it was a fountain house built in the style of a public building.[9] Clearly, we cannot simply use a rectangular structure with open internal space and benches around its walls as the basis for identifying early synagogues.

It is this gap between the theoretical scholarship on the identification of early synagogues and the physical evidence and its interpretation that informs the body of this dissertation, focused through the lens of the five case studies. As will become clear from the case studies, the physical similarity between each of the sites in this dissertation is tenuous and superficial. In addition, these five synagogue identifications were made – at best – on little more than the fact that the spaces identified as synagogues had benches around their walls; as uncomfortably unlikely and fanciful as this may seem.

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[8] E. Netzer, "Did the Spring-House at Magdala Serve as a Synagogue?", in A. Kasher, A. Oppenheimer and U. Rappaport (eds.), *Synagogues in Antiquity*. Jerusalem: 165-172 (1987).

[9] The little fountain house at Magdala is a different building to the synagogue identified in 2009 (for which see note 1 above). See also R. Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, (2002): 143; L.F. De Vries, *Cities of the Biblical World*, Hendrickson (1997): 327–28; L.I. Levine (2000): 67; C. Meyers, C.T. Craven, and R.S. Kraemer (eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and New Testament*, Houghton Mifflin, New York (2000); L.D. Matassa, "Magdala", in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Second Edition, 2008.

There are no certainties here and any potential descriptors must remain – of necessity – tentative. In these circumstances, what can possibly help to identify what a first century synagogue might have been, in the absence of specific identifiers and markers? Let us assume that if we are looking for a physical structure then it must be of sufficient size to hold a number of people from its community, let us say a minimum of ten people.[10] We may also need space for seating or standing or kneeling. This seating need not be fixed in place – such as stone benches – as, if our potential structure is a multi-purpose building, the space may need to be utilised in other ways at other times.

If, on the other hand, the building is designed to function solely as a synagogue as we now understand it, then perhaps, in addition to the open space sufficient to accommodate at least ten people, we may look for traces of architectural features that appear in later synagogues, such as a reading platform[11] (although, of course, this could easily be portable in the same way as seating might be). We will see in the case study of the purpose-built public building at Gamla that there is a structure that could – just possibly – be the foundation for a platform which might fit this bill. We might also expect to find some sort of external indication of what the building was, such as an identifying inscription, donor inscriptions, or perhaps a door lintel with rosettes carved into it (such as the one found at one of the entrances to the public building in Gamla).

[10] A Mishnaic *minyan*.
[11] A *bema*.

It is possible, though by no means assured, that our putative synagogue may have water systems that feed an installation such as a *mikveh*,[12] or even a hand-washing basin (such as the one at Gamla). We might also look for a building which is part of a larger complex that might perhaps offer accommodation for visitors, such as that described in the Theodotos Inscription (discussed below).

In the absence of these architectural identifiers, we are left with only a single possible criterion with which to identify a synagogue – either as a single or multi-purpose building – and that is that its internal configuration consisting of an open space need only be sufficient to accommodate a group of people gathered together for some purpose. This is clearly not an adequate or satisfactory basis on which to make an identification of a first century synagogue. Unfortunately, for the moment, and looking at the case studies in this dissertation, this may be an insurmountable difficulty (except, perhaps, in relation to Gamla).

Terminology

Arguments surrounding the origins of the synagogue, where they refer to structures that predate the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, are wholly based on literary and epigraphical evidence, in which the Greek terms προσευχή and συναγωγή are used to describe what we have come to know as houses of prayer or synagogues.[13] Other words that are used in the Hebrew bible (and

[12] Water installation for ritual purification.

[13] Hachlili, *The Origin of the Synagogue: A Reassessment*", in *JSJ* XXVIII 1 (February 1997): 39; M. Hengel, "Proseuche und Synagoge: Jüdische Gemeinde, Gotteshaus und Gottesdienst in der Diaspora und in Palästina", in *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture*, The Library of Biblical Studies, New York, KTAV (1975): 27-29; A. Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue*, Almqvist & Wiksell International (2001): 171-173. S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, Berlin, Hildesheim (1922): 15-17.

sometimes interpreted as relating to the synagogue) are עדה[14] (congregation) and קהל[15] (assembly), but these are used to describe an assembly of people, not a place in which to assemble.[16] In any event, none of the Hebrew Bible references to congregation or assemblies relate to any synagogue-like institution or activity, but instead to the assembly of people for particular events or announcements[17]. The Hebrew term בית כנסת (house of assembly) is also sometimes used in modern scholarship to refer to synagogues of this period, but is a term that comes to us from the late Roman-Byzantine period. According to rabbinic literature, after the return from the Babylonian exile, Jews gathered in secular assembly houses all over the country (*Tos. Sukka* 4, 5). Unfortunately, the rabbinic material is not helpful in discussion of particular identifications because, although a significant volume of work, it takes the form of biblical commentaries (*midrash*), translations (*targums*), collections of rabbinic rules (*Mishnah*), and discussions of those rules (*Talmud*), all of which were only written down from around 200 CE onwards and worked and reworked over the following centuries to create a purposeful uniformity.[18] It should not be surprising, given this framework, that the earliest rabbinic texts project some of the most significant aspects of rabbinic Judaism, including details about the fully realised synagogue of the later periods, back into

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[14] עדה at: Exodus 16.22, 38.25; Proverbs 9:14; Jeremiah 6:18; Numbers 1.16, 1:18, 3.7, 4.34, 6:19, 8:9, 10.2-3, 13.26, 14.1-2, 14.10, 14.35-6, 15.24, 15.33, 15.35-6, 16.3, 16:5, 16.9, 16.19, 16.21-2, 1624, 16.26, 16:45, 17.7, 17.10-11, 20.1, 20.8, 20.11, 20.22, 20.27, 20.29, 25.7, 26.9-10, 27.2-3, 27.14, 27.16, 27.19, 27.21-22, 31.13, 31.26-27, 31.43, 32.2, 35.12, 35.24-5; Leviticus 4.15, 8.3-5, 9:2, 9.5; 10.6, 10.17, 24.14, 24.16; Judges 20:1, 21.10, 21.13, 21.16; Joshua 9.15, 9.18-19, 9.21, 20.6, 20.9, 22:12, 22.30; 1 Kings 12.20; Job 15:34.

[15] קהל at Exodus 16.3; Leviticus 4.13-14, 4.21, 8.3, 16.33; Numbers 1:18, 8:9, 10.7, 15.15, 16.33, 17.12, 19.20, 20.2, 20.6, 20.10, 22.4; Deuteronomy 4.10, 9.10, 10.4, 18.6,31.12; Joshua 18.1, 22:12; Judges 21.8; 2 Samuel 20.14; 1 Kings 8.2; 1 Chronicles 13.4, 29.1, 29.10, 29.20; 2 Chronicles 1.3, 5.3, 20.14, 23.3, 28.14, 29.28, 29.31-32, 30.2, 30.4, 30.23, 30.25;2 Esther 9.15; Ezra 2:64; 10.1, 10.12, 10.14; Nehemiah 5.13, 7.66, 8:2, 8.17.

[16] J. Gutmann, "Synagogue Origins: Theories and Facts", in J. Gutmann (ed.), *Ancient Synagogues. The State of the Research*, Scholars Press, USA (1981): 1.

[17] See notes 12 and 13 above.

[18] S.D. Fraade, "The Early Rabbinic Sage", in Gammie, J.G. and L.G. Perdue (eds.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake (1990): 417; J. Neusner, , *The Mishnah: An Introduction*, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, New Jersey, London (1989): 1; J. Neusner, *The Talmud. What It Is and What It Says*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford (2006): 19.

the past.[19] The rabbinic collections incorporate many traditions, some of which surely predate their integration into the redacted texts, but the extent of their redaction is such that recovery of specific historiographic detail is fraught with difficulties that fall far outside the scope of this dissertation.

Schürer, in 1879, sought to classify the origins of the synagogue as relating to Graeco-Roman voluntary institutions, such as *collegia*.[20] Voluntary associations are a Hellenistic phenomenon which developed in urban centres .[21] In a sense all such voluntary and guild associations were religious, insomuch as piety was embedded in ancient culture. The benefits of professional *collegia* came in the form of patronage in support of communal assembly and common meals, and a wealthy patron might be persuaded to buy buildings to be used by the assembly for such meetings. [22]

Recently, Levine has asked whether Roman use of such terminology was meant to precisely define something specifically Jewish, or was simply the use of a term which was familiar to the Roman authorities and which could be applied to a Jewish community without attempting to be exact. If the use of the term *collegium* (a voluntary association or guild association) was deliberate, did it in fact describe a synagogue?[23] The term is never used in any Jewish document or inscription.[24]

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[19] S.D. Fraade (1990): 424.
[20] E. Schürer, *Die Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom in der Kaiserzeit*, J.C. Hinrichs, Leipzig (1879) 15-17; Levine (2004): 73.
[21] J.S. Kloppenborg and S.G. Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Association in the Graeco-Roman World*, Routledge, London (1996): 17.
[22] Kloppenborg and Wilson (1996): 18.
[23] Levine (2004): 73; Levine (2000): 90.
[24] Levine (2004): 74.

There are a number of other terms that are sometimes claimed to refer to early synagogues, such as *hiera* (temple), *hieros peribolos* (a wall enclosing a sacred precinct) and *naos* (the inner sanctum of a temple), *topos* (a district), which may be a form of shorthand for *to hagios topos* (holy place), although this is by no means certain. Moreover, the terms *hieros peribolos*, *to hagios topos*, and *hieros topos* suggest that the space referred to is enclosed in some way, and that access was not universal nor arranged for communal prayer or assembly.[25] The term *Sabbateion*, indicates a gathering, but not the activity undertaken at that gathering. Nonetheless, the use of *Sabbateion* must indicate that the social or religious act or institution to which it refers, in whatever form it took, was built around Sabbath observance. The term *Oikema* is sometimes thought to refer to converted house synagogues.[26]

However, in the broad spectrum of *possible* references to Jewish religious structures and institutions outside Jerusalem, the only terms that are used relatively consistently, in Egypt and Graeco-Roman Diaspora and in the land of Israel, as we shall see, are προσευχή and συναγωγή. And, of course, while all of the terminological possibilities are interesting, there is no way to link them with the subject matter of this dissertation, the identification of five specific structures as synagogues. Thus, we will concentrate on the Greek terms *proseuche* and *synagoge* insofar as we can track their usage geographically and chronologically to some degree, using contemporary sources.

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[25] Schürer (1879): 15-17

[26] J.F. Strange, "Ancient Texts, Archaeology as Text, and the Problem of the First-Century Synagogue", in H.CC. Kee and L.H. Cohick (eds.), *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (1999): 32-33.

Hengel, in his discussion of the development of the early synagogue, argued for origins in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora, which developed as a response to the centralisation of the cult, and not as a direct replacement for the temple. According to him, the development of the synagogue in the land of Israel came only later, with Hasmonaean policies of territorial expansion.[27] In his seminal work on the influence of Hellenisation on Judaism, he argued that about the middle of the third century BCE, all Judaism was effectively Hellenistic and differentiation was only discernable between the Greek-speaking Judaism of the western Diaspora and the Aramaic/Hebrew-speaking Judaism of Palestine and Babylonia. From the time of the Ptolemies to the destruction of the temple, 'a sizeable minority' in Jerusalem would have had Greek as their mother tongue, as evidenced by the epigraphy.[28] Thus, in the third century BCE even those who observed Mosaic law were subject to Greek influence.[29]

According to Hengel, the earliest evidence for the existence of the institution of the synagogue came from Ptolemaic Egypt where two inscriptions from the reign of Ptolemy III (247-221 BCE) refer to the προσευχή as a *house of prayer*.[30] Philo used the word προσευχή eighteen times. However, according to Hengel, it is unclear whether all of these instances refer to the synagogue as a building or as an assembly of people.[31] Nevertheless, the term προσευχή came to be used to describe the place of Jewish religious assembly in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora.[32]

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[27] M. Hengel "Proseuche und Synagoge: Jüdische Gemeinde, Gotteshaus und Gottesdienst in der Diaspora und in Palästina", in G. Jeremias, H.W. Kuhn & H. Stegemann (eds.), *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (1971): 181-182; and *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, SCM Press Ltd, London (1981).

[28] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism, Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, Volume 1, SCM Press Ltd, London (1974): 104.

[29] Hengel (1974): 248.

[30] Hengel (1971): 158-159.

[31] Hengel (1971): 169.

[32] Hengel (1971): 179.

The use of the Greek word προσευχή in the context of a *house of prayer,* originated in Ptolemaic Egypt, but its influence spread to the rest of the Mediterranean and to the land of Israel.[33] Thus it was that the synagogue – as a religious institution – developed in the Diaspora earlier than in Palestine,[34] and it is likely that its development in Palestine was facilitated by local communities.[35]

Moreover, προσευχή, according to Hengel, as well as referring to the building in which assembly took place, refers to prayers (like תפלה),[36] and that prayer was part of Jewish ritual assembly.[37] Hengel says that the term בית כנסת came to be used in the late Roman/Byzantine period to refer to a *house of assembly,*[38] and that the term בית תפלה was sometimes claimed to be an interpretation of the Greek προσευχῆς (contained in the Septuagint at Isaiah 56.7, 60.7 and Maccabees 7.37).[39]

Hengel's influence on early synagogue studies remains particularly strong, especially in relation to the terms which survived and were commonly used into the Roman period, that is, προσευχή and συναγωγή. It is fair to say that there is little evidence that the other terminology relates to specific buildings or to a particular type of religious institution in the Jewish world of the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods.

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[33] Hengel (1971): 179.
[34] Hengel (1971): 180.
[35] Hengel (1971): 180
[36] Hengel (1971): 161.
[37] Hengel (1971): 157-184.
[38] J.G. Griffiths, "Egypt and the Rise of the Synagogue", in D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher (eds.), *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Volume 1, E.J. Brill, Leiden, New York, Köln (1995): 7.
[39] Hengel (1971): 166.

Definitions of *proseuche/προσευχη*

The Greek noun *proseuche* means 'a prayer', or 'an offering', although in our context it has also come to mean, or it has come to be understood to mean, a *place* of prayer.[40] We find the earliest usage of the word *proseuche* in a Jewish context in Hellenistic-Roman Egypt in inscriptions that refer to donations and benefactions to *proseuchai* made by or on behalf of Egyptian Jews. It seems certain, based on the Egyptian inscriptions, that the Jews of Egypt had some form of building dedicated to their particular ethnic and/or communal and/or religious needs.

References to *proseuchai* in the Egyptian Graeco-Roman inscriptions

No. 13 of Horbury and Noy's *Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt*, is a plaque with an inscription dated to around 37 BCE, from Gabbary near Alexandria, which refers to Alypus who *made the proseuche*. No. 21 dating to the second or first century BCE is an inscription in which the Jews of Arthribis *dedicate the proseuche* to the Most High God. No. 22 is the earliest epigraphical reference to the proseuche of the diaspora Jewish community and dates to around 246-221 BCE. No. 24 is an inscription dating to 140-116 BCE dedicating the *gateway of the proseuche*. No. 25, also dating to 140-116 BCE, is an inscription dedicating the *proseuche and its appurtenances*. No. 28 is an inscription from Arthribis, dedicating the *exedra of a proseuche*. No. 105 is an inscription from Leontopolis, dating to the mid to early second century BCE, possibly dedicating a proseuche to God the Highest. No. 117 is an inscription from Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis dated to 246-221 BCE dedicating the proseuche. No. 125 is an inscription of uncertain origin, dating to around 145-116 BCE, proclaiming the proseuche *to be inviolate*. No. 126 is an

[40] H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Ninth Edition with a Revised Supplement*, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York (1996).

inscription, also of unknown origin, dating to around the first or second century CE referring to Papous who *built the proseuche*.[41]

It is difficult to understand precisely how these inscriptions relate to the existence of synagogues as we have come to understand them, as none of them is associated with any physical structure and some of the references may not be Jewish at all (since the term was also used in non-Jewish contexts). However, the inscriptions do indicate the existence of some form of physical structure in which Jews assembled regularly, whether that structure was used for religious purposes or not. We must infer from the specific use of the word *proseuche* ("a prayer") in the Egyptian inscriptions that the place itself was dedicated as part of an offering, although none of the inscriptions gives us detail of how the structures functioned, and whether religious worship of any sort was undertaken there.[42]

References to *proseuchai* in Philo

In addition to the Egyptian inscriptions, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, Philo, writing in the first half of the first century CE, describes how communities of Jews in Alexandria met on sabbaths to read the law (for example, *Hypothetica* 7:13; *Special laws* 2:62). This gives us a clear link between a physical structure

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[41] W. Horbury and D. Noy (1992).

[42] Horbury and Noy (1992); G. Botti, "Le inscrizioni cristiane di Alessandria d'Egitto", *Bessarione* 7 (1900): 270-281; G. Botti, "Les inscriptions de Schédia", *BSKG* 10 (1901): 611-617; A. Kasher, "Three Jewish Communities of Lower Egypt in the Ptolemaic Period", in *SCI* 2 (1975): 113-123; A. Kasher, "First Jewish military units in Ptolemaic Egypt", in *JSJ* 9 (1978),: 57-67; R.S. Kraemer, "Hellenistic Jewish women: the epigraphical evidence", in *SBL 1986 Seminar Papers*, Atlanta (1986): 183-200; R.S. Kraemer, "Non-literary evidence for Jewish women in Rome and Egypt", in M. Skinner (ed.), *Rescuing Creusa: New methodological approaches to women in antiquity*, Lubbock, Texas (1986): 75-101; R.S. Kraemer, "On the meaning of the term 'Jew' in Greco-Roman inscriptions", *HTR* 82 (1989): 35-54; H. Leclerq, "Judaïsme", in *DACL* vol. viii.i, Paris (1932): cols. 1-254; G. Lefèbvre, "Inscriptions grecques d'Égypte", in *BCH* 26 (1902): 440-466; G. Lefèbvre, "Inscriptions gréco-juives", in *ASAE* 24 (1924): 1-5; D.M. Lewis, "The Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt", in V.A. Tcherikover, A. Fuks & M. Stern (eds.), *Corpus Papyrorum Iudaicarum*, vol. Iii, Jerusalem (1964): 138-166; L.A. Mayer, & A. Reifenberg, "A Jewish titulus from Egypt", in *ASAE* 33 (1933): 81-82; D. Noy, "A Jewish place of prayer in Roman Egypt", in *JTS* 43.1 (1992): 118-122; and M. Schwabe, "On the interpretation of a Jewish inscription from Alexandria", in *BEHJ* 1 (1946): 101-103.

and a regularised and communal behaviour, However, Philo never once refers to praying as being part of the tradition of assembly, even though his accounts of these assemblies are otherwise quite specific (at least about the reading of the law on the sabbath).[43] Of course, we might assume this to be the case, given the use of the word *proseuche* to describe assembly.

While an argument from silence may be risky, the *proseuche* inscriptions and Philo's accounts do suggest, at least as regards Graeco-Roman Egypt and specifically in relation to Alexandrian Jews, that communal prayer may not have been part of a regularised Sabbath assembly and, thus, that the proseuche of Graeco-Roman Egypt in the first century (and earlier) did not function as religious institutions in the way later synagogues did, or that it was such a ubiquitous part of the sabbath assembly that it was simply not mentioned. However, even given these parameters, it is also very likely that the term *proseuche* must refer to a physical space in at least some of the Egyptian inscriptions and from the accounts in Philo (*Embassy to Gaius* and *Flaccus*) that attacks on Alexandrian Jews were launched when resentments built up among the Roman, Greek and native Egyptian populations as a result of the perceived separatedness of the Jewish community in general.

References to *proseuchai* in Josephus

When we move away from Egypt and into the second half of the first century CE, we see that the use and meaning of the word *proseuche* shifts somewhat.[44]

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[43] C. Mosser, "Torah Instruction, Discussion, and Prophecy in First-Century Synagogues", in S. Porter and A.W. Pitts (eds.), *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Literary and Social Contexts for the New Testament*, Brill: Leiden and Boston (forthcoming 2010/2011).

[44] Josephus uses the term *proseuche* only three times: *AJ* 14.258 (to decree relating to Halicarnassus and the right of Jews there to pray at the seaside according to their traditional

Josephus, writing about events during the rebellion against the Romans (when his opponents seek to discredit him), for example, refers to a *proseuche* in Tiberias as a place of assembly: "On the next day, they all came into the *proseuche*; it was a large edifice, and capable of receiving a great number of people; Jonathan went in there, and though he dared not openly speak of a revolt, yet did he say that their city stood in need of a better governor than it then had."[45] Josephus refers to that same meeting in the *proseuche* as a council ("so Jonathan and his colleagues put off their council till the next day, and went off without success.[46] Later, Josephus says he was making a prayer (καὶ πρὸς εὐχὰς), when Jesus began to question him "about the furniture and uncoined silver which had been confiscated after the conflagration of the royal palace".[47] It seems clear from this passage at least that the *proseuche* in Tiberias to which Josephus refers is an assembly space and/or council chamber. Unfortunately, other than being describing it as 'large', Josephus gives no details concerning the structure or its layout.

In another passage, referring to a decree from Halicarnassus, Josephus mentions a *proseuche* in a context in which he could be referring to the act of praying or, possibly, to going to a place to pray, or even having a fixed or regular place to pray, though this passage is open to interpretation: "[...] we have decreed, that as

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customs; *CA* 2.10 (refuting claims that Moses prayed in the open at Heliopolis facing the city walls); and *Vita* 277-295 (where Josephus refers to a large *proseuche* at Tiberias).

[45] Josephus, *Vita*, 277: "κατὰ τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν οὖν ἡμέραν συνάγονται πάντες εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν μέγιστον οἴκημα καὶ πολὺν ὄχλον ἐπιδέξασθαι δυνάμενον. εἰσελθὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰωνάθης φανερῶς μὲν περὶ τῆς ἀποστάσεως οὐκ ἐτόλμα λέγειν, ἔφη δὲ στρατηγοῦ κρείττονος χρείαν τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν ἔχειν". See also Josephus, *Vita* 280, 293-294. See also Josephus, *Vita*, 279, 280, 293-294, and, specifically, 295: "ἤδη δ' ἡμῶν τὰ νόμιμα ποιούντων καὶ πρὸς εὐχὰς τραπομένων ἀναστὰς Ἰησοῦς περὶ τῶν ληφθέντων ἐκ τοῦ ἐμπρησμοῦ τῆς βασιλικῆς αὐλῆς σκευῶν τοῦ ἀσήμου ἀργυρίου ἐπυνθάνετό μου, παρὰ τίνι τυγχάνει κείμενα. ταῦτα δ' ἔλεγεν διατρίβειν τὸν χρόνον βουλόμενος, ἕως ἂν ὁ Ἰωάννης παραγένηται [...]".

[46] Josephus, *Vita*, 279: "καὶ οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἰωνάθην εἰς τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν ὑπερθέμενοι τὴν βουλὴν ἀπῆεσαν ἄπρακτοι."

[47] Josephus, *Vita 295:* "ἤδη δ' ἡμῶν τὰ νόμιμα ποιούντων καὶ πρὸς εὐχὰς τραπομένων ἀναστὰς Ἰησοῦς περὶ τῶν ληφθέντων ἐκ τοῦ ἐμπρησμοῦ τῆς βασιλικῆς αὐλῆς σκευῶν τοῦ ἀσήμου ἀργυρίου ἐπυνθάνετό μου, παρὰ τίνι τυγχάνει κείμενα. ταῦτα δ' ἔλεγεν διατρίβειν τὸν χρόνον βουλόμενος, ἕως ἂν ὁ Ἰωάννης παραγένηται."

many men and women of the Jews as are willing so to do, may celebrate their Sabbaths, and perform their holy offices, according to Jewish laws; and may make their *proseuchai* at the seaside, according to the customs of their forefathers [...]."[48]

Even though, as with the Egyptian inscriptions, none of the references in Josephus have a physical analogue, they do strongly suggest that whatever the *proseuche* was, it was sometimes a physical structure in which groups of Jews met, whether it was for the purposes of holding town councils, or even as a place in which an individual could pray. There is nothing, in Josephus, however, to help us identify what shape that structure took although, in relation to the *proseuche* at Tiberias, we know that it was a large building, and we might suppose if it was intended for general or council assemblies, that we would see a building with an open space surrounded by encircling benches. While Josephus mentions praying in the *proseuche*, it is noteworthy that there is no mention of organised communal prayer, nor of liturgy. As it was normal for blessings for rulers and benefactors to be given at the start of formal proceedings in public meetings, we may assume that this was the case for proceedings in the *proseuche* at Tiberias.[49] Although,

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[48] "*AJ* 14.258: "δεδόχθαι καὶ ἡμῖν Ἰουδαίων τοὺς βουλομένους ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας τά τε σάββατα ἄγειν καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ συντελεῖν κατὰ τοὺς Ἰουδαίων νόμους καὶ τὰς προσευχὰς ποιεῖσθαι πρὸς τῇ θαλs, ἄττη κατὰ τὸ πάτριον ἔθος. ἂν δέ τις κωλύσῃ ἢ ἄρχων ἢ ἰδιώτης, τῷδε τῷ ζημιώματι ὑπεύθυνος ἔστω καὶ ὀφειλέτω τῇ πόλει."

[49] Some of the general literature discussing Judaism and synagogues in the Galilee can be found at M.A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee: The Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2002); M.A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2005); J. Frey, D.R. Schwartz & S. Gripentrog, *Jewish identity in the Greco-Roman World*, Brill Leiden, Boston (2007); S. Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin; Fortress Press (1988); S. Freyne, *The Geography, Politics and Economics of Galilee and the Quest for the Historical Jesus*, E.J. Brill: Leiden, New York (1994); S. Freyne, *Galilee: From Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 BCE. to 135 CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh (1998); S. Freyne, "Behind the Names: Galilaeans, Samaritans, *Ioudaioi*", in Eric M. Meyers, *Galilee through the Centuries*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana (1999): 39-56; S. Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen (2000); M. Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, SCM Press, London (2000); S. Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria. A study in the narrative of*

whether offering prayers and benedictions is sufficient reason to ascribe a 'religious' dimension to use of the space is debatable.

References to *proseuchai* in the New Testament

In the New Testament[50], the term *proseuche* is used to refer to prayer and praying. Only in five of the forty-three references in the New Testament does the term relate to anything more than a simple prayer or an act of praying, and three of these refer to the same incident in which Jesus refers to the Jerusalem temple as a *proseuche* (Matthew 21:13,[51] Mark 11:17[52] and Luke 19:46[53]). The other references are in Acts 12:5,[54] where prayer was made by the assembly for Peter who was in jail and, finally, in Acts 16:13, there is an incident recounting how the Apostles went to a riverside where they supposed there to be a place of prayer.[55] There are no occurrences of *proseuche* in the New Testament that imply an assembly space as with the Egyptian inscriptions, Philo and Josephus.

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the Letter of Aristeas, Routledge, London and New York (2003); W. Jeanrond & A.D.H. Mayes, *Recognising the Margins : Developments in Biblical and Theological Studies: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne*, Columba Press, Blackrock, Co. Dublin (2006); J.S. Kloppenborg, *The Shape of Q. Signal Essays on the Sayings Gospel*, Fortress Press, USA (1994); J.S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q. The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh (2000): 222; F.J. Murphy, *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*, Abingdon Press, Nashville (2005); S. Purdum, *He walked in Galilee: The days of Jesus' Ministry*, Abingdon: Nashville, Tennessee; Alban, Edinburgh (2005); A.J. Tomasino, *Judaism Before Jesus*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois and Leicester, England (2003); and G. Walser, *The Greek of the ancient synagogue : an investigation on the Greek of the Septuagint, Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, Almquist & Wiksell, Stockholm (2001).

[50]The bible used throughout this dissertation is *The Jewish Study Bible*, Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation, Oxford University Press, UK (2004).

[51] "καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· γέγραπται· ὁ οἶκος μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται, ὑμεῖς δὲ αὐτὸν ποιεῖτε σπήλαιον λῃστῶν."

[52] "καὶ ἐδίδασκεν καὶ ἔλεγεν· οὐ γέγραπται ὅτι ὁ οἶκος μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν; ὑμεῖς δὲ πεποιήκατε αὐτὸν σπήλαιον λῃστῶν."

[53] "λέγων αὐτοῖς· γέγραπται καὶ ἔσται ὁ οἶκος μου οἶκος προσευχῆς, ὑμεῖς δὲ αὐτὸν ἐποιήσατε σπήλαιον λῃστῶν."

[54] "ὁ μὲν οὖν Πέτρος ἐτηρεῖτο ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ προσευχὴ δὲ ἦν ἐκτενῶς γινομένη ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν περὶ αὐτοῦ."

[55] "τῇ τε ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων ἐξήλθομεν ἔξω τῆς πύλης παρὰ ποταμὸν οὗ ἐνομίζομεν προσευχὴν εἶναι καὶ καθίσαντες ἐλαλοῦμεν ταῖς συνελθούσαις γυναιξίν."

Based on Egyptian *proseuche* inscriptions, Philo, Josephus, and even the New Testament, we cannot take for granted that the various instances of the term *proseuche* in those texts necessarily denote the same thing. A house of assembly, a place of assembly, and participation in an assembly are very different things, though they may share some commonalities. We cannot now know precisely how the *proseuche* functioned in each of the different references; whether it was a prayer, or an offering, a location, or a particular building, the congregants themselves, or even different combinations of those elements. And, as we see in the collection of socially, politically, geographically and chronologically diverse documents that make up the New Testament, the word *proseuche* is only used to denote prayer not place.

Definitions of *synagoge*/*συναγωγή*

The Greek noun συναγωγή means a bringing-together, or a uniting, or an assembly, or a place of assembly. In its verb form it can also mean a bringing in [of a harvest], a drawing together, a contracting of, a forming of [an army in a column], a pursing of the lips or wrinkling of the face, or even the closing up of a wound.[56] In our context, the noun has come to mean an assembly of people and/or a place of assembly, though it is not universally used this way in Greek texts.[57]

References to synagogues in the New Testament

Moving to the New Testament, we find numerous occurrences of the word *synagogue* where it clearly denotes a physical structure or a physical space. From the missions of Jesus to those of the apostles we see clear indicators that by the

[56] Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.
[57] See Horbury & Noy (1992) in general; see also n. 20 above.

time the gospels are redacted into their canonical form, the term συναγωγή has become common (at least in those texts). Unfortunately, not one single one of these references describes a single physical feature of the synagogues mentioned. They do, however, mention reading of scripture, discussions of scripture, preaching, teaching, scourging (of miscreants), law courts, and the collection of monies. It is notable that there is no mention of prayer in the synagogue – communal or otherwise, nor of liturgy although, of course, this may simply be because this was a ubiquitous part of communal and/or ritual activity in a synagogue.[58] And, while it is fascinating to note that the places where the synagogue is seen to be developing in the first century are some distance from Judaea; either in the Graeco-Roman diaspora or in the north of Israel in the Galilee or Golan,[59] this does not help us to identify any of our case study sites. There is no uniformity in the way the two terms, *proseuche* and *synagogue*, are used in the New Testament and that ambiguity may represent the way in which the institution we have come to know as the synagogue was developing and evolving.

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[58] συναγωγή/synagogue Matthew 12.9, 13.54; Mark 1.21-1,23, 1,29, 3,1, 5,22, 5,35, 5,36, 5,38, 6,2; Luke 4.16, 4.20, 4.28, 4.33, 4.38, 6.6, 7.5, 8.41, 8.49, 13.14; John 6.59, 9.22, 12.42, 18.20; Acts 6.9, 5.15-21, 13.14, 13.15, 13.42, 14.1, 17.10, 17.17, 18.4, 18.7, 18.8, 18.17, 18.19, 18.26, 19.8, 22.19, 26.11; Revelations 2.9, 3.9.
κηρύσσειν/preach Matthew 4.17, 10.7, 10.27, 11.1; Mark 1.4, 1.38, 3.14, 16.15; Luke 4.18, 4.19, 4.43, 9.2, 9.60; Acts 5.42, 10.42, 14.15, 15.2, 16.6, 16.10, 17.3; Romans 1.15, 10.8, 10.15, 15.20; 1 Corinthians 1.17, 1.23, 9.14, 9.16, 9.18, 15.11; 2 Corinthians 2.12, 4.5, 10.16; Galatians 1.8, 1.9, 2.2, 5.11; Ephesians 3.18; Philippians 1.15, 1.16; 1 Colossians 1.28; 2 Timothy 4.2; Revelations 14.6.
διδάσκειν/teach Matthew 11.1, 28.19; Mark 4.1, 6.2, 6.34, 8.31; Luke 11.1, 12.12; John 7.35, 9.34, 14.26; Acts 1.1, 4.18, 5.28, 5.42, 16.21; 1 Corinthians 4.17, 11.14, 14.19; 1 Timothy 1.3, 3.2, 6.3; 2 Timothy 2.2, 2.4; Hebrews 5.12, 8.11; 1 John 2.27; Revelations 2.20.
[59] Richardson (1996): 100.

References to synagogues in Josephus

In Josephus, we find the word συναγωγη used five times. In *AJ* 1.10, Josephus refers to the translation of the Septuagint into Greek for Ptolemy II;[60] in *AJ* 19.300-305, Josephus refers to a synagogue at Dor (just 8 km north of Caesarea) where a statue of the emperor is erected;[61] in *BJ* 2.285, Josephus mentions a synagogue to which access is being deliberately blocked by its Greek owner;[62] at *BJ* 2.289 Josephus refers to a synagogue outside of which a local youth sacrificed a number of fowl so as to offend Jews;[63] and a reference at *BJ* 7.74 where Josephus refers to the successors of Antiochus Epiphanes allowing the Jews of Antioch to restore their synagogue to its former state and granting them equal privileges with Greek citizens.[64]

These five passages clearly indicate that the synagogues referred to by Josephus were buildings in which there was some element of religious activity being observed and where regular practise could be disrupted by local gentiles. Unfortunately, none of the references to synagogues include any detail as to precisely what the synagogue was, or how it was used by the local Jewish

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[60] AJ 1.10: "Εὗρον τοίνυν ὅτι Πτολεμαίων μὲν ὁ δεύτερος μάλιστα δὴ βασιλεὺς περὶ παιδείαν καὶ βιβλίων συναγωγὴν σπουδάσας ἐξαιρέτως ἐφιλοτιμήθη τὸν ἡμέτερον νόμον καὶ τὴν κατ' αὐτὸν διάταξιν τῆς πολιτείας εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα φωνὴν μεταβαλεῖν".

[61] *AJ* 19.300 & 305: "παντάπασιν δὲ ὀλίγου χρόνου διελθόντος Δωρῖται νεανίσκοι τῆς ὁσιότητος προτιθέμενοι τόλμαν καὶ πεφυκότες εἶναι παραβόλως θρασεῖς Καίσαρος ἀνδριάντα κομίσαντες εἰς τὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων συναγωγὴν ἀνέστησαν" [...] "τἀναντία δὲ πάντα πρᾶξαι συναγωγὴν Ἰουδαίων κωλύοντας εἶναι διὰ τὸ μεταθεῖναι ἐν αὐτῇ τὸν Καίσαρος ἀνδριάντα παρανομοῦντας οὐκ εἰς μόνους Ἰουδαίους ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα οὗ ὁ ἀνδριὰς βέλτιον ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ ναῷ ἢ ἐν ἀλλοτρίῳ ἐτίθετο καὶ ταῦτα ἐν τῷ τῆς συναγωγῆς τόπῳ τοῦ φύσει δικαιοῦντος ἕνα ἕκαστον τῶν ἰδίων τόπων κυριεύειν κατὰ τὸ Καίσαρος ἐπίκριμα".

[62] *BJ* 2.285: "πρὸς δὲ τὸ μέγεθος τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ συμφορῶν οὐκ ἀξίαν ἔσχεν πρόφασιν οἱ γὰρ ἐν Καισαρείᾳ Ἰουδαῖοι συναγωγὴν ἔχοντες παρὰ χωρίον οὗ δεσπότης ἦν τις Ἕλλην Καισαρεύς πολλάκις μὲν κτήσασθαι τὸν τόπον ἐσπούδασαν τιμὴν πολλαπλασίονα τῆς ἀξίας διδόντες".

[63] *BJ* 2.289: "Τῆς δ' ἐπιούσης ἡμέρας ἑβδομάδος οὔσης τῶν Ἰουδαίων εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν συναθροισθέντων στασιαστής τις Καισαρεὺς γάστραν καταστρέψας καὶ παρὰ τὴν εἴσοδον αὐτῶν θέμενος ἐπέθυεν ὄρνεις τοῦτο τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀνηκέστως παρώξυνεν ὡς ὑβρισμένων μὲν αὐτοῖς τῶν νόμων μεμιασμένου δὲ τοῦ χωρίου".

[64] *BJ* 7.44: "Ἀντίοχος μὲν γὰρ ὁ κληθεὶς Ἐπιφανὴς Ἱεροσόλυμα πορθήσας τὸν νεὼν ἐσύλησεν οἱ δὲ μετ' αὐτὸν τὴν βασιλείαν παραλαβόντες τῶν ἀναθημάτων ὅσα χαλκᾶ πεποίητο πάντα τοῖς ἐπ' Ἀντιοχείας Ἰουδαίοις ἀπέδοσαν εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν αὐτῶν ἀναθέντες καὶ συνεχώρησαν αὐτοῖς ἐξ ἴσου τῆς πόλεως τοῖς Ἕλλησι μετέχειν".

community. Still, it seems certain that during the period about which Josephus was writing, there were synagogues in some shape or form in northern Israel.

The Theodotos Inscription

Perhaps most the most tantalising use of the word *synagogue* appears on the Theodotos inscription found in a cistern filled with rubble from both the pre-70 CE and the post-70 CE periods in the City of David in Jerusalem. This inscription is thought by many scholars to attest to the existence of a synagogue in Jerusalem in the first century CE:

> Theodotos, son of Vettenos the priest and *archisynagogos*, son of an *archisynagogos* and grandson of a *archisynagogos*, who built the synagogue for purposes of reciting the Law and studying the commandments, and the hostel, chambers and water installations to provide for the needs of itinerants from abroad, and whose father, with the elders and Simonides, founded the synagogue[65].

Kloppenborg, writing in 2000, says that there is near consensus on the dating of the inscription. This is on the basis of both a close palaeographic analysis of the lettering inscribed on it and the location and archaeological context in which the inscription was found.[66] On a close analysis of the palaeography, using comparisons with Greek and other Near Eastern inscriptions (but not inscriptions from Jerusalem), Kloppenborg acknowledges that the "dating of undated inscriptions is far from an exact science"[67] and that "it is important to note again that shifts in lettering styles are not sufficiently sharply defined to enable one to exclude a second century date or one even later."[68] He notes that there are very few Greek inscriptions from the Herodian and early Roman period from

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[65] Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, "Palestinian Synagogues Before 70 C.E. A Review of the Evidence", in D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher (eds), *Ancient Synagogues, Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Volume 1, Leiden (1995): 33.
[66] J.S. Kloppenborg, "Dating Theodotos (CIJ II 1404)", in *JJS* 51,2 (2000): 243-244.
[67] Kloppenborg (2000): 265.
[68] Kloppenborg (2000): 276.

Jerusalem from which to draw a direct palaeographic parallel.[69] Kloppenborg concludes that, "while it is still possible that the lettering is from later than the first century CE – the result of traditionalism or deliberate archaizing – nothing requires such a dating, and all of the indications are consistent with the Herodian period."[70]

In relation to the archaeological context, Kloppenborg makes a strong supporting argument for an early date on the basis that the area in which the inscription was found in the City of David has clear signs of destruction from the period around the razing of Jerusalem. In general, the late Roman period is generally ill-represented throughout the entire City of David in the areas east, northeast and north of Weill's excavations. The City of David seems to have been unoccupied after 135 CE until around 460 CE. There was nothing found that could be dated to the period immediately after 70 CE, and dateable finds from the area only begin to emerge again in the Byzantine period so that, on this basis too, it is likely that the inscription dates from the pre-70 CE period.[71]

Although Kloppenborg's intention is to support the dating of the Theodotos inscription to the pre-70 CE period, the evidence on which he makes his argument is, unfortunately, inherently ambiguous and while it is possible, and even likely, that the Theodotos inscription can be dated to the first century CE, it also possible that it belongs to a much later period. Thus, the Theodotos inscription remains

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[69] Kloppenborg (2000): 269.
[70] Kloppenborg (2000): 276.
[71] Kloppenborg (2000): 260-61. There is good supporting evidence for this argument to be found in the current excavations of the Givati Parking Lot in the City of David where a team led by Doron Ben-Ami of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has found that after the destruction layer of 70 CE only Roman and then later Byzantine material has been excavated. See http://www.antiquities.org.il /article_Item_eng.asp?sec_id=25&subj_id=240&id=1596&module_id=#as (accessed 17 May 2011).

perhaps the single most frustrating pieces of evidence relating to first century synagogues in the land of Israel because information about its discovery, including whether it was found below, in or above the destruction layer of 70 CE was not recorded, and it is now impossible to reconstruct the information which might have helped support a definitive first century date.[72]

In spite of the ambiguity of the evidence both for and against an early dating of the Theodotos inscription, it may be appropriate to take a more positive position and leave the matter open, so that if Kloppenborg is correct about the pre-70 CE dating of the Theodotos inscription, it would prove to be enormously helpful in any ongoing search for physical manifestations of the first century synagogue and it would, in fact, fulfil some of the criteria of possible identifiers outlined above, such as the presence of water installations and hostel accommodation for visitors and, of course, a specific reference to reading the law in the synagogue itself. The inscription would also be useful in relation to the identification of the public building at Gamla, which is not yet completely excavated, but which is thought to have been part of a far more extensive complex of integrated buildings.

As we shall see in the case studies in this dissertation, even though we may use somewhat nebulous terms to discuss what we have come to know as the *synagogue*, and whichever terms we use to describe that institution; be it προσευχη, συναγωγη, עדה or קהל, and however we choose to interpret the textual and epigraphic evidence, there is a separation between modern scholarship's theoretical constructs of what a first century synagogue might have been,

[72] Flesher (1995): 33.

references to possible physical structures in the ancient sources, and the available physical/archaeological evidence.

Literature Review

Modern scholarship on the identification of early synagogues cannot fill in the missing link between the Hellenistic/early Roman period and the late Roman/Byzantine period when synagogues become fully realised and dedicated physical structures. This is because the contemporary sources which they interpret are neither specific nor detailed and there is no link between any of the *synagogue* and *proseuche* references in the literature, the epigraphy and a physical structure anywhere. On the face of it this seems an extraordinary statement given the amount that has been written on the subject (only a tiny portion of which is included in this overview). Scholars in this field have constructed a veritable creed of synagogue development that is endlessly regurgitated and expanded without ever having properly been tested against the five buildings which it has identified as first century synagogues. Very few scholars writing about the continuing search for the origins of the synagogue deal with the archaeological record, and of the ones that do, there are only a few who deal with the material as relating to particular sites. These few are discussed in context in the case studies herein. The overwhelming majority of the rest of the scholarship on the subject deal with the archaeological origins of the synagogue by surveying past scholarship, and by adding new speculations to those accounts.

We can identify the beginnings of modern synagogue scholarship with Kohl and Watzinger's 1905-1907 survey of eleven Galilaean and Golan synagogues, which was published in 1916 under the title *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea*. Kohl and

Watzinger argued that the earliest synagogues (at that time) dated to the late second and early third centuries CE and were modelled along Romano-Syrian temple structures.[73] In 1934, Sukenik identified a series of basilica-like structures, also in the Galilee, which he said originated in the sixth and seventh centuries CE and belonged to a completely different and later synagogue type. In the 1950s, a third type of synagogue, the broadhouse, was proposed by Goodenough and Avi-Yonah. The common thread in these identifications was that synagogue architecture was thought to have developed along a chronological and physical continuum and that at any time there was a dominant architectural model with some overlapping styles.[74]

To date, and beginning with Kohl and Watzinger's work, there has not been one single identification related to any physical structure which can be definitively identified as a synagogue **and** dated to earlier than the late Roman/Byzantine period. The earliest phase of Nabratein in the Galilee *may* be late second century CE, but is probably later,[75] and the synagogue excavated at Magdala in 2009 may be second century, but since the site has not been published, there is not much evidence on which to base any judgement. Even so, various scholars have argued for the establishment of synagogues from as early as the ninth century BCE.[76] Some prominent streams of scholarship thought that the development of the synagogue was a direct product of the reforms of Ezra-Nehemiah,[77] while others suggested establishment dates from the fourth to the first centuries BCE, distributed over a post-exilic diaspora setting.[78]

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[73] H. Kohl and C. Watzinger, *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea*, J.C. Hinrichs, Leipzig (1916).
[74] Levine (2000): 10.
[75] Fine (1996): 13.
[76] Gutmann (1981): 1.
[77] Gutmann (1981): 1.
[78] Levine (2000): 20.

Writing in the 1920s and 1930s, E.L. Sukenik's approach fed into the zeitgeist of the time, using what became known as *biblical archaeology* to connect the emerging modern state of Israel to its ancient past.[79] Sukenik's excavations at Beth Alpha took synagogue studies into the media spotlight in Israel.[80] He argued that the origins of the synagogue lay in the Babylonian diaspora, and that the early synagogue was a place of assembly, study and worship, through his discussion of the synagogues at Na'aran, Beth Alpha, Jerash, Delos, Miletus, Aegina and Priene. However, while Sukenik argued for Babylonian origins, his excavations and studies of synagogue sites were unable to provide physical evidence of anything that dated to before the late Roman/Byzantine period, and he was making an assumption that what could be seen in that later period was also the case for the earlier period.[81] This, as we shall see in the context of the specific case studies in this dissertation, has been the standard approach to the subject as a whole.

M. Hengel, writing in the 1970s, argued for synagogue origins in the Hellenistic period diaspora, which developed as a response to the centralisation of the cult, and not as a direct replacement for the temple. According to Hengel, the development of the synagogue in the land of Israel came only later, with Hasmonaean policies of territorial expansion and the rise of the Pharisees. Hengel tied his argument together by saying that the diaspora synagogue was then

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[79] Sukenik's excavation of the synagogue at Bet Alpha inspired his son Yigael Yadin to develop his own interest in early synagogues and eventually led to his identification of Locus 1042 on Masada as a first century synagogue.

[80] E.L. Sukenik, "The Present State of Ancient Synagogue Studies", in *Bulletin of the Lewis M. Rabinowitz Fund* (1949) 1: 8-23.

[81] Sukenik (1949): 8-23. Sukenik famously changed his mind about the Delos case after reading B. Mazur's 1935 discussion of the site and, in 1949, wrote that "the case of the so-called "Synagogue" at Delos shows how misleading incomplete research can be". His revised position is explained in the Delos case study in this dissertation.

influenced by Palestinian customs, beginning under the Hasmonaeans.[82] This argument took the debate even further from the physical reality of identifiable structures into the realm of the wholly *notional* synagogue, almost removing any requirement for corroboration in the material record and laying open the way for subsequent definitions of the early synagogue as a multi-purpose public building.

Zeitlin (1975) argued for an institution whose focus was the reading of the law, and for communal prayer and, like Hengel, said that this institution arose out of Pharisaic attempts to "democratise" temple worship into a communal act.[83] This argument about Pharisaic influence and involvement is based in its entirety on supposition and, along with Hengel's position, serves to broaden the definition of the early synagogue to something that could have served virtually any communal or public function. But, because the definition has become so vague, it does not get any closer to what the early institution of the synagogue might actually have been or how it might have worked.

J. Gutmann (1981) noted that "Edward Carr wisely cautioned that "the facts of history cannot be purely objective, since they become facts only in virtue of the significance attached to them by the historian [...]."[84] He also said that nothing testifies to this more than the problem of synagogue origins where the same facts lead to radically different theories of origins from the rabbinic tradition of Mosaic origins, to more modern hypotheses ascribing origins to the Babylonian exile, or to Hellenistic Egypt.[85] According to him, there is no archaeological evidence for

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[82] Hengel (1971): 181-182.
[83] S. Zeitlin "The Origin of the Synagogue: A Study in the Development of Jewish Institutions", in J. Gutmann (ed.), *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture,* The Library of Biblical Studies, New York, Ktav (1975): 56-58.
[84] Gutmann(1981): 1.
[85] Gutmann (1981): 1.

the synagogue, nor is there textual evidence in the Hebrew Bible. Even the Septuagint, which uses the term *synagoge* to translate the Hebrew words *kahal* and *edah*, does not refer to a building, despite claims to the contrary.[86] Increasingly frustrated by myriad claims about synagogue origins, he said that all hypotheses in support of an early origin for the synagogues are arguments from silence, and the proofs offered up for the early existence of the synagogue are merely semantics; ripping words from their biblical context in the belief that the meaning of the word remains static and that one may infer the same meaning for a word found both in a biblical and a rabbinical context.[87] Even taking for granted that such institutions existed in Babylonia, it does not follow that these were synagogues.[88]

Moreover, the references to the so-called *houses of prayer* or the *proseuche* of Hellenistic Egypt do not necessarily imply the existence of the synagogue and, according to Gutmann, whatever the *proseuche* was, it was not a synagogue, but was some localised form of Judaism that had responded to the specific environmental challenges.[89] Gutmann may be making too sceptical a claim here as regards the Egyptian inscriptions because, while we cannot account for the precise meaning of the use of the term *proseuche* in the inscriptions, the word does mean *a prayer* or *for a prayer*, and the dedication of a *proseuche* or its appurtenances, implies that it had a physical element or purpose which could be offered in some way [to god]. And, according to Gutman, if we cannot rely on finding the origins of the synagogue in semantic arguments, then we can at least

[86] Gutmann (1981): 1.
[87] Gutmann (1981): 1-2.
[88] Gutmann (1981): 3.
[89] Gutmann (1981): 3.

see that it is attested, in the first century, by Josephus and the New Testament, even though archaeological corroboration is lacking.[90]

J.D. Newsome (1982) argues that the synagogue may initially have been an institution dedicated to the reading of and instruction in the Torah. This would have been especially true in the diaspora where Jews comprised a minority in the local population. After the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, the synagogue took on greater significance within the community, and became the place where Jews met for worship, instruction, and fellowship.[91] This is a sufficiently vague claim as to be probably correct, but does not add weight or credibility to any of the identifications of first century synagogues so far made. Newsome further argues that as regards the origins of the synagogue, all that can be stated with any certainty is that it flourished in the Hellenistic and Roman periods first in the Diaspora, and later in Palestine.[92] But this, as we have seen in the section on the terminology and sources, above, is not the case. Since, with the best will in the world, we do not know exactly what the *proseuche* was, or how its physical manifestation worked, we cannot claim that whatever it was it was flourishing in a given time period or that it was a synagogue at all. Consequently, Newsome's claim that communities in Palestine, where the population was almost entirely Jewish, would mirror the membership of the local synagogue is untenable.[93]

J.T. Burtchaell (1992) notes that while the books of Maccabees describe in detail Seleucid efforts in the second century BCE to wipe out every institution and

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[90] Gutmann (1981): 3. Indeed, it is attested in the New Testament in a myriad of references, some to physical structures, some to congregations or assemblies (see footnote 38 above).
[91] J.D. Newsome, *Greeks, Romans, Jews. Currents of Culture and Belief in the New Testament World*, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia (1992): 27-28.
[92] Newsome (1992): 27-28.
[93] Newsome (1992): 27-28.

observance precious to Jews, no mention is made of synagogues, which therefore did not exist at that time, at least not in the sense of being a religious institution.[94] Using their own nomenclature, the Jews themselves were the assembly and this covenantal belief was so typical that it provided the term by which one referred to the Jews.[95] It is difficult to argue with this viewpoint, as it is undoubtedly correct, but it does not add anything to the means by which we can identify the institutions and physical structures that developed out of this self-designation.

I. Elbogen, writing in 1993, argues that the developing Jewish liturgy was completely unique in the history of religions, because it was completely independent of a sacrificial cult. Because liturgy was central to post-70 CE Judaism, and because it was community based, it was able to spread easily throughout the Graeco-Roman world.[96] Again, this has to be correct, but still does not address the use of liturgy in the period before the destruction of the temple or in its immediate aftermath, or how it was adapted for synagogue use or even how much adaptation was required to move it from place to place.

L.L. Grabbe (1995) tries to locate a finite point in time after which synagogues existed.[97] While he accepts there were 'synagogues' in Egypt in the third century BCE, he argues that they did not develop in the land of Israel until the third century CE.[98] Using the Theodotos inscription and the New Testament to support his argument, he says that the institution that existed before the destruction of the

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[94] James T Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press (1992): 203-4.
[95] Burtchaell (1992): 209.
[96] I. Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, The Jewish Publication Society, USA (1993): 304.
[97] L.L. Grabbe, "Synagogues in Pre-70 Palestine: A Re-Assessment", in D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher (eds.), *Ancient Synagogues, Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Volume 1, Leiden (1995): 17.
[98] The Egyptian inscriptions refer to *proseuchai* and not *synagogues*, however.

Jerusalem temple was well placed to transform Judaism into a non-sacrificial cult.[99] His position is interesting in a number of ways, not least of which is because he is using the term "synagogue" in a way that it is not used even in the Egyptian inscriptions to which he refers. The Egyptian inscriptions uniformly use the term *proseuche*. This, is a minor point, however, as Grabbe is scathing on the use of assumptions in history writing, and says that these can be so strong that evidence often makes little impact against the tide of tradition and is confounded by "that most persistent and hardy of species – the impregnable defence of 'what everybody knows,' the incontrovertible argument of 'what must have been.'" According to Grabbe, this results in flimsy evidence being used to support major conclusions, often without reference to any primary data, and where data from different periods and geographical areas is mixed.[100]

Z. Safrai (1995) argues that the main function of the בית הכנסת (*house of assembly*[101]) was not for public prayer but as a place for the reading and study of Torah, and that this was the main function of the synagogue.[102] Here, the terminology is being obfuscated because the phrase used in the passage at Ezekiel 11.16 to which Safrai is referring is מקדש מעט (a small sanctuary), which *Tos. Sukka* 4, 5 interprets as *house of assembly* (בית הכנסת).[103] There is no historical basis on which to imply that the early synagogue was the equivalent of a religious sanctuary or whether the one developed from the other.

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[99] A. Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue. A Socio-Historical Study*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 37, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, Sweden (2001): 153.
[100] Grabbe (1995): 17.
[101] The phrase is an interpretation of the passage at Ezekiel 11:16 which refers to מקדש מעט, not בית הכנסת.
[102] Z. Safrai, "*The Communal Functions of the Synagogue in the Land of Israel in the Rabbinic Period*", in D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher (eds), *Ancient Synagogues, Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Volume 1, Leiden (1995): 181.
[103] Safrai (1995: 182.

A. Kasher (1995) argues that the two most important non-sacrificial functions of the Jerusalem temple, praying and Torah reading, were adopted in Egypt after the Torah was translated into Greek during and after the reign of Ptolemy II (285-246 BCE). According to Kasher, the description of daily prayer in the *Letter of Aristeas* provided a model for imitation, and there is a line of development from *The Letter of Aristeas* through to the writings of Philo and his descriptions of synagogue activity in Alexandria.[104] The central place of the synagogues means that one can assume wherever there is such an institution, there is also an organised Jewish community. Such an institution can only be built where a sizable Jewish community required its services, which means that the synagogue was situated at the very heart of the area of settlement.[105]

Kasher, like Grabbe, is using the word *synagogue* to discuss Philo's accounts of Jewish religious activity in Egypt. In fact, Philo refers to the *proseuche* as a place to assemble seventeen times (*Flaccus* 41, 45, 47, 48, 49, 53, 122; *Embassy to Gaius* 132, 134, 137, 138-9, 148, 152, 156-8, 165, 191, 371), and to the *synagogue* as a place to assemble only three times (*Gaius* 311, 346; *Every Good Man is Free* 81-83), and to the *synagogue* as a congregation twice (both in *On the Posterity and Exile of Cain* 67). Moreover, while Philo describes assemblies where the law is read and where instruction is given, nowhere does he refer to any acts of communal prayer, which is what Kasher is implying here. This thesis would work well if it were combined with that of H.A. McKay, who wrote in 1995 that if the use of sacred texts should be regarded as a sacred act, it has to be

[104] Kasher(1995): 211.
[105] Kasher (1995): 213-14.

accompanied by other rituals that define the event as "a planned session of worship".[106]

A.T. Kraabel (1995) argues that in the diaspora, the sanctity of the synagogue increased, particularly after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The synagogue gradually became more than a 'prayer house', and secular functions became restricted to side rooms. Kraabel says that this must have happened in the diaspora even before the temple was destroyed.[107] Unfortunately, again, there is no evidence that this was the case. And, while Kraabel refers to an institution that gradually became "more than" a prayer house, we still do not know exactly what a prayer-house was (if that is what a *proseuche* was), and when or where this might have happened. The only reference we have to prayer in the *proseuche* comes to us from the passage in Josephus where he refers to praying in the large *proseuche* at Tiberias.[108]

P.V.M. Flesher (1995) notes that in the period prior to 70 CE, in the numerous Jewish documents, there is little information about synagogues, and only three texts even mention synagogues in Palestine – the New Testament, Josephus and Philo. All other documents are silent.[109] Flesher tries to discover the origins from a specific context in Palestine, and argues that it was that an institution that arose where there was no easy access to the Jerusalem temple. He looks for a central and mainstream institution in Jewish towns and villages in which religious

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[106] H.A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue. The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, New York, Köln (1995): 3.
[107] A.T. Kraabel, "The Diaspora Synagogue: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence Since Sukenik", in D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher (eds), *Ancient Synagogues, Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Volume 1, Leiden (1995): 120-1.
[108] *Vitae* 1.295 (καὶ πρὸς εὐχὰς).
[109] Flesher (1995): 30-1. Actually, we do see a reference to a *proseuche* in Juvenal's third satire, but as the reference is part of a vituperative [albeit satirical] attack on a poor person in Rome, it is difficult to understand precisely what is being referred to (see note 2 above).

functions (and other things took place). He finds this mainstream institution in northern Palestine only, and says the only evidence for synagogues in Judaea (Acts 6:9[110] and the Theodotos Inscription) are references to institutions for diaspora Jews.[111] This is quite interesting in that it raises the question of why – if he is right – the institution existed for foreign nationals only and whether, therefore, it functioned in any religious capacity. Of course, if it is correct that the Theodotos inscription relates to a later period, then the *only* evidence for synagogues in Judaea comes to us from Acts.

R. Reich (1995), argues that both the literary and archaeological evidence make it clear that the synagogue emerged in the Second Temple period, although its precise origins remain unclear.[112] This claim does not stand up to scrutiny, as will be made clear in the case studies, and while there is some evidence in the textual sources, it is by no means overwhelming. There is certainly literary evidence for the existence of synagogues in the New Testament, and *proseuchai* as places of assembly in the Egyptian inscriptions and in Philo, but there is no archaeological evidence to support a claim that they emerged in the second temple period. Linking the literary material to non-existent or later archaeological evidence has created a very artificial space in which to look for the synagogue of the first century CE.

P. Richardson (1996) argues that the earliest evidence for synagogues is from the diaspora, where they took the form of voluntary associations and guilds, and that as they spread and came to be adopted in Palestine they retained this structure,

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[110] A reference to the "synagogue of the freedmen".
[111] Runesson (2001): 157, referring to Flesher (1995): 29-30.
[112] R. Reich, "The Synagogue and the Miqweh in Eretz-Israel in the Second-Temple, Mishnaic, and Talmudic Periods", in D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher (eds), *Ancient Synagogues, Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Volume 1, Leiden (1995): 289.

even though the terminology changed.[113] Again, we have an interesting theory here, but no supporting evidence either in the material record or in the texts. Because of the nature of Philo's writings, and his presumed audience, it is not clear whether he is describing religious institutions or voluntary associations and guilds when he discusses assemblies of Jews.

According to Eric Meyers (1996), the identification of early synagogues in the land of Israel was initially heavily influenced by nationalistic concerns.[114] Meyers, like Levine (and the vast majority of other scholars writing on the subject of early synagogues) identifies synagogues at Masada, Herodium and Gamla, and dates them to the first century ce.[115] He lists general support for this in the writings of Philo, Josephus, and the New Testament, but also uses rabbinic literature to support his thesis that synagogues were common in first century Palestine, citing *Megillah* 3:1,738, which says there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem during the reign of the emperor Vespasian (although he acknowledges that this number derives from a later homiletic and not a historical perspective).[116] According to Meyers's position, which is broadly similar to Levine's, there are distinct elements in synagogue buildings and their settlements; these are, a focus on the importance of reading the law, an attachment to Jerusalem, and a commitment to make houses of assembly the locus of all sorts of activities.[117] Meyers says that the synagogue enabled Judaism to survive the destruction of the temple and that liturgy and communal functions increased, to the point where they

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[113]Richardson (1996): 90-93.
[114] E.M. Meyers, "Ancient Synagogues. An Archaeological Introduction", in Steven Fine (ed.), *Sacred Realm. The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, Oxford University Press and Yeshiva University Museum (1996): 3-6.
[115] Meyers (1996): 8.
[116] Meyers (1996): 9.
[117] Meyers (1996): 18.

then influenced the physical form the early synagogue took.[118] While he may use general sources as support for his thesis, there are no references to synagogues in any of these places and the material record, as will be seen in the case studies, does not support his contention. This problem, while reproduced in a somewhat repetitive manner in this overview, is representative of the scholarship on the subject as a whole.

L. Feldman (1996) is sceptical about the use of epigraphical evidence relating to the identification of early synagogues. He notes, correctly that these texts are not informative about the religious beliefs and practises of Jews and often do not specify dates. He also argues that there are problems with identifying which inscriptions are Jewish and which are Christian, and names, where they are not specifically Jewish, add to the ambiguity of the epigraphic evidence as a whole. According to Feldman, even where an inscription or papyrus refers to people who held honorary positions in synagogues, it does not necessarily follow that this relates to a Jewish community with a building called a synagogue. Feldman also notes that the overall picture taken from the epigraphy and papyri is skewed because more than a third of all inscriptions come from Rome, which had only a small percentage of the total Jewish population of the Diaspora.[119]

S. Fine (1996) sees the development of synagogues as part of a trend in the Graeco-Jewish world, evidenced in the proliferation of voluntary associations and guilds. For Fine, the period after the destruction of the temple saw an explosion in the sorts of religious activities carried out in synagogues, and the most

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[118] Meyers (1996): 18.

[119] L.H. Feldman, "Diaspora Synagogues. New Light from Inscriptions and Papyri", in S. Fine (ed.), *Sacred Realm. The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, Oxford University Press: New York and Oxford (1996): 49-50.

important of these was liturgical when, for the first time, prayer became an important part of synagogue life.[120] According to Fine, prayer modelled on temple liturgy played a major part in the sanctification of the synagogue from the late first to the early third century CE and the focus of community assembly in a religious context enabled Judaism to survive the destruction of the central cult at Jerusalem.[121] Fine argues that the synagogue is one of the most influential religious institutions in western civilisation, and that it allowed a much more democratised religious experience than had existed before, and one which became a model for the early Christian church.[122] According to Fine, the "overwhelming impression" to be taken from the extant sources is that early synagogues were places of communal scripture reading and instruction.[123] All of which is perfectly logical, except we do not know anything about synagogue liturgy in the first century, or its development, and we can only surmise that the extant liturgies possibly relate to synagogues. The paucity of information has resulted in Fine, like so many other scholars, constructing an argument about the development of the early synagogue, on little more than supposition and the projection backwards of information from later periods and from the heavily redacted body of work that is the rabbinic material.

R.A. Horsley (1996), does not try to pinpoint the origins of synagogues and argues only that early synagogues were not religious buildings, but rather intended for communal and public assemblies. While he does not rule out a religious

[120] Fine (1996): 26-28.
[121] Fine (1996): 47.
[122] Fine (1996): 21.
[123] Fine (1996): 22-23.

aspect, he says that this did not define the function of the space.[124] He makes a good point here, because the internal configuration of space intended for public assembly for discussions and the configuration of space intended for religious functions may be quite different.

R. Hachlili (1997), emphasises the destruction of the Jerusalem temple as the key to the development of the synagogue as a religious institution in which liturgical activities developed.[125] The sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem temple, conducted by an elite group of priests, was replaced by an egalitarian assembly, organised communally, which put the study of the Torah and prayer at its centre.[126] According to Hachlili, the synagogue, as a purpose-built structure, with Torah shrines, only began to appear in the land of Israel at a much later date and construction of new synagogues and renovations of old ones continued into the seventh and eighth centuries CE.[127] It certainly seems clear from the literature that the study of Judaism was central to the developing institution and although we might suppose prayer played a role in this, we do not have any sources or material to confirm this.

D. Binder (1999), argues for the beginnings of the synagogue in the city gate, and traces the development via the Jerusalem temple to a form which was heavily influenced by Hellenistic architecture. He has concluded that early synagogues were extensions of the Jerusalem temple cult, and functioned as satellite temples,

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[124] Runesson (2001): 153, citing R.A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee. The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania (1996): 155-156.
[125] Runesson (2001): 153, citing Hachlili (1997a): 46.
[126] Rachel Hachlili, "Aspects of Similarity and Diversity in the Architecture and Art of Ancient Synagogues and Churches in the Land of Israel", in ZDPV 113 (1997): 92.
[127] Hachlili (1997a): 93.

of sorts.[128] Binder's work can be troublesome as it leans heavily on presumptions and suppositions about the nature of the early synagogue and ties some of these presumptions to the physical structures identified as first century synagogues at Delos, Herodian Jericho, Masada, Herodium and Gamla. His and other specific claims in relation to these sites are discussed in the case studies in this dissertation to illustrate how unproven claims have become part of the accepted scholarship on the subject.

E.P. Sanders (1999), takes the view that the origin of the synagogue lies in the diaspora and that it was natural for immigrant groups to join together in clubs or associations and societies, which were popular throughout the Graeco-Roman world.[129]

H.C. Kee, writing in 1999, advocates a late date for the development of synagogues. He argues for the development of the synagogue from voluntary gatherings through to institutionalised structures and concludes that this took place from the second century CE onwards. Before this time, he argues, the term *synagogue* referred only to informal gatherings in private houses and public buildings, and not to purpose-built structures.[130]

L.I. Levine (2000), defines the early synagogue as a location for regular prayer, study of Mosaic law, sacred meals, a communal treasury, law courts, general assembly, a hostel and a residence for synagogue officials. Levine's seminal

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[128] D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts. The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period*, Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series 169, Atlanta: Georgia (1999): 218-220.
[129] E.P. Sanders, "Common Judaism and the Synagogue in the First Century" in S. Fine (ed.) *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue, Cultural interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, Routledge: London and New York (1999): 1.
[130] Runesson (2001): 149-150.

work, *The Ancient Synagogue*, which spans a thousand years of synagogue history, has effectively become *the* text book for synagogue studies because of the breadth of information it covers. According to Levine, both the first century CE synagogue and the *proseuche* were communal institutions where a variety of activities took place; thus, it may have been used as a courtroom, school, or hostel, or for political meetings, social gatherings, keeping treasury funds, slave manumissions, meals (sacred or otherwise), and religious-liturgical functions.[131] There is evidence for all of this, except for the last claim which we must, for the purposes of his thesis, assume to be a ubiquitous part of the institution of synagogue (or *proseuche*). Levine argues that the synagogue (as a formal institution) was well-established by the early Roman period, and the basis on which he enunciates this position (and constructs his list of synagogal functions) is primarily the Theodotos inscription, although he also refers to Acts, Philo, and Josephus.[132] The thrust of Levine's argument is that the origins of the synagogue lay in its role as a community centre, and that it did not develop as a religious institution until the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, although it had had religious elements present from its beginnings.[133] Levine says that even if the synagogue was a post-70 CE institution, its origins lay earlier and its role only changed in the period after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.[134] Like Hengel, Kasher, Kraabel and Grabbe, Levine uses terms to discuss the identification of first century synagogue that are so broad as to be virtually useless in relation to the search for specific early (first century CE) sites. Levine says that, of the hundred or so synagogue sites excavated in the land of Israel, only four can be dated to the pre-70 CE period. These four are Masada, Gamla,

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[131] Levine (2000): 27.
[132] Levine (1982): 33-34.
[133] Levine (2000): 3.
[134] L.I. Levine, "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered", in *JBL* 115/3 (1996): 443-448.

Herodium and the synagogue referred to in the Theodotos inscription[135], and asks why, if the synagogue was already a central communal institution by that period, there should be so few remains. He concludes that the topography of Israel contributes greatly to this, and we see this phenomenon even in the cities that flourished during the period with which we are concerned (such as Caesarea, Tiberias, Sepphoris and Jericho).[136] It is true that topography contributes to the scarcity of remains, but it is notable that none of the literature relates to any of these supposed synagogues and, as we have already seen, the archaeological context of the Theodotos inscription has been lost rendering it impossible to date accurately. Even Josephus, discussing events on Masada at the end of the rebellion against Rome, and at pains to give details of all aspects of life there, does not once mention the existence of a synagogue. In the case study on Masada in this dissertation, it will be clear why this is so, and the extent to which a mythology has developed around the existence of a synagogue there.

A. Runesson, writing in 2001, says there is no consensus as to the earliest history of the synagogue and that if, for instance, Jesus or the Apostles, taught or spoke in any place they thought fit, this place need not have been in a synagogue building.[137] Runesson says that even though there are no specific sources to support this claim, it is likely that "charismatics, prophets and scholars" used public spaces in Jerusalem to teach at times other than those dedicated to communal Torah reading on the Sabbath.[138] Runesson sees the vector of

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[135] Lee I. Levine, "The Revolutionary Effects of Archaeology on the Study of Jewish History: The Case of the Ancient Synagogue", in Neil Asher Silberman and David B. Small, *The Archaeology of Israel. Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, JSOT, Supplement Series 237, Sheffield Academic Press, UK (1997): 171. Masada, Herodium Gamla and discussed in the detailed case studies in this dissertation Herodium

[136] Levine (1997): 171.

[137] Runesson (2001): 478.

[138] Runesson (2001): 218.

synagogue development as deriving from Torah-reading rituals in public assemblies, as early as the reign of Artaxerxes I in the fifth century BCE. Thus, the institutional aspects of the early synagogue were established before the liturgy and they functioned in an official capacity from the start. He says that through the Hellenistic period, changing national authorities did not impose any direct control over the teaching of the law, and so the emphasis changed from national to local, while still retaining an official nature.[139] At some stage in the late Hellenistic period, the first signs of non-official institutions dedicated to communal reading and study began to emerge and these were most likely influenced by voluntary associations and guilds as seen in the broader Graeco-Roman World.[140] In the diaspora, evidence of Jewish institutions was limited to temple cults around which the Jewish community organised and that by around the second century BCE the evolution from sacrificial cult to one of public Torah-reading had been incorporated into the institution. He argues that the *proseuchai* of the Egyptian inscriptions were probably temples, as is supported by Philo's account that offerings were part of the ritual activities of the first century CE.[141] This meant that by the first century CE, various Jewish groups had developed their own agendas, separate from the cult dictated from Jerusalem, and this led to public assemblies where anyone could put forward their views, and no one group controlled synagogues in general.[142] Runesson says that although the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE is often seen as a pivotal point in the development of the synagogue, that it actually mattered little because the institution had begun to evolve from as early as the Hellenistic period so that by the time the temple was destroyed, the synagogue already had an established

[139] Runesson (2001): 479.
[140] Runesson (2001): 480.
[141] Runesson (2001): 481.
[142] Runesson (2001): 482-484.

organisational pattern.[143] According to Runesson, the aspect that points to a continuity between the origins and the developing synagogue was the reading and teaching of the Torah.

Runesson's thesis is reasonable and he is generally careful not too link too much of his theoretical construct to the material record, which is helpful. Moreover, he makes what is a very important claim, that while the early rabbinic material on Torah reading provides a link between the multifaceted origins of the synagogue and the later mainstream institution, *the origin of the rabbinic synagogue is not the same as the origins of the early synagogue.*[144] This is a particularly useful point, and it may go some way towards explaining the gap between the somewhat nebulous *proseuche* or *synagogue* of the earlier period and the proliferation of rabbinic synagogues in the late Roman/Byzantine period.

C. Claussen (2003), says that despite the fact that it is now twenty years after Kraabel wrote his essay on "The Diaspora Synagogue: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence since Sukenik", we are still dealing with the same archaeological evidence and the findings from Sardis, Priene, Dura Europos, Delos,[145] and that Ostia and Stobi are still the only reliable architectural remains of synagogues in the diaspora.[146] P. Richardson (2003), also points to the diaspora for the origins of the synagogue, but suggests that this is merely a

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[143] Runesson (2001): 485-486.
[144] Runesson (2001): 192-193.
[145] In the Delos case study herein this identification is vigorously disputed.
[146] C. Claussen, "Meeting, Community, Synagogue – Different Frameworks of Ancient Jewish Congregations in the Diaspora", in B. Olsson, and M. Zetterholm (eds.) *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins until 200 CE*, Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 39, Almqvist & Wiskell International, Stockholm (2003): 157.

hypothesis, and other theories are possible but these rely on arguments from silence or complex processes of which there is no evidence.[147]

I. Nielsen (2005), notes that the period before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem is the least known in the synagogue's history, but that there are some preserved synagogues and written sources, such as the Theodotos inscription, although the dating of that inscription is disputed.[148] Nielsen points out that the absence of any reference to prayer is a glaring omission from the Theodotos inscription.[149] In Acts 6.9, there is a reference to a "synagogue of the freedmen" in Jerusalem,[150] but the term *synagogue* is more frequently applied to Galilee and northern Palestine, where Jesus frequently preached.[151] Nielsen notes that seven buildings have been identified as synagogues in Palestine in the pre-70 period. These are at Gamla, Magdala, Capernaum and Chorazim (in Galilee) and Jericho, Masada, and Herodium (in Judaea). The view of some scholars, mostly non-archaeologists, according to Nielsen, is that none of these sites should be regarded as *proper* [my emphasis] synagogues, but only as public buildings for assembly, whereas she claims that most scholars accept all or most of these identifications.[152] Nielsen opines that if a building for assembly is found in Jewish surroundings, whether in a city-quarter, a palace area or a fortress, it is likely to be a synagogue, since this was the form the Jewish communal building took. When the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, holiness was gradually

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[147] P. Richardson, "An Architectural Case for Synagogues as Associations", in B. Olsson, and M. Zetterholm (eds.) *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins until 200 CE*, Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 39, Almqvist & Wiskell International, Stockholm (2003): 113.
[148] I. Nielsen, "Issues of Current Interest. Synagogue (*synagoge*) and Prayerhouse (*proseuche*): The Relationship Between Jewish Religious Architecture in Palestine and the Diaspora", *Hephaistos*, 13: (2005): 74.
[149] Nielsen (2005): 74.
[150] τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων.
[151] See footnote 38 above.
[152] Nielsen (2005): 74.

transferred to the synagogue, a process traceable both in the written and the archaeological sources. [153] This is not supported in any way either in the literary evidence or material record. Nielsen does not address the problems with the dating of the buildings at Capernaum and Chorazin, neither of which provides evidence for a pre-70 public building, let alone for a synagogue.

Conclusions

Thus, the main positions of scholarship on the subject of early synagogues to date and the nagging problem that the problem of the gap between theoretical modern constructions, the ancient literature and the archaeological evidence, cannot be resolved. This is not the only problem: while purporting to write about the identification of early synagogues, many scholars survey what has already been written in general terms and apply it to specific sites, a practice that is potentially (and in some cases actually) damaging to the process of identification, as will be clear in the five case studies.

The field of synagogue studies continues to grow apace, with material from archaeological excavations, secondary studies, and from increasingly refined methodological approaches. The earlier and simplistic model of chronologically linked and overlapping types promoted by Goodenough and Avi-Yonah in the early years and others has been overtaken by the intricate and multifaceted approaches of modern scholarship, which take a more technical and scientific approach to the archaeology as well as an increasingly critical approach to the

[153] Nielsen (2005): 74.

ancient sources, including the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the works of Josephus and Philo, and the rabbinical literature.[154]

Unfortunately, while these new methods are being used to make new identifications, they are not being used to analyse those identifications already made (such as Delos, Jericho, Herodium, Masada and Gamla, the five case studies herein). Thus we have a situation where the early identifications are still being used to shore up subsequent identifications, thereby weaving old errors and presumptions into the new work being done. As against the increasingly numerous claims of early foundations, only three sources (Josephus, Philo and the New Testament) refer to pre-70 CE synagogues and/or *proseuchai*, and the terminology is not used in the same way throughout the sources, as we have seen. Moreover, in the Hebrew Bible (including First and Second Maccabees, Tobit and Ben Sira), throughout all known extra-biblical pseudepigrapha, in texts such as the Hellenistic *Letter of Aristeas*, in all of the apocalyptic literature and in the Qumran texts, there remains a deafening and lengthy silence on the subject of the synagogue.[155]

No physical site has yet been matched to any of the epigraphical or literary or other evidential material for pre-70 CE synagogues in the land of Israel. And, almost without exception, assumptions about early synagogues are made based on the identifications of Delos, Jericho, Herodium, Masada and Gamla, and commonalities between their architecture and synagogues from later periods. Moreover, the model of the synagogue as a multi-purpose public building, whether in the Graeco-Roman diaspora or the land of Israel, is unhelpful and

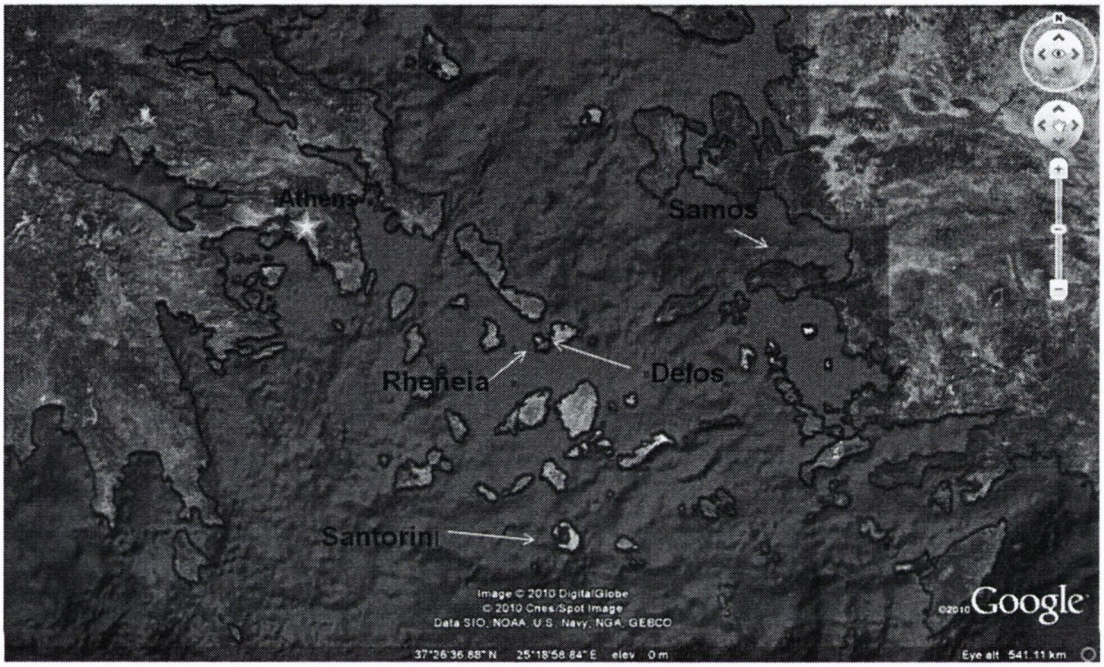
[154] Levine (2000): 13.
[155] Flesher (1995): 30-1; Grabbe (1995): 20.

allows for a plethora of public buildings to be identified as synagogues without any requirement for supporting evidence.

While theory and speculation is useful in the discussion of what a first century synagogue might have been and how it might have functioned; too much has been made too often of too little archaeological and other evidence, resulting in the development of complex accounts and descriptions of the function and layout of specific first century and earlier synagogues without unambiguous evidential support. The problem with the definition of what the early synagogue might have been is bound up in the fact that many of the arguments are circular. Thus, because the structures at Masada, Herodium, Gamla and Delos are assumed to be synagogues – that is what we should be looking for in an early synagogue. This naturally creates problems and inconsistencies. This argument will be clearly borne out by the evidence presented in the case studies that follow.

CHAPTER 2
Delos

Figure 1 – The Cycladic Islands

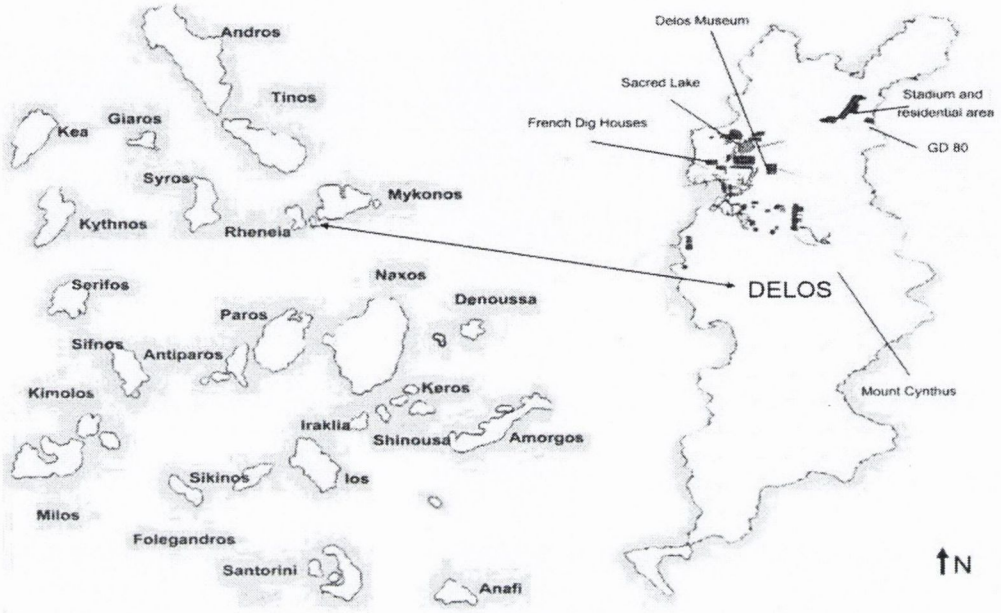


Introduction

The identification of a synagogue on Delos has been problematic ever since it was first made in 1913 because while there is some evidence relating to Jews and/or Samaritans on Delos not one single piece of it refers to a synagogue or association house. When we come to look at the material relating to how a building on this tiny Greek island came to be identified as a synagogue, we find a surprisingly large gap between what was originally proposed — and widely accepted — and what has been found. To this day, scholarship continues to build upon the original and quite erroneous identification. The building with which we are here concerned, GD 80, lies on the northeastern shoreline of the Greek island of Delos,

in the Bay of Gournia, outside the town walls. It stands in the area just east of the stadium and northeast of the gymnasium (Figure 2 below).

Figure 2 – Delos in context



It is important to note that there is nothing in the structure of GD 80 that is specifically Jewish in nature, although I am always mindful of Levine's comment that Jews and Jewish architecture have always been influenced by local material culture.[156]

History of Delos

Delos is a small island in the Cyclades, measuring just 5 km north to south and 1.3 km east to west (see Figures 1 & 2 above). The mythological birthplace of the gods Apollo and Artemis, it was a major cultic centre, and is mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* (6.160-169) and in Homeric Hymn 3 to Apollo.[157]

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[156] Levine (1982): 6; L.I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity. Conflict or Confluence?*, University of Washington Press, Seattle & London (1998): 23; Levine (2000): 581.
[157] M. Crudden, *The Homeric Hymns*, (Hymn 3 to Apollo) Oxford University Press (2001): 23-42.

Delos arrived at its prominent political and economic status almost by default. According to Thucydides (*Peloponnesian Wars*, 1.96.2; 6.76.3), the Persian emperor Xerxes had razed the Athenian sanctuaries during raids into mainland Greece. In 478 BCE, the Greek city states responded by forming a defensive alliance funded by its member states. To avoid the danger of any one of the city states becoming too powerful, the Athenian-controlled island of Delos was chosen to hold the treasury of what came to be known as the Delian League. Delos became a hub of commercial, military, maritime trading and slaving activity (the main slave markets were at Rhodes, Delos and Crete) whilst continuing to be a major cultic centre.[158] Delos became independent from Athens in 314 BCE and, when the Delian League was finally dissolved in the mid-third century BCE, its independence continued, along with its economic boom.[159]

Later, after it came under Roman rule, Athens lobbied the Roman Senate for the return of some of its erstwhile territories. In 166 BCE, the Roman Senate returned Delos to Athenian control and it was made a cleruchy of Athens.[160] To accommodate this, Delian citizens were exiled and their land turned over to the colonists. Even so, people still flocked to Delos from all over the Aegean, many establishing businesses, cults and associations on the island.[161]

The downside of being a thriving and strategically placed cultic, trade and slaving centre was that Delos was often caught between warring factions vying for control of the Aegean. During the first Mithridatic war (88-84 BCE), Delos was raided

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[158] P. de Souza, *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World*, Cambridge University Press, UK (1999): 61.
[159] de Souza (1999): 61.
[160] A colony of military veterans, given land as a settlement.
[161] B.H. McLean, "The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations and Christian Churches on Delos", in J.S. Kloppenborg and S.G. Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Association in the Graeco-Roman World*, London, Routledge (1996), 189.

by Menophaneses, one of Mithridates Eupator's generals. According to Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, 3.23.2) and Appian (*Mithridateios* 28), some 20,000 of the island's inhabitants were slaughtered during that incursion. There was a further major destruction during the second Mithridatic war (83–81 BCE), and another (led by the pirate Athenodoros) during the third Mithridatic war (74–63 BCE).[162] The problem of piracy in the Aegean was so widespread that Cicero complained to the Roman Senate in 66 BCE, saying that the friends, allies and subjects of Rome had been at the mercy of pirates until Pompey finally drove them away. In 69 BCE, Gaius Triarius, Legate to the Roman Consul Lucullus, repaired some of the damage and built a defensive wall round the town centre of Delos.[163]

By the mid-first century BCE, the rise of other trading centres (such as Puteoli and Ostia in Italy), as well as the constant raids and destructions, had taken their toll, and trade routes had altered to accommodate these changes, pushing Delos further outside the commercial loop until eventually it was in such decline that Athens did not even bother sending its official representatives to the island, and the priest of Apollo on Delos left to live in Athens, only returning for the traditional annual ceremonial sacrifice of twelve animals.[164]

The decline continued apace and in the second century CE, the philhellenic Emperor Hadrian's attempt to revive the old Delian festivals was unsuccessful. By then, according to Pausanias (8.33.2), the island was already very sparsely inhabited.[165] The agricultural land in the southern part of Delos continued to be

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[162] de Souza (1999): 162-3; McLean (1996): 188.
[163] de Souza (1999): 162-3.
[164] McLean (1996): 189.
[165] McLean (1996): 189.

cultivated until the last person left, probably during the fifth century CE.[166]

History of the excavations

The École française d'Athènes commenced excavations on Delos in 1873. Between 1904 and 1914, much of the island was excavated. There were further extensive excavations between 1958 and 1975. The École française d'Athènes continues to run excavations on the island in conjunction with the Cycladic Ephoreia (the governing body for archaeological excavations, museums and conservation in the Cycladic Islands), and it maintains a permanent presence there[167]. All structures on the island will be referred to according to their designations in Bruneau and Ducat's seminal guide to the excavations on Delos, the *Guide de Délos*, and I will refer to all inscriptions found on the island according to their designations in the collections of inscriptions from Delos, the *Inscriptions de Délos* (ID). Using this format, the building known as the synagogue is GD 80 (see Figure 3 below).

Identification of the synagogue (GD 80)

It was André Plassart of the École française d'Athènes who, during the excavations of 1912 and 1913, identified GD 80 as a synagogue. His identification relied on six inscriptions. Rather astonishingly, the principal inscription, around which the entire identification was made, was found not in GD 80, but rather some 90 m north of it, in a complex of residential buildings on the

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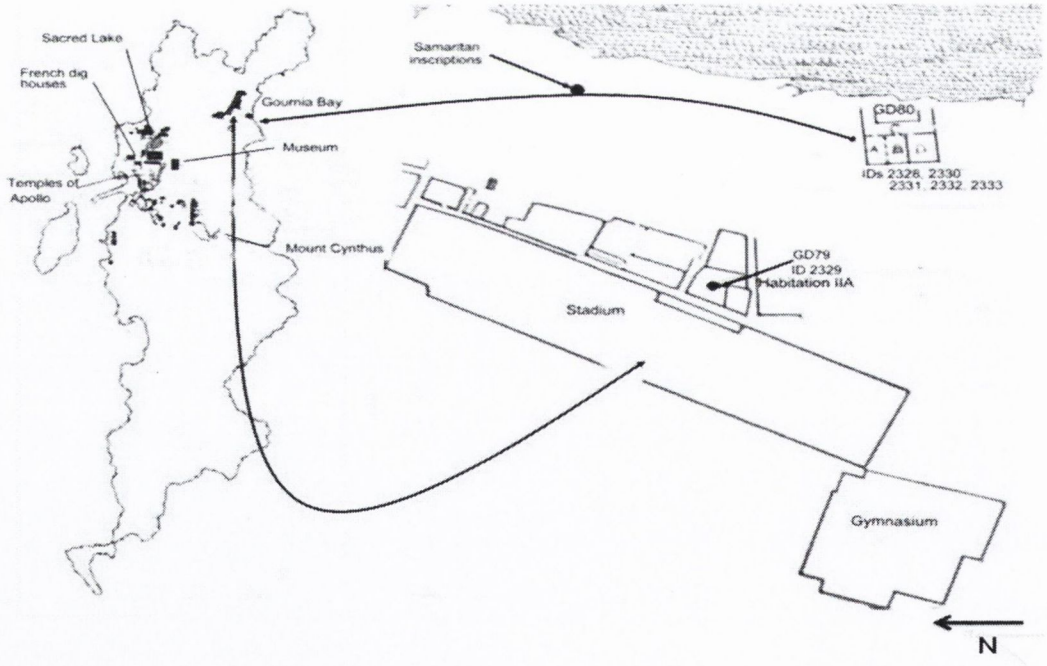
[166] In conversation with Michelè Brunet in October 2003, discussing the extent of agriculture on Delos until its abandonment. See M. Brunet, "Contribution à l'histoire rurale de Délos aux époques classique et hellénistique", *BCH* 114:2 (1990) 669-682, which looks at aspects of the countryside of Delos and its historic cultivation.

[167] The École française d'Athènes maintain a number of houses on the island for the purpose of accommodating their archaeologists during the digging seasons and I am most grateful to their Director of Studies, Michèle Brunet for arranging to open one of their dig houses for me, and to Panayotis Chatzidakis of the 21st Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classic Antiquities, for giving me permission to stay overnight on the island in October of 2003.

east side of the stadium district, and was not associated with GD 80 until some time later. This inscription, ID 2329, contained the donor names *Agathokles* and *Lysimachos* and the word *proseuche* which, Plassart said, referred to a Jewish 'house of prayer' or 'synagogue'.[168]

Plassart's other five inscriptions were found scattered around GD 80, and among those was one which contained one of the donor names found in ID 2329 above. Three of the inscriptions contained the epithet *Theo Hypsisto* ('god most high'), and one contained the epithet *Hypsisto* ('most high'). Plassart's final inscription retained only two legible words, *genomenos eleutheros* ('became free').[169]

Figure 3 – GD 80 ("the synagogue") in context



In an article written in 1913, André Plassart laid out his argument that the use of the epithets *Hypsisto* ("most high) or *Theo Hypsisto* ("god most high") indicated a religious tendency towards monotheism and therefore referred to the Jewish deity.

[168] A. Plassart, "La Synagogue juive de Délos" in *Mélanges Holleaux, recueil de memoirs concernant l'antiquité grecque*, Picard: Paris (1913): 201-215; A. Plassart, "La synagogue juive de Délos", *Revue Biblique*: 23 (1914): 523-534.
[169] André Plassart. "La Synagogue juive de Délos", *Revue Biblique*: 23 (1914): 528.

However, in the same article, he noted that an inscription had recently been found in Lydia, bearing the epithet *Thea Hypsista*, probably referring to the great mother goddess of Asia Minor, and that other similar inscriptions had been found in relation to the Thracian-Phrygian deity Dionysos-*S*abazios and to the Syrian Zeus of Heliopolis.[170]

Thus, despite being aware of the non-Jewish uses of the term *Theos Hypsistos*, and its application to different divinities, male and female, and despite the fact that the inscription on which he was basing his argument was not found in GD 80 (see Figure 4 below), he proceeded to use it as proof that GD 80 was a synagogue. According to his argument, since the word *proseuche* signified a later Jewish use and context, he associated the *proseuche* and *Lysimachos* inscriptions with one another. Combining the use of *Theos Hypsistos* and *Hypsistos* in the other inscriptions, and looking at the configuration of the furnishings of the building (arguing that it was similar to later synagogues) Plassart declared GD 80 to be a synagogue[171].

However, as we shall see, the word *proseuche* in the context in which André Plassart found it refers to the fulfilment of a prayer or votive offering, not to a building and, indeed, possibly not to a Jewish context at all. Moreover, the occurrences of the names *Lysimachos* and *Agathokles* are entirely coincidental and the arguments relating to the form, style, furnishings and artefacts found in GD 80 are irrelevant to its identification as a synagogue. In short, there are no compelling reasons to consider GD 80 a synagogue.

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[170] Plassart (1914): 529.
[171] Plassart (1914): 528-529.

The ancient sources

There is very little literary evidence relating to Jews on Delos and while what does exist is useful in establishing the presence of Jews in the region, it does not allude to the existence of a synagogue or indeed to any specifically Jewish physical structure on Delos. The earliest reference to Jews on Delos is found in the first book of Maccabees and incorporates a letter from Lucius, a Roman consul:

> Then Numenius and his companions arrived from Rome, with letters to the kings and countries, in which the following was written: 'Lucius, consul of the Romans, to King Ptolemy, greetings. The envoys of the Jews have come to us as our friends and allies to renew our ancient friendship and alliance. They had been sent by the high priest Simon and by the Jewish people and have brought a gold shield weighing one thousand minas. We therefore have decided to write to the kings and countries that they should not seek their harm or make war against them and their cities and their country, or make alliance with those who war against them. And it has seemed good to us to accept the shield from them. Therefore if any scoundrels have fled to you from their country, hand them over to the high priest Simon, so that he may punish them according to their law.' The consul wrote the same thing to King Demetrius and to Attalus and Ariarathes and Arsaces, and to all the countries, and to Sampsames, and to the Spartans, and to Delos, and to Myndos, and to Sicyon, and to Caria, and to Samos, and to Pamphylia, and to Lycia, and to Halicarnassus, and to Rhodes, and to Phaselis, and to Cos, and to Side, and to Aradus and Gortyna and Cnidus and Cyprus and Cyrene. They also sent a copy of these things to the high priest Simon.
>
> (1 Maccabees 15.15-23)

In this passage, the Jews, through the High Priest Simon, have made an offering to the Romans of a valuable shield in return for which the Romans have renewed an old alliance and offered their protection. There is an ongoing debate concerning the chronology of this text, but it is not relevant here[172]. While this text is useful in that it suggests that the Delians may have had some interaction with Jews, it may be that because we have already assumed that there are Jews on the island, we see the text as confirming their presence there. This has the potential of

[172] For the essentials of the debate on the chronology, see J.A. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, Doubleday and Company, Inc, New York (1976) and J.R. Bartlett, *1 Maccabees*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, (1998).

becoming an entirely circular argument. What the text *actually* says is that the Romans have renewed their friendship with the Jews, via a delegation sent to Rome by the high priest Simon, as a consequence of which Rome asked its allies to hand over to the Jewish authorities those who harassed the Jews and 'scoundrels' who, having made war against the Jews, fled to the locations listed in the letter. Notably, there is no mention of *Jews on Delos*, or of any Jewish buildings, houses or associations.

The second text is Josephus's account of the same event. There are variables in this version in that Josephus identifies the Lucius mentioned in the 1 Maccabees passage as the praetor Lucius Valerius, and the island of Delos is not mentioned at all. The chronological context of this passage is also disputed.[173]

> Lucius Valerius, son of Lucius the praetor, consulted with the senate on the Ides of December in the Temple of Concord. And at the writing of the decree there were present Lucius Coponius, son of Lucius, of the Colline tribe, and Papirius of the Quirine tribe. Whereas Alexander, son of Jason, Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Alexander, son of Dorotheus, envoys of the Jews and worthy men and allies, have discussed the matter of renewing the relation of goodwill and friendship which they formerly maintained with the Romans, and have brought as a token of the alliance a golden shield worth fifty thousand gold pieces, and have asked that letters be given them to the autonomous cities and kings in order that their country and ports may be secure and suffer no harm, it has been decreed to form a relation of goodwill and friendship with them and to provide them with all the things which they have requested, and to accept the shield which they have brought.
>
> (Josephus, *AJ*, 14.145-148)[174]

While the text is very similar to the text of the Maccabees passage, there is no reference whatsoever to Delos or, again, to the presence of Jews on Delos. Again, past and modern scholarship has assumed that this text refers to Jews on Delos because we presuppose that, because of its similarity to the passage at 1

[173] Bartlett (1998): 93-94.
[174] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, The Loeb Classical Library, translated by Ralph Marcus, London and Massachusetts (1943).

Maccabees 15, it must be so. Again, the text actually only notes the renewal of Roman-Jewish friendship and the request made by a Jewish delegation that Jews not be harassed in the autonomous ports and cities of the Mediterranean.

The third text is the most interesting and most substantial. Again, it comes to us via Josephus, in the form of a letter dealing specifically with the Jews of Delos. This text is thought to date to about the middle of the first century BCE.

> Julius Gaius, Praetor, Consul of the Romans, to the magistrates, council and people of Parium, greeting. The Jews in Delos and some of the neighbouring Jews, some of your envoys also being present, have appealed to me and declared that you are preventing them by statute from observing their national customs and sacred rites. Now it displeases me that such statutes should be made against our friends and allies and that they should be forbidden to live in accordance with their customs and to contribute money to common meals and sacred rites, for this they are not forbidden to do even in Rome. For example, Gaius Caesar, our consular praetor, by edict forbade religious societies to assemble in the city, but these people alone he did not forbid to do so or to collect contributions or to hold common meals. Similarly do I forbid other religious societies but permit these people alone to assemble and feast in accordance with their native customs and ordinances. And if you have made any statutes against our friends and allies, you will do well to revoke them because of their worthy deeds on our behalf and their goodwill towards us.
>
> (Josephus, *AJ* 14.213-216)[175]

According to this text, at some point in the middle of the first century BCE, the Jews of Delos (and other Jews) were being prevented by the magistrates, council and people of Parium *from observing their national customs and sacred rites*. They were not being allowed to meet for religious purposes, to collect religious tithes or to pay for common meals, or to assemble, even though assembly by religious societies in Rome had been forbidden, *except for the Jews* who were not forbidden *...to do so or to collect contributions or to hold common meals*. The letter asked that the religious prohibitions against the Jews of Delos (and other neighbouring Jews) be revoked.

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[175] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Books XII-XIV*, The Loeb Classical Library, translated by Ralph Marcus, London, William Heinemann Ltd and Harvard University Press, Massachusetts: 1943).

We can hypothesise, based on this letter, that the Jews on Delos (and some of the neighbouring Jews) were for some time not permitted the same privileges as Jews in Rome. Thus, at the time of this letter, the Jews at Rome could assemble, collect contributions and hold common meals, but the Jews on Delos (and some of the neighbouring Jews) could not. Apart from any other interpretation of the text, it does not suggest that the Jews on Delos were in a position to have had a physically identifiable synagogue or other communal building to use for their traditional practices, given that those practices were forbidden by the magistrates, council and people of Parium. It is evident that for at least some unknown time there was a statute of some sort in place forbidding Jews to live in accordance with their native customs, to assemble and to contribute money to communal meals and sacred rites, and it is apposite to note that the prohibition against Jewish practices mentioned in it relates to precisely the period when GD 80 is said to have functioned as a synagogue, that is from the middle of the first century BCE.

Despite these problems and despite the lack of corroborating evidence, Plassart used the foregoing passage as support for his identification of GD 80 as a synagogue. He said that the text 'undertook to repeal the decree' by which the Jews had been forbidden from observing their ancient customs and, in particular, from organising communal meals that would have taken place 'in the vast premises of the synagogue'.[176] While it is possible that the appeal by Josephus presupposed tat the Jews on Delos had the facilities to practise common worship, which practise had been prohibited by decree, there is no evidence to suggest that GD 80 functioned as such a facility.

[176] Plassart (1914): 529.

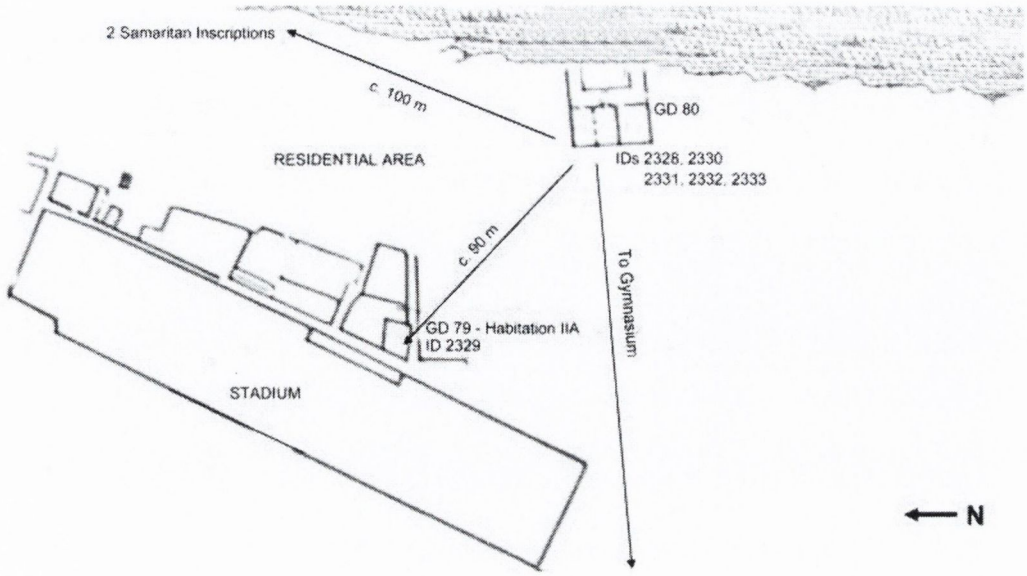
There is not one shred of evidence connecting GD 80 with a reading of the letter about the Delian Jews in Josephus other than Plassart's original assumption (based on his association of the inscriptions mentioned above and discussed in more detail below) that it was a synagogue.

The foregoing passage in Josephus does not allude to a synagogue or house being used as a synagogue, and then being prevented from being used as a synagogue. Indeed, it only says that Jews on Delos (and other neighbouring Jews) were being prevented from following their traditional practices and that the Romans thought it desirable that this should change, in line with Roman administrative leniency relative to Jews.

At best, therefore, we have one direct reference to Jews on Delos (and other neighbouring Jews; either on the island or elsewhere in the region either in the Cyclades or the Dodecanese, or even Aegina, Crete, Rhodes or Cyprus; and not necessarily on Delos at all), in the first century BCE, suggesting that they were, for some unknown period of time, prevented from following their traditional practices.

As this text provides the only clear reference we have to the presence of Jews on the island of Delos, it must be examined in that context. So, what we do have is what appears to be a reliable and plausible reference to the presence of Jews on the island of Delos, albeit one that is wholly dependent on Josephus. What we do not have is a reference to a synagogue or association house or community building of the Jews on Delos.

Figure 4 – GD 80 (its environs and where the inscriptions were found)



The Plassart Inscriptions

As stated above, Plassart's evidence for the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue consisted of six inscriptions. The principal inscription was found in house IIA of GD 79 in the densely packed residential area, some 90 m northwest of GD 80 (see Figure 4 above).

Inscription 1 (ID 2329)

Αγαθοκλης και Λυσιμαχος επι προσευχη[177]

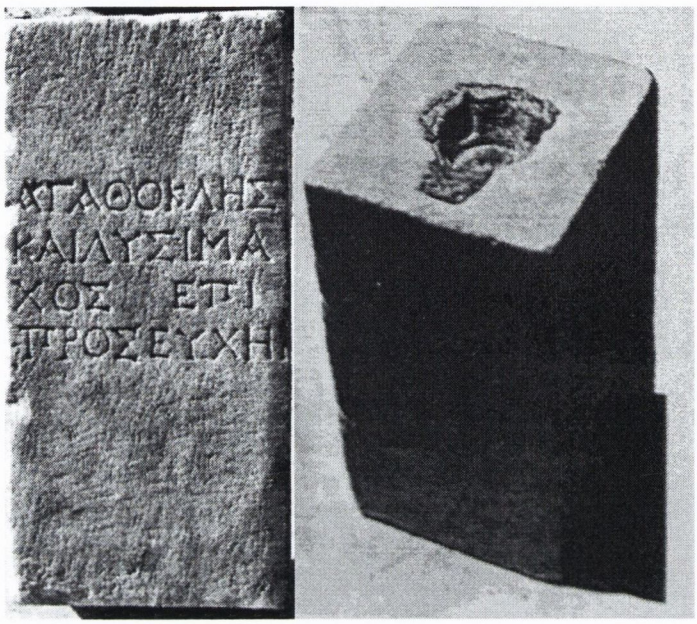
("Agathokles and Lysimachos for an offering/prayer")[178]

This inscription is the one on which Plassart based his identification of GD 80 as a synagogue. It is notable that ID 2329 was, however, found in the cistern of house IIA of GD 79 beside the stadium, about 90 m northwest of GD 80 (see Figure 4 above). This inscription has been dated to around the first century BCE and is

[177] P. Roussel & M. Launey, *Inscriptions de Délos. Decrets Postérieurs A 166 AV. J.-C. (Nos. 1497-1524). Dédicaces Postérieures A 166 AV. J.-C. (Nos. 1525-2219)*, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, Paris (1937a): 295; Plassart (1913): 205.
[178] My translation.

carved on a plain rectangular marble stele with a cut on the top side containing the remnants of a lead fixing, indicating it held a statue or some other votive offering.

Figure 4a – ID 2329 (front and top views)[179]



The presence of the lead fixing for a votive offering is some support for the argument that this inscription may not be a Jewish one. It is also support for the argument that if *ID* 2329 was indeed a Jewish inscription, then whatever was affixed to the top of the stele was what was being offered.[180] Moreover, as there is no definite article used in the wording of the inscription, it is plausible that the words επι προσευχη (in this context) may not refer to a building at all and should be translated as reading 'for an offering' or simply as a 'prayer' (in the sense that a prayer to a deity is always an offering) and not 'for the synagogue' (as Plassart translated it in his 1913 article) and as others have continued to do.[181] It is, of course, possible that the inscription does indeed refer to a physical structure and that the standards of Greek used in literary writing simply cannot or should not be applied to the inscribing of dedicatory inscriptions.

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[179] W. Déonna, *Le Mobilier délien, Délos*, Paris: De Boccard, 1938 (pages unnumbered).
[180] Possibly a model of a decorative vase or urn of a standard type.
[181] Plassart (1913): 205.

ID 2329 contained the names *Agathokles* and *Lysimachos* and the word *proseuche* which, Plassart said, referred to a Jewish 'house of prayer' or 'synagogue' (and following Plassart most scholars have agreed with this interpretation).[182] On the basis of his presumption that ID 2329 indicated the existence of a synagogue, Plassart identified the two names listed on it as Jewish.[183] However, in addition, to the presence of those two names on ID 2329, there other contemporary instances of the name *Agathokles* from Delos, including one from the Agora of the Competalists (ID 1760);[184] one from the Portico of Antigone (ID 1965);[185] one from a list of donors and subscribers found in and belonging to Sarapeion C (ID 2618);[186] one from an *Ephebium* list (ID 2598);[187] one on a decree of the Athenian cleruchy in honour of the musician *Amphikles* (ID 1497)[188]; and one on a white marble stele found in the Sanctuary of the Syrians (ID 2263).[189]

Inscription 2 (ID 2328)

Λυσιμαχος υπερ εαυτου Θεω Υψιστω χαριστηριον[190]

("Lysimachos for himself [to] God Most High [for a] votive/thank-offering")[191]

ID 2328 is carved on a small piece of white marble. It was found lying at the foot of a wall in GD 80. This inscription is also dated to the first century BCE. It was the use of the name *Lysimachos* in this inscription that caused Plassart to associate

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[182] Roussel & Launey (1937a): 295; Plassart (1913): 205.
[183] P.M. Fraser and E. Matthews (eds.). *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names: Volume I: The Aegean Islands*, Clarendon Press, New York, Oxford University Press (1987).
[184] Roussel & Launey (1937a): 119.
[185] Roussel & Launey (1937a): 188.
[186] P. Roussel & M. Launey, *Inscriptions de Délos. Dédicaces Postérieures A 166 AV. J.-C. (Nos. 2220-2528). Textes Divers, Listes et Catalogues, Fragments Divers Postérieurs A 166 AV. J.-C. (Nos. 2529-2879)*, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, Paris (1937b): 395.
[187] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 374.
[188] Roussel & Launey (1937a): 1.
[189] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 78.
[190] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 295; Plassart (1913): 205, n.2; Plassart (1914): 527, n.2.
[191] My translation.

IDs 2329 and 2328 together, resulting in the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue.

Again, there are other contemporary inscriptions from Delos containing the name *Lysimachos*. The name appears on ID 1764,[192] relating to the Association of Competalists and on ID 2616,[193] a list of donors and subscribers to Sarapeion C.

The fact that the names *Lysimachos* and *Agathokles* both appear in lists of donors and subscribers to Sarapeion C is interesting, and it is well worth mentioning here that the internal configuration of GD 80 (our supposed synagogue), GD 91 (Sarapeion A) and GD 100 (Sarapeion C) is very similar – with benches placed around the internal walls (we will return to this point in the discussion of the archaeological evidence below).

Inscription 3 (ID 2330)

Λαωδικη Θεωι Υψιστωι σωθεισα ταις υφ αυτου θαραπηαις ευχην[194]

("Laodike [to] God Most High for healing him of his infirmities, an offering")[195]

ID 2330 is carved on a rectangular base of white marble. It was found in GD 80, and has been dated to around 108/107 BCE. It is an inscription in the style of a Greek votive rather than a Jewish dedication.

The name *Laodike* is identified in the *LPGN* as possibly being Jewish, but this is again on the basis of Plassart's identification. There is one other instance of the

[192] Roussel & Launey (1937a): 122.
[193] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 389.
[194] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 296; Plassart (1913): 205, n.3; Plassart (1914): 527.
[195] My translation.

name *Laodike* from Delos, ID 2628,[196] among a list of donor and subscriber names on a marble plaque, which was discovered in the Theatre of the Syrian Sanctuary.

Inscription 4 (ID 2331)

Ζωσας Παριος Θεω Υψιστῳ ευχην[197]

("Zozas of Paros [to] God Most High, an offering")[198]

ID 2331 was found on a bench in the western side of room A in GD 80. It is carved on a small base of white marble, Plassart described it as 'slightly pyramid-shaped', but it is actually in the shape of a horned altar.

Figure 4b – ID 2331[199]



This inscription has been dated to the first century BCE, and the name *Zozas* is identified in the *LGPN* as possibly belonging to a manumitted slave, but not specifically identified as a Jewish name. The style of this base and that of ID

[196] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 401-2.
[197] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 296; Plassart (1913): 205, n.4; Plassart (1914): 527.
[198] My translation.
[199] W. Déonna, *Le Mobilier délien, Délos*, Paris: De Boccard, 1938 (pages unnumbered).

2328 is very similar, and there are many examples of this type of inscribed base all over Delos itself (and indeed all over the ancient Near East).

There was no other instance of the name *Zozas* in the ID. However, there are other instances of the name *Zozas* in the context of the first rebellion against Rome in Josephus (*BJ* 4.235; 5.249; 6.92; 6.148; and 6.380), and all the references are to the same person: one James, *son of Sosas*, an Idumaean general who mustered forces to march on Jerusalem in support of the Zealot faction. This could be support for a Jewish identification of ID 2331, although it is not an association Plassart or any other following scholar made and, of course, it could be entirely coincidental and/or unrelated.

Inscription 5 (ID 2332)

Υψιστω ευχὴν Μαρκια[200]

("Most High [from] Markia")[201]

ID 2332 was found on a bench in the west of room A in GD 80. It is carved on a small, white marble base and dates to the first century BCE. The name *Markia* is again identified as Jewish in the *LGPN* on the basis of Plassart's identification. It is the only instance of this name on an inscription from Delos.

Inscription 6 (ID 2333)

γενομενος ελευθερος[202]

("... became free")[203]

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[200] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 296; Plassart (1913): 206, n.5; Plassart (1914): 528.
[201] My translation.
[202] Roussel & Launey (1937b): 296; Plassart (1913): 206, n.6; Plassart (1914): 528, n.6.

ID 2333 is carved on a small rectangular base of white marble and was found in GD 80. The marble is very badly damaged and only those two words can be made out. Given the position of Delos as one of the main Aegean centres of the slave trade, it is hardly surprising to find that there are inscriptions relating to the freeing of slaves found there. Furthermore, there were other inscription bases found in GD 80 which neither Plassart nor subsequent scholars have chosen to mention, and whose texts are illegible.[204] It is evident, thus, that other than its proximity to the other four inscription bases found in GD 80 (and the one found some 90 m away in the stadium district) and discussed by Plassart, there is nothing Jewish about ID 2333 and it is merely Plassart's association of the inscriptions that has linked it with the others.

It becomes clear, when looked at in the light of all of the foregoing, that the inscriptions used by Plassart to identify GD 80 as a synagogue are unrelated. They, like many of the other pieces of marble on the island have ended up together in building GD 80 where there is a lime kiln (for melting down marble to make lime), and we will return to this point below in the discussion of the archaeological remains.

However, there are two further inscriptions which are very interesting indeed:

The Samaritan Inscriptions

In 1979, two inscriptions were found by Philippe Fraisse of the École française d'Athènes. These two inscriptions are the only specifically Jewish (Samaritan)

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[203] My translation.

[204] Specifically, two small inscription bases whose texts are illegible. See W. Déonna, *Le Mobilier délien, Délos*, Paris: De Boccard (1938) Pl. CXII, photographs 969 and 970 (the pages are unnumbered)

pieces of material found on the island. They were both found in an unexcavated area just beneath current ground level, where they had fallen from the exterior wall onto which they had apparently been fixed, near the shoreline about 100 m north of GD 80. Both inscriptions are written in Greek, and both are dedicated by the 'Israelites who offer to Holy Argarizein' (presumably Mount Gerizim in Samaria).

These two inscriptions do provide evidence of Samaritans on the island. It is possible that if there were a Samaritan (or Jewish) community on Delos that it came there in the same way as the other multinational migrants, to benefit from the free trade status of Delos and to deal in merchandise and slaves from around the Mediterranean region.

Unfortunately, other than these two inscriptions, there is no literary, archaeological or epigraphic evidence to tell us anything about Samaritans on Delos. Of course, it is possible to theorise, based on the inscriptions and on the passage in Josephus (*AJ* 14.213-216) above, that the references to the Jews on Delos could relate to Samaritans and that the building from which the two inscriptions came could have been a Samaritan synagogue.

Samaritan Inscription 1

Οι εν Δηλῳ Ισραελειται οι
απαρχομενοι εις ιερον
Αργαριζειν στεφανουσιν
χρυσω στεφαῳ Σαραπιωνα
Ιασονος Κνωσιον ευεργεσιας
ενεκεν της εις εαυτους[205]

[205] Philippe Bruneau, "Les Israélites de Délos et la juiverie délienne", in Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique, 106 (1982): 469.

("The Israelites on Delos who make first-fruit offerings to Holy Argarizim crown with a golden crown Sarapion son of Jason of Knossos for his benefactions on their behalf.")[206]

This inscription has been dated to somewhere between 150 and 50 BCE.[207] There is substantial damage to the upper area of the stele, but it does not affect the text.[208] The inscription honours *Sarapion (*son of Jason of Knossos) for his benefactions on behalf of the 'Israelites on Delos' but does not offer any details as to the presence of a permanent community of Samaritans on the island, and it is not clear whether the *Sarapion* honoured in the text is a Samaritan, Jew or pagan. It does, however, identify the dedicators as 'the Israelites on Delos', which certainly indicates a community of Israelites on the island, be it a temporary, seasonal or permanent one.

Samaritan Inscription 2

Ισραηλιται οι απαρχομενοι εις ιερον Αργαριζειν
ετιμησαν υαc. Μενιππον Αρτεμιδωρου
Ηρακλειον αυτον και τους εγγονους αυτου
κατασκευασαντα και αναθεντα εκ των ιδιον επι
προσευχη του θε[ου] TON[- - - - - - - - - - - - - -]
ΟΛΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ[- - - - - και εστεφανωσαν] χρυσω
στε[φα -]νω και [- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -]
ΚΑ - - -
Τ - -[209]

("[The] Israelites who make first-fruit offerings to holy Argarizim honour Menippos, son of Artemidoros of Heraclea, himself as well as his descendants to

[206] Bruneau (1982): 469.
[207] Bruneau (1982): 469-474.
[208] Bruneau (1982) : 474.
[209] Bruneau (1982) : 471-474.

have established and dedicated its expenses, for an offering/prayer [to God], [- - - - - - -] and [- - - - -] and crowned it with a golden crown and [- - -]")[210]

The second Samaritan inscription is tentatively dated to between 250-175 BCE and is carved onto a white marble stele.[211] There is a great deal of damage to the bottom portion of the text, with the second half of the text entirely missing. This inscription refers to a donation of some unknown thing or act. It is unfortunate that this second inscription, whose damaged portion probably contained the details of the donation, has not survived intact and thus, unfortunately, the two Samaritan inscriptions do not clear up the mystery for us. It is to be hoped that the bottom fragment of the second inscription might at some point be found and the text fully reconstructed so that we might at least know what was offered.

The second inscription is very similar to the first and honours Menippos (son of Artemidoros of Heraclea) for his benefactions in establishing something somewhere on Delos (perhaps the place where the stele fell to the ground and was ultimately found), and again offers no clues as to the presence of a permanent community of Samaritans on the island. Again, it is not clear whether the Menippos of the text is a Samaritan or pagan himself. It is the 'Israelites' who honour Menippos, but unlike the first Samaritan inscription, *the text of the second inscription does not include the phrase 'the Israelites of Delos'.*

The text of the second inscription has been interpreted on the basis that it must be worded like the first. However, it is inscribed on a reused marble stele with an earlier text blocked out and, as noted above, whoever inscribed the new text over

[210] Bruneau (1982): 471-474.
[211] Bruneau (1982): 469-474.

the old did not include the words *on Delos*, although there is space to do so. Nevertheless, Philippe Bruneau of the École française d'Athènes reconstructed it as though it did contain that phrase and subsequent scholarship has followed suit.[212] It is possible that this dedication, like the first, might relate to a permanent, seasonal or even a non-resident donor or group of Samaritans, or to a group who did not have the same legal status on Delos as those who dedicated the first stele.

To add some further confusion to the translation and interpretation of the two Samaritan inscriptions, Plassart's initial translation of the phrase επι προσευχη (from ID 2329) as 'for the synagogue', has led to a number of scholars translating the same phrase in the second Samaritan inscription in that way, leading them to think that the building from which the Samaritan inscription came was a synagogue. Moreover, Bruneau translated the phrase επι προσευχη in the second Samaritan inscription as 'in ex-voto' (for a vow/offering), whereas in relation to ID 2329 he accepted Plassart's reading of it as 'for the synagogue'.[213]

In any event, the two Samaritan inscriptions provide at least some indication that the texts referring to the Jews on Delos in Josephus and Maccabees might relate to a permanent or seasonal community of Samaritans and possibly to the existence of a building related to their presence there. The dating of the inscriptions is broad (c. 250-50 BCE) and it could be that offerings were sent to Mount Gerizim while the temple still stood there; or that offerings continued to be made and sent to Samaria after the destruction of the temple. Or, indeed, it could be that the

[212] Bruneau (1982): 474.
[213] L.M. White. "The Delos Synagogue Revisited: Recent Fieldwork in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora", Harvard Theological Review, 1987(80): 142.

offerings, in whatever form they took, were made on Delos only, perhaps in the form of votives.

In the light of the discovery of two Samaritan inscriptions, it has been suggested that there were communities of both Jews and Samaritans on Delos, and that the letter recorded in Josephus refers to both,[214] and it must be at least possible that this is so. However, while the reference in Josephus (*AJ* 14.213-216) to the 'Jews in Delos and some of the neighbouring Jews' does indicate that there was more than one Jewish community, in the area, it is possible that these 'neighbouring Jews' may have been on other islands, either in the Cyclades or the Dodecanese or indeed other larger islands in the region, such as Crete, Rhodes or Cyprus. Since we know of the Jewish population on Delos only from Josephus, and of the Samaritans only from the two Samaritan inscriptions, it is difficult to see how this conundrum can be resolved without substantial excavations of the area immediately east of the stadium.

Theos Hypsistos/Hypsistos

Writing in 1914, Plassart outlined his belief that the use of the epithets *Hypsisto* or *Theo Hypsisto* (in the inscriptions found in GD 80) indicated 'a tendency towards monotheism', and Jewish monotheism in particular.[215] However, the inscriptions that refer to *Hypsistos* may also refer to the Greek deity *Zeus Hypsistos*, whose cult (a healing cult, and a more likely association given the physical form of the inscription bases) also used these epithets to describe their chief deity. The sanctuary of the cult of *Zeus Hypsistos* is located on Mt. Cynthus, less than 500 m southwest of GD 80 (see Figure 3 above).

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[214] White (1987): 153.
[215] Plassart (1914): 529.

Plassart only identified the names from the group of inscriptions he considered to be related (see above) as being Jewish without looking at other occurrences of those names on Delos. Additionally, as already stated, he noted an occurrence of the term *Thea Hypsista*, which he acknowledged as referring to a Near Eastern female deity, possibly the Great Goddess of Asia Minor.[216] Taking this together with the recurrences of the names contained in the inscriptions, Plassart's argument is considerably and correctly diminished. Furthermore, the names on the two Samaritan inscriptions may or may not be Jewish and could be the names of non-Jewish Cretan donors. If, at some future point, it were possible to relate the two names (Menippos and Jason) from Crete to a Jewish family there, it would be a significant advance in the scholarship on the subject.

Writing in 1935, Belle Mazur noted that the style of the inscribed bases was inconsistent with Jewish practice, in particular the *proseuche* and the *Lysimachos* inscriptions which had lead fixings in place for votive offerings or statues.[217] She made the first connection with the Greek cult of *Zeus Hypsistos,* in whose sanctuary on the Athenian Pnyx were found similar inscribed bases, and to the cult of *Theos Hypsistos* from Asia Minor. Mazur was the first scholar to note that Plassart's translation of the phrase επι προσευχη as meaning 'for the synagogue' was incorrect because the definite article is absent from the inscription. She translated it as 'for a prayer/votive'.[218]

[216] Plassart (1914): 529.
[217] Belle D. Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, Athens, Printing Office "Hestia" (1935): 21-22.
[218] Mazur (1935): 21-22.

An illustrative digression – the cult of the Hypsistarians

There is another cult that used the epithets *Hypsistos* and *Theos Hypsistos*: the *Hypsistarians* who, while they recognised other gods, considered theirs as being above all. Part of their ritual is described in an inscription carved on one of the blocks of the Hellenistic inner face of the city wall of Oenoanda in northern Lycia.[219]

> Born of itself, untaught, without a mother, unshakeable, not contained in a name, known by many names, dwelling in fire, this is god. We, his angels, are a small part of god. To you who ask this question about god, what his essential nature is, he has pronounced that Aether is god who sees all, on whom you should gaze and pray at dawn, looking towards the sunrise.[220]

According to descriptions of their practices, the Hypsistarians stood in the open air facing east, looking up to heaven and offering their prayers. Lamps and fire were an essential part of their cult, which was associated with heaven and the sun, and, by the dedication of light, it was thought possible to establish a link with the deity.[221]

GD 80, our putative synagogue, is oriented eastwards, is unroofed, and 40 lamps were found in it by Plassart's excavation team. While it is impossible (and, indeed, would be absurd) to attribute the use of the final phase of GD 80 to the Hypsistarians, there is nothing to suggest that the lamps could not have been used in a ritual such as that described in the Oenoanda Oracle. There is certainly no known Jewish ritual with which to compare this and, to add further to this idea,

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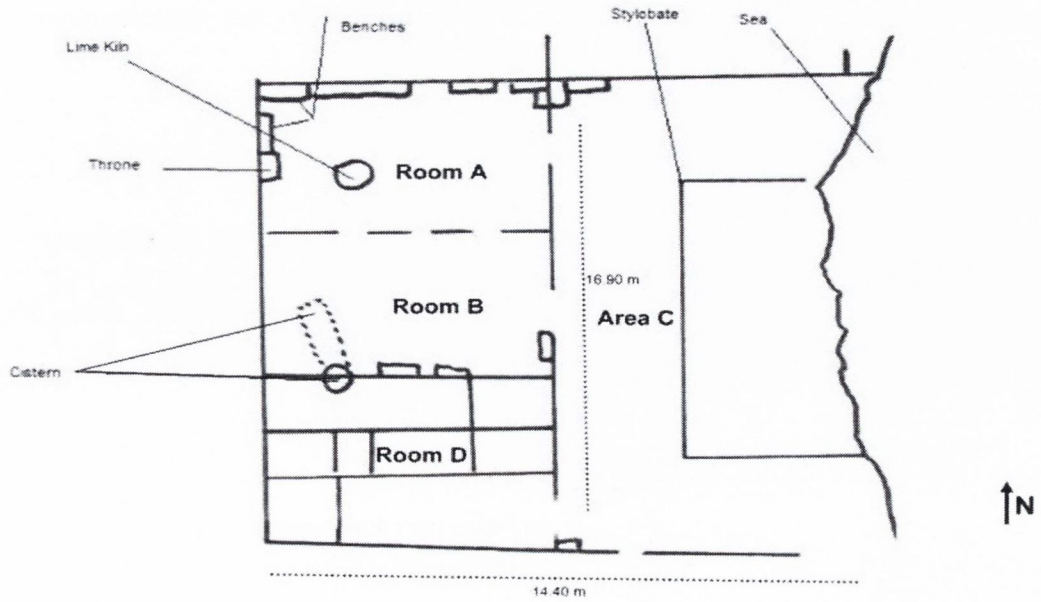
[219] Stephen Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews and Christians", in Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (eds.). *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford University Press (1999): 193-4. I am most grateful to John Dillon, Emeritus Professor of Greek in the School of Classics at Trinity College in Dublin for pointing out this interesting parallel, during a conversation in Athens.
[220] Mitchell (1999): 193-4.
[221] Mitchell (1999): 91-2.

even as late as the fourth century CE, Hypsistarians were sometimes mistaken for Jews.[222] In any event, the cult of the Hypsistarians has been offered for consideration *only* to illustrate how tenuous and tendentious the identification of GD 80 as a Jewish and/or Samaritan synagogue is.

The archaeological evidence

GD 80 lies on the northeastern shoreline of Delos in the Bay of Gournia, outside the defensive town walls. It stands in the area just east of the stadium and northeast of the gymnasium (Figures 2, 3 & 4 above). When Plassart excavated GD 80 in 1912, he found a large rectangular room measuring 16.90 m (north to south) by 14.40 m (west to east). The floor of this room had a coarse flaked marble/gravel-like covering, and there was some plaster left on the base of some of the walls, as well as some rooftiles scattered around the floor. The building directly abuts the shoreline which has advanced over time and has consumed its eastern side (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5 – Plan of GD 80



[222] Mitchell (1999): 93-94.

Dividing the main rectangular space (Rooms A and B) into two almost equal parts is an east-west wall with three doorways, with room A in the north and room B in the south. This wall was erected some unknown time after the north, west and south walls (it is not bonded into them, and is therefore a later addition), and is made up of gneiss, rubble, and reworked marble from abandoned or destroyed buildings, including pieces of capitals, marble inscription bases, triglyphs and thresholds.[223] There is also a further space, room D, along the south of the building, parallel with rooms A and B, which was divided into smaller chambers and which may have contained a stairwell. Running beneath part of rooms B and D is the cistern around which the building was constructed.[224]

According to Plassart and based on his assumptions about Inscriptions ID 2329 and ID 2328 and on the letter preserved in Josephus, rooms A and B served as the assembly halls of a synagogue. There are some white marble benches in place in this area dating to the period he argued GD 80 was in use as a synagogue (from around the middle of the first century BCE). There are also benches running along the south and west inner walls of room B, and some more benches running along the south, west and north walls of area C (the corridor between the main rectangular space and the peristyle courtyard to the east).[225]

In the centre of the west wall of room A is a white marble throne (see Figure 6 below). This was found *in situ* with the marble benches on either side, along the inside west wall of the area A.[226]

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[223] Plassart (1914): 523-534.
[224] Plassart (1914): 523-534.
[225] Plassart (1914): 523-534.
[226] Plassart (1914): 526.

Figure 6 – The benches and marble throne in GD 80




The marble throne in GD 80 is very similar to the first century BCE throne for the priest of Dionysos in the theatre in Athens, or the stone thrones in the Ampherion at Oropos, and to others all over the Graeco-Roman world. In a world of limited resources, the reuse of objects was a common way to reduce the cost of furnishing any given space, and the throne is likely to have come from the theatre on Delos, on the west side of the island.

Likewise, the benches in GD 80 are made up of various reused architectural pieces which are similar to those still left in the nearby gymnasium, from whence they may have been removed after its destruction and abandonment around 74-63 BCE.[227] Of course, this does not prove that GD 80 was not used as a synagogue, but it is also striking that the internal furnishing of other buildings on the island have a similar layout, including the use of similarly reused benches in Sarapeion A near the theatre district on Delos (see Figure 7 below). Thus, the internal configuration of GD 80 cannot in itself be evidence that it was used as a synagogue.

[227] Around 200m distant from *GD* 80. The *Ephebium* is where the education of *ephebes* took place under the supervision of the *Gymnasiarch*. The construction of the benches there is very similar to the construction of the benches in GD 80, and the throne would probably have been used by the *Gymnasiarch* who instructed the *ephebes*. The throne could, alternatively, have come from the theatre as it is identical to other theatre 'VIP' chairs.

Figure 7 – GD 91 (Sarapeion A)



In terms of the Sarapeia, there is also the connection between the names from the inscriptions found in and near GD 80 and the donor names on the Sarapeion C list of subscribers (and the associations of Hermaists and the Poseidonists). The list was found in, and specifically refers to, that structure. In fact, more than one hundred and seventy dedicatory and votive offerings and inscriptions relating Isis, Sarapis and Anubis were found in Sarapeion C alone.[228]

Furthermore, there are other buildings on the island with this sort of benching still apparent, such as in the Heraion; the Italian Agora; in the semi-circular exedra of the Sanctuary of Apollo; the Ephebium and in the orchestra of the theatre, as well as others dotted around the island.[229]

It is possible to date — approximately — the second phase GD 80 by reference to the material used in the rebuilt areas of the internal walls, and especially to the

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[228] P. Bruneau and J. Ducat. *Guide de Délos*, Second Edition, Paris: 1966, (third edition 1983): 227.

[229] W. Déonna, *Le Mobilier délien, Délos*, Paris: De Boccard (1938) Pl. CXII, photographs 64, 67, 68, 69 (pages unnumbered).

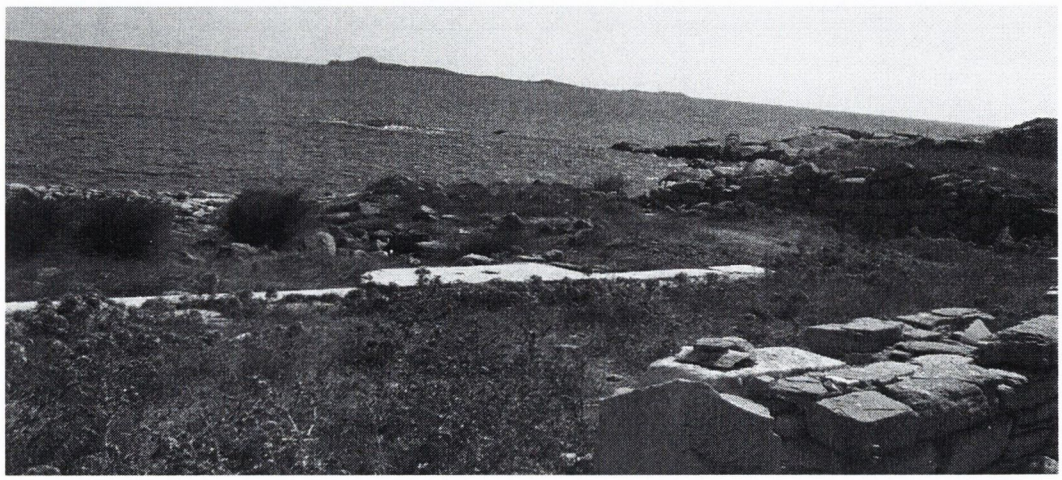
marble taken from the nearby gymnasium. A second century BCE inscribed base (ID 1928) of the Gymnasiarch *Poses* was used in rebuilding one of the walls of GD 80, after the destruction or removal of the statue which it carried. Another gymnasium inscription base (ID 1923b) relating to *ephebes* under the rule of the *Gymnasiarch Diotimos Theodosion* (126-125 BCE) was also found in another rebuilt wall.

Other inscriptions from the gymnasium ended up being reused in the Palaestra of the Lake on the western side of the island. As the gymnasium was plundered during the pirate raids of the Mithridatic wars, it is only from this time (74-63 BCE) that GD 80 could have been adapted for the sort of use that required the seating arrangement found there.[230]

On the eastern side of the building is area C, the remains of the corridor and step or stylobate leading out into what was originally a peristyle courtyard. The peristyle would have measured approximately 18 x 18 m, but has now been destroyed by the sea almost up to the line of the stylobate (Figure 8 below). In October 2003, the northern and southern walls of the existing structure extended to almost the same point of collapse into the sea, some 1.5 m beyond the stylobate, and rooftiles were found along the inside of these perimeter walls indicating that they were at least partially covered.

[230] Plassart (1914): 532.

Figure 8 – GD 80 (from the stylobate down to the sea)[231]



The seaward side of area C retains a section of a stylobate running parallel just over 6 m from the easternmost wall. The visible section is made of blocks of white marble resting on a gneiss foundation. This line stops approximately 5 m from the north and south walls of area C. Just one metre in front of the stylobate is a sharp drop-off to the beach (marked in the photograph by the clumps of sea grass), and the rest of the courtyard and whatever was on the other side of it has been consumed by the encroaching sea.

Plassart and other scholars (most notably, Mazur 1935; Bruneau 1970; White 1987, 1990; Binder 1999 and Trümper 2004) interpreted the physical layout of the Hellenistic house in several ways, none of which has much bearing on its identification as a synagogue, other than the fact that in the final phase of the structure it had benches arranged around the walls of the two main areas and that the final phase is oriented towards the east. However, as I mentioned above, this seating arrangement is something of an archaeological red herring given the configuration of Sarapeion A (Figure 7 above) and other buildings on the island.

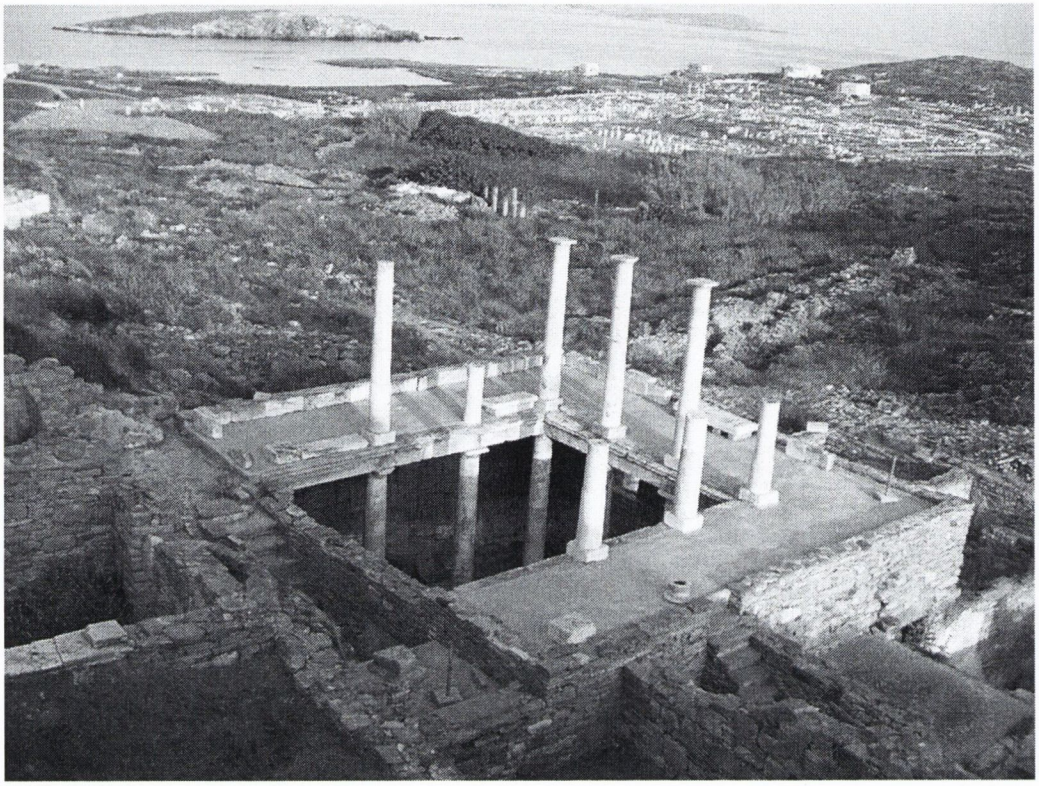
[231] The stylobate can also be clearly seen in the satellite image at Figure 14 below.

In the final ruined phase of GD 80, Rooms A and B are bisected by a east-west wall with three doorways (see Figure 5 above). This wall was erected some unknown time after the north, west and south walls, as it is not bonded to them. When it was excavated in 1912-13 its three doorways were found walled up. This east-west wall is made up of local gneiss, rubble, and reused material from other buildings, including pieces of capitals, marble inscription bases and thresholds. There are also three doorways on the east side of the structure, providing access to areas A and B from the peristyle courtyard along the shoreline.

On Delos, it was normal for some of the larger Hellenistic houses to have two courtyards; one courtyard was often deeper and sometimes taller than the other, in order to enhance the entrance to a reception room[232]. GD 80 is similar in size and layout to a number of other houses on Delos, such as the House of the Hermes (GD 89) near the theatre, which had at least three storeys, accessed from various external and internal stairways (see Figures 9 and 10 below).

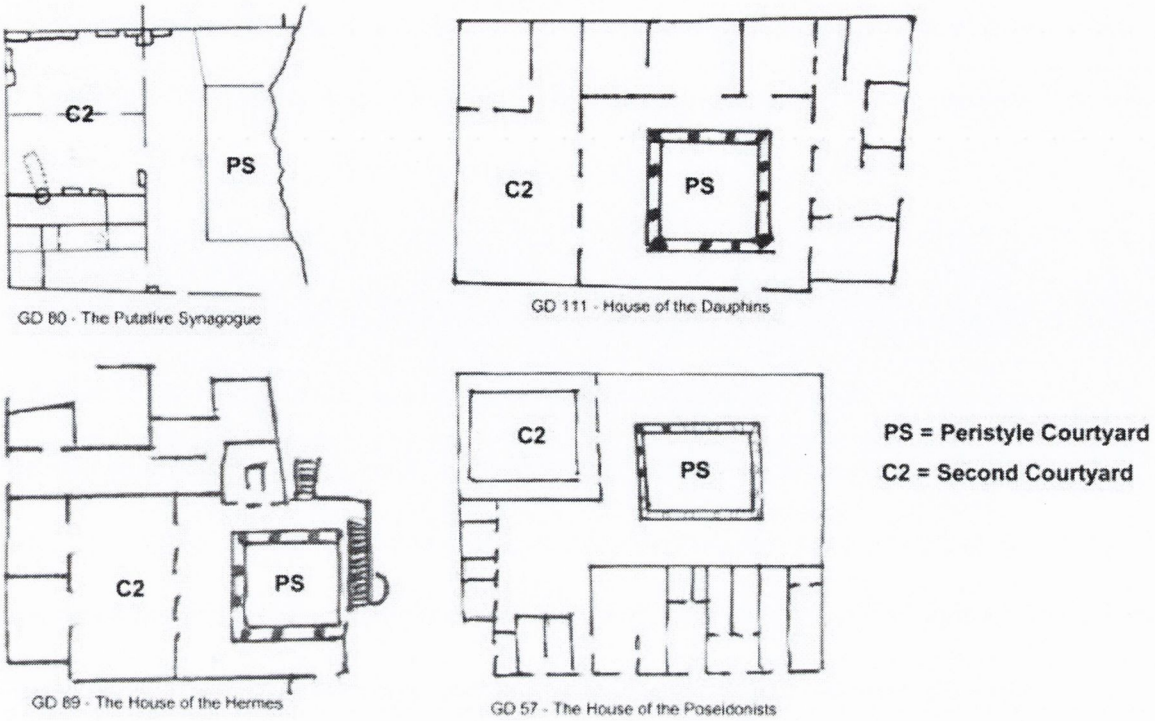
[232] Simon Price "The History of the Hellenistic Period" in John Boardman, Jasper Griffin and Oswyn Murray, *Greece and the Hellenistic World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York (1988): 388.

Figure 9 – GD 89 (House of the Hermes, looking northwest)



The floor plan of GD 89 (House of the Hermes) is very similar to the floor plan of GD 80 (the "synagogue"), as well as to the floor plans of GD 111 (House of the Dauphins) and GD 57 (House of the Poseidonists), as can be seen in the comparison of floor plans below (Figure 10). In the photograph of GD 89 (Figure 9 above), the preserved and restored section of the house is built around the central peristyle courtyard and other areas of the house were ranged around the courtyard with access through that central area as well as from the exterior of the building.

Figure 10 – Floor plans of GDs 80, 89, 111, 57



As can be seen in the floor plans, each of these houses had a peristyle courtyard around which was arranged the habitation areas of the house. Moreover, each building comprised two to three storeys, and each had a second, smaller domestic courtyard. However, there is nothing in the layout of GD 80 which can in any way be ascribed to its having been used a synagogue. Its final usage, in a ruined state, included benches around the space which originally had been the domestic courtyard.

Other than lamps, antefixes, roof-tiles and inscription blocks, there was nothing found in GD 80 that would enable it to be absolutely identified as belonging to a particular group, religious or otherwise, although the number of lamps found in the structure is quite curious in itself and as referred to it above in the section on the Hypsistarians. Specifically, there was no artefact, structure or inscription found within GD 80 which was Jewish in nature.

As already discussed above, and as described by Mazur in 1935, a number of the inscription or statue bases found in GD 80 are in the form of Greek and Near Eastern 'horned' altars, including two of the bases cited as Jewish (Inscription 2 (ID 2328) and Inscription 4 (ID 2331) by Plassart in 1912/1913.

The cistern

Uniquely on the island, GD 80 appears to have been constructed over a rock-fault which was extended into a cistern by means of vaulting. This cistern lies beneath the main east-west wall between rooms B and D (see Figure 5 above). For those who built the house this rock fault must have represented a convenient location, since it meant the degree of excavation necessary to provide the house with its water supply was considerably reduced. Philippe Bruneau, of the École française d'Athènes, is the only person, following Plassart, who has excavated on the site of GD 80. In 1962 he excavated part of the floor around the arch (on both sides of the wall) so that he could access and clean out the well/cistern which Plassart had left untouched. Unfortunately, the list of finds from the cistern is not complete but included a piece of bluish marble; a fragment of a bluish marble bowl; three antefixes of beige/pink clay decorated with palmettes; some fragments of a vase with a ringed wall; three fragments of blown glass (Plassart had also found numerous fragments of small glass vases in GD 80, but not in the cistern). In the cistern, Bruneau recovered the only lamp not found during the original excavations of GD 80 (see Figure 11 below).

Figure 11 – The lamp from the cistern[233]



Only the area immediately underneath the arch of the cistern was accessible when it was in use and although the floor is now quite opened out, this is only because of Bruneau's 1962 excavations. The floor in this area originally came right up to the wall, leaving only the space immediately beneath the arch open into this room.[234] Even *with* the excavated opening, access from room B is both difficult and precarious as the opening lies under and extends only a metre from the arch. There is a sharp and sheer drop from the floor level to the bottom of the cistern. There are no steps built into the cistern, and there is insufficient space in the opening in rooms B or D (on the other side of the wall) for access via a ladder for the purposes of bathing.

The cistern is deep, the bottom of the fault lies at 4 m in places, and is by no means a level surface, running some 6.08 m in length, under a vaulted roof, and was probably constructed before the rest of the building was finished.[235] The arch

[233] W. Déonna, *Le Mobilier délien, Délos*, Paris: De Boccard (1938) (pages unnumbered).
[234] Philippe Bruneau. *Recherches Sur Les Cultes de Délos a L'Époque Hellénistique et a L'Époque Impériale*, Éditions E. De Boccard, Paris, 1970: 481.
[235] Bruneau (1970): 481.

over the opening to the cistern serves not only as access for the drawing of water, but also bears weight for the wall that divides rooms B and D, so that the floor does not collapse into the cistern.

It has been suggested that the cistern in GD 80 could have been used as a *mikveh.*[236] This claim can be completely dismissed. The arch above the cistern provides limited access to the cistern from both B and D and at its *highest* point the arch is just 32cm off the original floor level (see Figure 12 below). The top of the cistern arch does not rise above the top of the benches.

Figure 12 – The cistern from room B (looking south to Mount Cynthus)



Binder also says that Bruneau suggests that a wooden ladder or stairs may have been used to enter the cistern for ritual ablutions'[237], but what Bruneau actually said was that if it is possible to take water from room B via an opening in the wall

[236] Binder (1999): 306.
[237] Binder (1999): 306.

framed by the arch, this is only because part of the original floor is now missing (removed during the excavation process).[238]

Furthermore, while there may be water in the well/cistern from the water table, there is no direct means for rainwater to flow into the cistern, and it would undoubtedly have presented a most unsatisfactory manner in which to bathe, ritually or otherwise. As Bruneau noted, emptying this cistern would have been impossible, especially as it is partly fed from the aquifer.[239] Most importantly, on an island devoid of a surface supply of water, bathing would have rendered the cistern useless for the collection of water for domestic purposes. This, in turn, would suggest that the building ought to have had a separate domestic water supply if it had a mikveh. It does not.

Binder cites Bruneau as having said that the cistern in GD 80 was unusual in that it allowed for human access.[240] He is incorrect on *three* counts: the first is that there is no room for human access into the cistern in GD 80, as is clear from the photograph and description above. The second is that many of the cisterns on Delos are constructed to incorporate stone stairways specifically designed for human access.[241] The third is that Binder did not understand what Bruneau said, which was that *according to Plassart* (who had not excavated the cistern), it is possible to take water from room B via an opening in the wall framed by a marble arch, but that he had been unable to do so.[242] In any case, access is somewhat better from room D, and it is likely that it was properly accessed from there when

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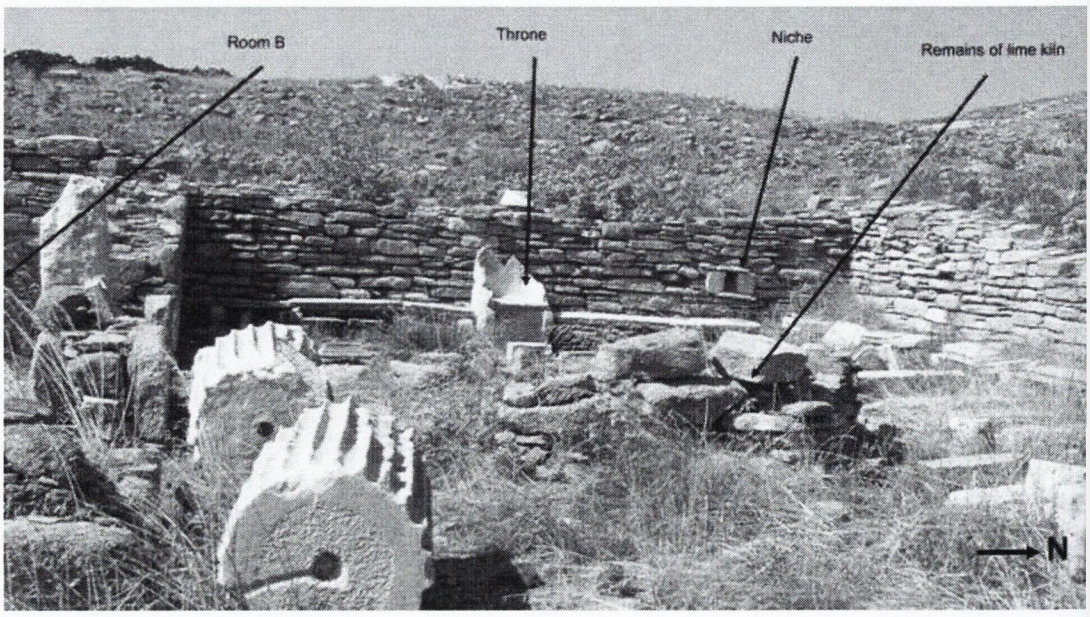
[238] Bruneau (1970): 482.
[239] Bruneau (1970): 481.
[240] Binder (1999): 306.
[241] The cistern of *GD* 79 (the building where *ID* 2329 was found), for example, has a stone staircase leading down into that cistern.
[242] Bruneau (1970): 482.

the cistern was in use. Even from room D, however, the height of the access to the cistern is just 30 cm and the floor before it was excavated went right to the wall.

The lime kiln

In room A of GD 80 there is a substantial lime kiln measuring some 2 m in diameter (Figure 13 below). Produced by melting down marble and limestone, lime was a valuable commodity in the ancient world. In agriculture, it was used as a fertiliser and to improve drainage. Lime was also used in construction. Mortar for laying masonry was made by mixing lime with sand. Concrete was made by mixing the lime with crushed or natural stone. Plaster was covered with a similar mix to mortar. Lime white is a mixture of the lime and water and was used for whitening walls, the traditional 'whitewash', and lime plaster was used to waterproof cisterns.

Figure 13 – The lime kiln in Room A (looking west)



The town centre of Delos, as it became further and further removed from the commercial and strategic centres of the Mediterranean, lay abandoned and in ruins. The marble lying around the island remained one of its final commercial assets. The lime kiln in GD 80 was likely put in place in the post-abandonment phase of the site as the burning or melting down of marble for lime generally only occurred when the Mediterranean marble trade was tapering off, that is, from about the third century CE, and possibly as late as the fourth century CE, and there was agriculture and viticulture on the southern part of the island up until the beginning of the fifth century CE when the island was finally abandoned, so some of that obsolete marble would have been burned down to make lime to use for this purpose.[243]

When Plassart found the marble inscription bases in rooms A and B of GD 80, he stated (without explaining his reasoning) that they were not associated with the kiln.[244] Given that a number of large marble column barrels (see Figure 13 above) and inscription bases were also found in GD 80 probably waiting to be sawn into smaller pieces before being burned down, and given also the variety of the inscription bases found in GD 80, including two small marble inscription bases with no visible text or with wholly eroded text, which were found by Plassart in the same area as IDs 2330, 2331 and 2332 - discussed earlier - it is logical to expect that the marble found in this building was destined for the kiln.[245]

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[243] Brunet (1990): 669-682.
[244] Plassart (1914): 526.
[245] Déonna, *Le Mobilier délien, Délos*, Paris: De Boccard (1938) Pl. CXII, photos 969-970 (loose unnumbered pages).

LITERATURE REVIEW

André Plassart (1913, 1914)

André Plassart, of the École française d'Athènes identified GD 80 as a synagogue during excavations of 1912 and 1913. He identified the structure as a Hellenistic house with a formal portico entranceway on its eastern extremity. He found six inscriptions, the principal one of which was found some 90 m away from GD 80, the other five inscriptions were found within GD 80, which combined with the internal configuration of GD 80 caused him to interpret it as a synagogue.[246] Plassart interpreted the main structure as a Hellenistic house with a portico. Plassart's identification of the inscriptions as Jewish is incorrect (see section on inscriptions above). Not only was his translation of ID 2331 incorrect, but he ignored occurrences of the same names (as those from his 'Jewish' inscriptions) found elsewhere on the island. In relation to the archaeological evidence, he ignored other buildings on the island with the same internal configuration, such as the Sarapeia (see Figure 7 above).

Belle D. Mazur (1935)

Mazur interpreted the main structure as a Hellenistic house with a peristyle courtyard, rather than a portico (as Plassart had suggested). Both options are equally possible. Mazur's reconstruction of it was based on parallels of size and layout with other houses on the island.[247] Mazur's was the first and only dissenting voice on the subject of the so-called synagogue on Delos, and, while her interpretation of the physical structure of the building was very similar to that of Plassart and others, her interpretation of the inscriptions and statue bases found in the building was not. She argued that their form (votive bases with lead fixings

[246] Plassart (1914): 523-534.
[247] Mazur (1935): 17-18.

for decorative attachments) was not consistent with a Jewish context, that Plassart's inscriptions were therefore not Jewish and that GD 80 was not a synagogue, but some sort of establishment belonging to the Greek cult of *Theos Hypsistos*, whose sanctuary was on the summit of Mount Cynthus just 500 m south of GD 80.[248] Mazur also retranslated the text of the principal inscription (ID 2329), and pointed out that there is no definite article used in the wording of the inscription, and that the words επι προσευχη in this context cannot refer to a building and must be translated as reading 'for an offering' or simply as a 'prayer'.[249] Mazur's arguments in terms of the form of the inscription bases and the inscriptions themselves are convincing. Her translations are accurate and careful. In terms of her discussion of GD 80 itself, as to whether it had a portico or peristyle courtyard, etc, this is entirely irrelevant. How GD 80 was adapted for use in its final phase is unrelated to its original purpose.

Eleazar Lipa Sukenik (1934, 1949)

Sukenik initially accepted André Plassart's interpretation of GD 80. However, once he had read Mazur's 1935 analysis of the evidence, he changed his mind. Writing in 1949, he said 'the case of the so-called "Synagogue" at Delos shows how misleading incomplete research can be', and went on to conclude, based on Mazur's argument, that the word προσευχη could only mean 'prayer' and not 'synagogue' because of the absence of the definite article in the inscription; that the deity referred to as '*hypsistos*', was the Greek god Zeus; and that the form of the inscribed bases was pagan and not Jewish.[250]

[248] Mazur (1935): 21.
[249] Mazur (1935): 1935: 21.
[250] Sukenik (1949): 1: 8-23.

Philippe Bruneau (1970, 1982)

Bruneau was the only other archaeologist to have excavated at GD 80 other than Plassart. Bruneau accepted Plassart's synagogue identification and dismissed Mazur's rebuttal of Plassart's work, along with Sukenik's later acknowledgement of the correctness of her rebuttal.[251] He insisted that the inscriptions showed that GD 80 was a sanctuary of the Jewish God Most High, *Theos Hypsistos*, since the name *Zeus Hypsistos* does not appear on the inscriptions and since the cult of *Zeus Hypsistos* had its own sanctuary on Mount Cynthus.[252] Bruneau also rejected Mazur's argument concerning the format and style of the inscribed bases, saying that the Hellenised Jews of the diaspora assimilated certain pagan customs which over time became established in their religion. Peculiarly, even though he agreed with Mazur's translation of the phrase επι προσευχη as 'for a prayer/offering', he accepted Plassart's reading of it as 'for the synagogue' and insisted that προσευχη remains 'an essentially Jewish term', concluding that GD 80 was a synagogue of an exceptional type, and that the endurance of the Jewish cult on Delos even after the destructions of 88 BCE and 69 BCE confirms the references in the literary sources.[253] The ancient sources, however, do not refer to any structure at all, let alone to a synagogue. At the very best, they confirm the presence of Jews on Delos (and other *neighbouring* Jews), and indicate that the Jews on Delos were for some time unable to follow their customary religious practices. Moreover, the fact that there is a large lime kiln in GD 80, together with many pieces of marble, suggests that much of the material in this locus was being melted down to make lime. Moveable objects, such as the inscription bases, could easily have been taken from other areas to GD 80 for this purpose. The

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[251] Bruneau (1970): 465-504.
[252] Bruneau (1970): 486-487. However, one of the inscriptions (*ID 2332*) contains has the epithet *hypsistos* and not *theos hypsistos*.
[253] Bruneau (1970): 485-488.

presence of the *theos hypsistos* inscriptions in GD 80 does not mean that they belonged in this building.

L. Michael White (1987, 1990)

White concluded that because there is some external evidence of a Jewish community on Delos, GD 80 would have fitted their needs and that in all likelihood it was a Samaritan synagogue that was founded.[254] Like many other buildings on the island, GD 80 *could* have been a synagogue. It is only that there is no evidence that it *was* a synagogue, be it Jewish or Samaritan.

A. Thomas Kraabel (1992)

Kraabel came to the conclusion that GD 80 was a synagogue on the basis of the earlier debate (rejecting Mazur's critique and Sukenik's support of it), and relying on Bruneau's presentation of the material. His main argument for the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue rests on the epigraphical references to *Theos Hypsistos* in the inscriptions found by André Plassart which, he says, 'do not offer an obviously pagan use of the term at a time when references to one or other pagan deity as *Hypsistos* are not uncommon'[255]. As outlined above, the inscriptions are out of context and unrelated. Whilst Kraabel acknowledged the ambiguity of the *proseuche* inscription, he concluded it was nonetheless Jewish. He did not remark on the form or style of the inscribed bases, nor did he note or refer to the cuttings for lead fixings.[256]

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[254] White (1987): 133-160; L.M. White. *Building God's House in the Roman World. Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London: 1990: 138.

[255] J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan (eds.), *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, Atlanta, Georgia, Scholars Press (1992): 491, 493.

[256] Overman & Robert (1992): 493.

Hudson McLean (1996)

McLean took the two Samaritan inscriptions as proof that GD 80 was a synagogue, but a Samaritan one. In McLean's interpretation of the physical structure (adopted from White's), he noted that there was no provision in GD 80 for cultic rites, that there was no altar or shrine and that therefore the congregation 'related to a remote external cult, namely the Samaritan cult practiced at Mount Gerizim'.[257]

Peter Richardson (1996)

Richardson interpreted GD 80 as a 'remodelled house adapted to the needs of the worshipping community'. He accepted that Plassart and all those who followed on from his work were correct and that GD 80 was a synagogue.[258]

Donald Binder (1999)

Binder made what is probably one of the most ambitious of all the interpretations of the building. Based only on the letter preserved in Josephus (*AJ* 14.213-216) and on Plassart's and Bruneau's interpretation of the material he found, he described GD 80 as "a synagogue with an ancillary banquet hall used to hold feasts on sacred days" and argued that the dividing wall between Rooms A and B presented "the first serious architectural evidence suggesting the division of the sexes within the synagogue".[259] He deemed that access to the cistern from rooms B and D was part of the proof for this claim, on the basis that it was possible that the cistern might have functioned as a *mikveh*.[260]. In general, Binder's argument

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[257] B. Hudson McLean. "The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations and Christian Churches on Delos", in John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (eds). *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, Routledge, London and New York (1996): 195.
[258] Richardson (1996): 97.
[259] Binder (1999): 299.
[260] Binder (1999): 306, n. 153.

is that there were two possible patterns of occupation of GD 80. In the first scenario, GD 80 was originally a cultic hall of a pagan association in the second century BCE. During the Mithridatic war of 88 BCE and/or the pirate raids of 69 BCE, the building was severely damaged and eventually abandoned by the association to whom it belonged. Then the building was "transformed into a synagogue", and remained as such until the second century CE.[261] In his second scenario, the building was originally constructed as a synagogue, damaged in the first century BCE and afterwards modified with a dividing wall constructed, perhaps as a result of the earlier damage[262].

Both of Binder's occupation scenarios are irrelevant to the identification, since the identification was made on the basis of the inscriptions (the principal one of which was not found in GD 80 at all), and the benches around the Rooms A and B. His suggestion regarding the use of the cistern as a mikveh is both physically and domestically unlikely.[263] Moreover, he has misunderstood – in quite a basic way – Philippe Bruneau's descriptions of the structure he excavated. Since he relies wholly on Bruneau's description as the basis for his understanding of the cistern, this proves an insurmountable problem for his interpretation.

Lee I. Levine (2000)

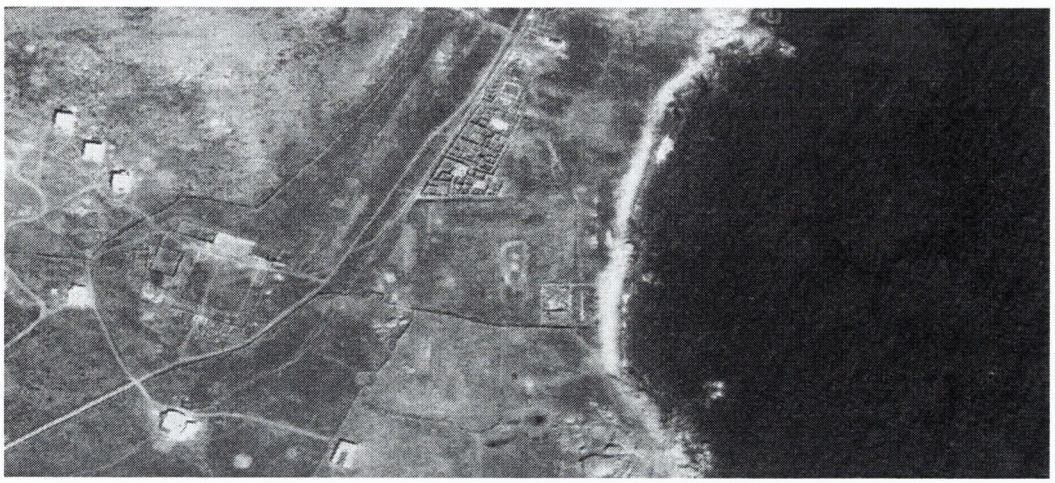
Levine accepted Bruneau's conclusion that GD 80 was a synagogue, and referred to the 1970s as the point at which a scholarly consensus was arrived at (Levine 2000: 100; apparently on the basis of Philippe Bruneau's publication of the site). Levine described IDs *2328, 2330, 2331, 2331* as having been inscribed on

[261] Binder (1999): 314.
[262] Binder (1999): 314.
[263] Binder (1999): 316-317.

'column bases', which is incorrect. These inscriptions are actually on carved stelae, some in the shape of horned altars, some rectangles with lead fixings. Levine further mentioned ID 2329 (the *proseuche* inscription), noting that it could have been used in a pagan context but that, combined with the other ancillary evidence and the discovery in 1979 of the two Samaritan stelae by Philippe Fraisse of the École française d'Athènes added up to sufficient evidence to identify GD 80 as the earliest synagogue thus far found.[264] As we have seen, the Samaritan inscriptions found by Fraisse and the inscriptions found by Plassart are unrelated and, while the Samaritan inscriptions are unquestionably evidence of some sort of Samaritan community on Delos, Plassart's inscriptions are unlikely to be Jewish. Levine asked whether there were two separate synagogues (one Jewish, one Samaritan) or one synagogue serving both communities.[265] He went on to conclude that the location of the Delian Jewish community was in a 'relatively isolated part of the island'. In fact, GD 80, the *proseuche* inscription and the two Samaritan inscriptions were found in densely populated areas, each not more than 100 m or so from the others, abutting a heavily occupied residential area on the east side of the stadium. This area has not been fully excavated yet, but it is evident from Bruneau's plans, my own observations in October 2003 and by cursory examination of satellite views of the site from the *Google Earth* website (see Figure 14 below), that there are sub-surface and above-surface walls all over the area, so that there is practically no unused ground in that quarter. There was simply no room in the town and town-adjacent areas of this small island for isolation of any sort.

[264] Levine (2000): 100-101.
[265] Levine (2000): 103.

Figure 14 – Satellite image of GD 80 and its environs[266]



Monika Trümper (2004)

According to Trümper, the "synagogue on Delos is the earliest known to date, either in the Diaspora or in Palestine" and that in the last thirty years a consensus has emerged that the building was an assembly hall for Jews or Samaritans. Trümper argues that the building was a purpose-built synagogue from the time of its initial construction in the period before 88 BC[267].

Trümper discusses the inscribed stelae as found within the building. Four of them, she says, include vows to Θεω Υψιστω, a "God Most High". Although the identity of *theos hypsistos* and the nature of the cult are debatable, she says that it is generally agreed that this epithet was certainly, though not exclusively, used by Diaspora Jews (and also Samaritans) to refer to their god. These inscriptions are regarded as primary evidence for the identification of *GD 80* as a synagogue[268]. Even though the two earliest votives are dated to the first century BCE, they do not testify with certainty to such an early Jewish or Samaritan use of the building

[266] From Google Earth. Visible are GD 80, the gymnasium, the stadium district and the residential area.
[267] Trümper (2004): 513-514.
[268] Trümper (2004): 569-570.

because they, like the other three, are small and movable and might easily have been transported from one building to another. Therefore, the possibility that the two oldest votives were set up in another building and were transferred to *GD 80* only in the last (fifth) phase of its use cannot be ruled out[269]. She goes on to discuss "three other Jewish and Samaritan inscriptions". One, she says, was discovered in a private house nearby, in the Quartier du stade, and the other two, on two stelae, were found in an unexcavated area some 90 m north of GD 80. She asks whether these inscriptions originally belonged to GD 80, but were displaced in a later period, or were they discovered in their original contexts, thus bearing witness to Jewish or Samaritan ownership of the respective buildings?[270].

Trümper also says, quite correctly, that the use of the benches and the throne are only datable to the last phase of GD 80, and hypothetical for all previous phases and that this holds true for all other movable furniture found in the building.[271]. She also discusses the carved palmette decoration on the back of the throne (which cannot be seen, because it was designed for use in a theatre or other public building where it would not have stood against a wall) and says that suggesting it is of a Jewish or Samaritan provenance is to be regarded with extreme caution. These palmettes, which appear on the marble throne, on antefixes, and on a marble lintel (of the third century CE), and rosettes, which decorate an inscribed votive offering, might be among the prominent motifs of later Jewish and Samaritan art, but they were certainly no less prominent in non-Jewish and non-Samaritan pagan art. According to Trümper, it is difficult to know whether the decorated objects were made for Jewish or Samaritan use, whether they were

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[269] Trümper (2004): 570.
[270] Trümper (2004): 571.
[271] Trümper (2004): 572.

deliberately chosen out of a large stock of spoil material for Jewish or Samaritan reuse, or whether no special meaning could be assigned to their presence in this building because of the extensive diffusion of these motifs throughout the ancient world[272]. Trümper acknowledged that the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue was made primarily on the basis of the inscriptions and furnishings. She cited just three scholars, Bruneau, White and Binder, as being sufficient to explain the history and use of GD 80 "because no substantially differing views have been presented in the literature."[273] In a footnote she goes on to qualify this with the statement that the earlier opponents to the 'synagogue' argument (Mazur and Sukenik) 'can be ignored here'.[274]

Trümper's article is largely a discussion of the architectural arrangement of GD 80, as taken from Bruneau's (not Plassart's) excavation reports, and there is much in it with which I agree. Her discussion of the architecture of the structure, and the limitations of the possibility of making identifications based on decorative embellishments are of particular use.

However, ultimately, because of her dismissal of any opposing opinions as irrelevant, Trümper is drawn into a circular argument of her own making whereby she cannot acknowledge the full force of the Mazur's argument against the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue, and is hindered in her view by not having read Mazur's 1935 article.[275]

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[272] Trümper (2004): 573-574.
[273] Trümper (2004): 569.
[274] Trümper (2004): 569, n.121.
[275] Trümper (2004): 519. Footnote 17, says that she had no access to Mazur's 'book'. I had no difficulty in obtaining a photocopy of what is actually a short article in 2003 from the École française d'Athènes while I was staying in Athens before travelling south to Delos, as they hold it in their library.

Moreover, there are a number of errors in Trümper analysis. She cites, for example, the *four* inscriptions found in GD 80 that bear the name *theos hypsistos*. She is incorrect in this detail: only three of the inscriptions bear the epithet *theos hypsistos* (IDs *2328, 2330* and *2331*). One of the inscriptions bears only the epithet *hypsistos* (ID *2332*). She goes on to say that the use of this epithet is still debated, although it is now generally agreed that it was used (although not exclusively) 'by Diaspora Jews (and also Samaritans) to refer to their god'.[276] This may well be the case from about the middle of the first century CE for the use of the epithet *theos hypsistos*, but it is by no means certain in the first century BCE or earlier – the period to which Trümper refers. By using later evidence to support earlier data without any corroboration she creates yet another circular and potentially misleading argument.

Trümper goes on to make another error, saying that there is an ongoing discussion about the *three other* Jewish and Samaritan inscriptions: 'One was discovered in a private house nearby, in the *Quartier du stade*, and the other two, on stelae, were found in an unexcavated area some 90 m north of GD 80'.[277] Here she has confused two things. The two Samaritan stelae to which she alludes were discovered in 1979 by Philippe Fraisse of the École française d'Athènes (see the section above on inscriptions). However, the *third* inscription to which she refers is the original *proseuche* inscription that Plassart found back in 1912 (ID 2329), which was indeed found in the stadium district, in Habitation IIA of GD 79 (see section on inscriptions, above) and to which she refers separately and earlier in her article. Thus, she has accidentally duplicated a piece of evidence and treating

[276] Trümper (2004): 569.
[277] Trümper (2004): 571.

it as though its existence supports her argument that it and the Samaritan inscriptions may have originated in GD 80.

There are a number of other claims made by Trümper to which I must also refer. One is that a niche in the wall of room A postdates the construction of the wall and is 'rather crudely made' (see Figure 15 below).[278]

Figure 15 – The niche in GD 80 (and other niches on Delos)



The GD 80 niche (and the other niches) clearly do not postdate the construction of the wall, but are instead an integral part of its construction. Trümper suggests the niche could have been used to contain lamps.[279] These niches could indeed have been used, as Trümper suggests, for placing lamps to light building interiors. It is

[278] Trümper (2004): 584-585.
[279] Trümper (2004): 585.

also possible that they were shrines of some sort, as were those recorded by Colin Renfrew during his extensive excavations on Phylakopi.[280]

Trümper also says that the stelae on which the inscriptions were found resemble 'altar incense burners', and were probably used in the 'synagogue' on Delos, a claim, for which, again, there is no evidence whatsoever.[281] Trümper cites Anders Runesson here as support for this argument, but Runesson does not offer any support for this specific contention, and indeed his comments on meal and incense offerings relate only to the petition to restore the Jewish Temple at Elephantine some time before its ultimate abandonment, and not to any purported synagogue usage, then or later.[282]

Conclusions

Because we know so very little about early synagogues, it is important to proceed carefully with the available evidence and not to reach into inherently teleological solutions to explain what we do not yet have answers for. The problem with the foregoing and other interpretations of the structure, identification and internal furnishings of GD 80 is that they are predicated on the pre-existing belief, following Plassart, that GD 80 is a synagogue. They are not based on the physical, literary or epigraphic evidence. The argument, for instance, that the Samaritan inscriptions provide *additional* proof that GD 80 was a synagogue is spurious since it is clear from all the evidence that the initial identification of GD 80 as a synagogue was made on the basis of the tenuous association of two

[280] Colin Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Cult. The Sanctuary at Phylakopi*, London : British School of Archaeology at Athens (Thames and Hudson), 1985: 11-12 and plate 12b.
[281] Trümper (2004): 585.
[282] Runesson (2001): 437.

inscriptions by Plassart, and that *that* initial association is clearly not supported by the evidence.

Plassart's identification of GD 80 as a synagogue seems to have given rise to an historical distortion in the chronology of the development of synagogues in the diaspora. Indeed, some scholars have dated the 'Delian synagogue' not even to the last phase of the building (when the benches were added), but to its Hellenistic origins in the third century BCE, and all on the basis of the first inscription that Plassart discovered 90 m north of GD 80.

The question to ask must surely be, if Plassart had not originally associated the inscriptions from GD 79 and GD 80, whether such an identification could ever have been made. The answer to that question is clearly 'no', such an identification of GD 80 as a synagogue on such tenuous material would be deemed implausible. It is safe to say that while there is nothing that would exclude GD 80 from being a synagogue, there is not one piece of evidence that would suggest that it actually *was* a synagogue.

All that can be said is that there were Jews or Samaritans (or both) on Delos from some time in the first (or possibly second) century BCE, and that they were prevented from following their traditional customs for an unknown period of time during the first century BCE. While it is possible that there was a synagogue (Samaritan or Jewish, or both) on Delos, there is as yet no evidence that it has been found. Because of the restrictions on the traditional practices of some cults and associations, including the Jews, in the first century BCE, it is also possible that if Jews assembled for religious purposes, they did so in private dwellings, not

in cultic establishments, in which case they would have remained hidden and unidentifiable. Moreover, the letter preserved in Josephus (*AJ* 14.213-216) relating to the Jews being forbidden to follow their religious traditions and customs is dated to precisely the time that it is argued GD 80 functioned as a synagogue, that is, to the middle of the first century BCE.

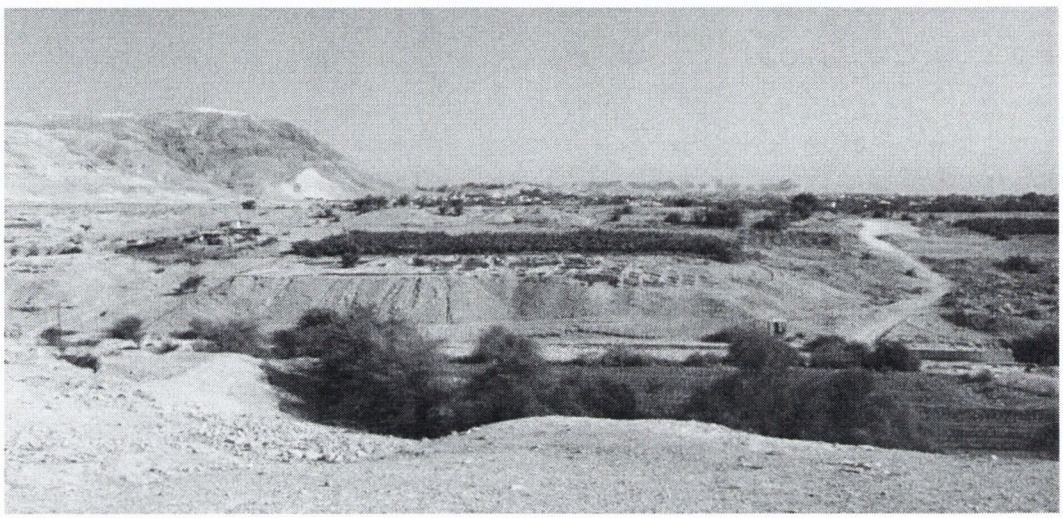
As already stated, the issue of physical evidence is complicated because in this period it is not certain that we should be looking for synagogues since religious structures are bound to be of an ambiguous nature if that worship was forbidden by local law. An obvious example would be that when Christians were being persecuted under Roman rule there were no purpose-built Christian churches or basilicas. Private houses, bath houses, crypts and even catacombs were used as meeting places, and overt architectural statements of identity only emerged when the political climate of religious tolerance made safe for them to develop.

All in all, it is impossible to identify GD 80 as a synagogue on the available evidence. It is furthermore impossible to identify any other structure on the island as a synagogue. It is also clear that other than the two Samaritan (Israelite) inscriptions, nothing specifically pertaining to Jews or Samaritans has been found on the island. It is also clear that the names *Lysimachus* and *Agathokles* are not indicators of Jewishness on the island and appear elsewhere in very specifically non-Jewish contexts on the island. The only names associated with a Jewish or Samaritan context on Delos are those of Jason of Knossos and Artemidoros of Heraclea, both apparently from Crete. And again, we do not know if these were Samaritan benefactors or pagan donors or patrons.

We must conclude, therefore, that the vexed question of the existence of a synagogue on Delos remains open, and that we must hope for specifically Jewish and/or *more* Samaritan material to be found to help with any potential identification.

CHAPTER 3
Herodian/Hasmonaean Jericho

Figure 16 - View over Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho (looking north)



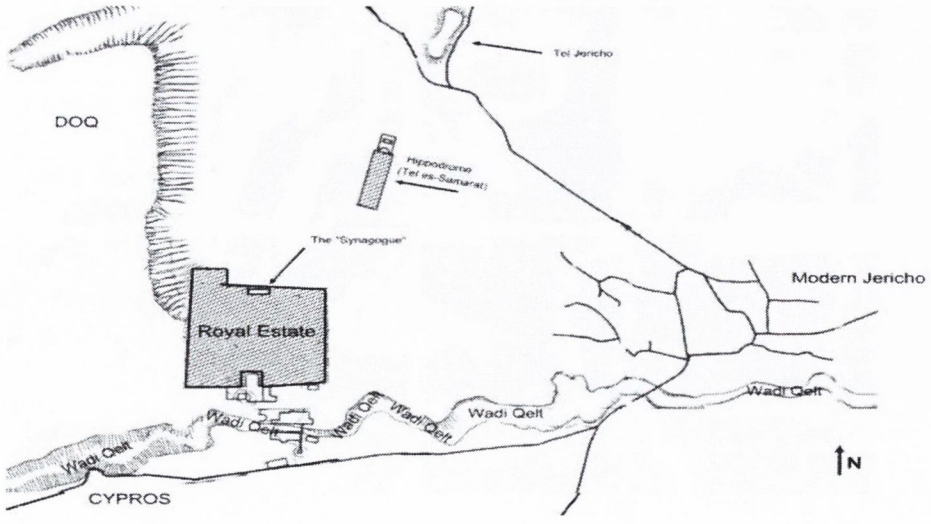
Introduction

During the course of excavations at the Hasmonaean and Herodian palace estates near Jericho in 1998, Ehud Netzer of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem identified a courtyard building in the northeastern section of the estate as a Hasmonaean period synagogue. The building was identified on the basis of its physical layout and is a Hellenistic period villa built around an internal courtyard. The identification, in the main, relies on the shape and construction of the villa along with some specific features architectural features, such as an assembly space, a triclinium and a niche, all of which will be discussed below. Looking at the data relating to the site, it is clear that there is no evidence to support the identification and, in this case, it is possible to show how the identification is specifically mistaken. It also must be noted here that the ancient sources relating to the Hasmonaean period are particularly scant and deal with the date and balsam

plantations on the estate and not the occupants of the palaces, much less with the political, economic, social, and/or religious dimensions thereof. Moreover, the building which is the subject of this chapter, the courtyard house, was destroyed in an earthquake in 31 BCE and Herod the Great built over the ruins, never reconstructing the destroyed building.

It is possible that the Hasmonaean royal estate began to be constructed as early as the mid-second century BCE, but this is uncertain.[283] Even accepting a later date for its construction, we do not know which of the Hasmonaeans built the estate, precisely when, or under what circumstances it was built, although construction is tentatively attributed by the excavators approximately to the reigns of Alexander Jannaeus (106-76 BCE) and his widow Alexandra (76-67 BCE).[284] Nor do we have any idea what, if anything, occupied the site before the Hasmonaeans built on it although, logically, it must have been occupied because the area of the estate is an oasis.

Figure 17 – Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho (context and locations)



[283] *Excavations and Surveys in Israel 1982*, Volume 1, English Edition of *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, Archaeological Newsletter of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, Numbers 78-71, Jerusalem (1982): 45. Author unattributed.
[284] *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* (1982): 45.

History of Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho

Even though little is directly known about the Hasmonaean/Herodian estates at Jericho, it may be possible to surmise a little of the history of occupation of the area by reference to the nearby site of Tel Jericho. Tel Jericho is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and the remains of some twenty successive settlements dating back to around 9000 BCE have been excavated on that site. Tel Jericho sits barely 2 km north-east of the Hasmonaean/Herodian palace site (see Figure 17 above).

The first archaeological explorations of Tel Jericho were made by Charles Warren of the British Royal Engineers in 1868. Following this, Two German archaeologists, Carl Watzinger and Ernest Sellin, conducted excavations at Tel es-Sultan (Tel Jericho) and Tulul Abu el-Alayiq (Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho) from 1907-1909 and in 1911.[285] From 1952-1958, Kathleen Kenyon's excavations provided a flood of information and she was able to set out a chronology of Tel Jericho through its entire history.[286]

In terms of the local population, we know that after the Babylonian exile Tel Jericho was abandoned, but it is thought that there was a settlement somewhere nearby because, of the people who returned with the biblical Ezra to Judaea after

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[285] E. Sellin and C. Watzinger, *Jericho die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen*, Osnabrück, Otto Zeller Verlag, 1973: 58 (reprint of the 1913 edition); C. Watzinger, "Zur Chronologie der Schichten von Jericho", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, LXXX (1926): 131-136.

[286] Kathleen Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho* (London, 1957); *The Bible and Recent Archaeology*, Atlanta : J. Knox Press, 1987; "Excavations at Jericho", London: British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem *1960-1983*. Kenyon was Director of the British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem at that time (now the Kenyon Research Institute in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem).

the Babylonian exile, three hundred and forty-five men (and their families, servants, slaves, etc) returned to the Jericho area (Ezra 2.34).[287]

Despite these shadows of earlier Persian period occupation, there are few monumental remains dating to this period.[288] This scarcity is sometimes attributed to a widespread destruction at the end of the First Temple period (although this explanation is by no means universally accepted).[289] In any event, the scarcity of monumental remains probably relates as much to local construction methods and materials used (mud brick and wood), as to any specific destruction event or series of events.

There are quite significant gaps in what we know of Jericho from the Persian period through the Hellenistic and Roman periods. However, Tel Jericho appears to have been fortified during the Hellenistic period (1 Maccabees 9.50). During the Roman conquest of Judaea and after he conquered Jerusalem, the Roman general, Pompey the Great undertook to "cleanse Judaea of the haunts of robbers and the treasure-holds of the tyrants", two of which were along the route leading to Jericho (Strabo, *Geographies*, 16.2.40). Under Roman rule, Gabinius made Jericho one of the five administrative centres of Palestine (Josephus, *BJ* 1.170).

The modern Arab name of the Hasmonaean/Herodian palace site is *Tulul Abu el-Alayiq*.[290] The site is located in the western area of the Jericho plain, spanning both sides of the Wadi Qelt not far from the Qelt source in the hills to the north. It

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[287] Ephraim Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538 – 332 BC*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, Wiltshire, England. Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, Israel, 1982, 38.
[288] Stern (1982): 47.
[289] Stern (1982): 47.
[290] The Arabic plural of *Tel*. The site is built over two hillocks.

lies some 7 km west of the River Jordan, 10 km north of the Dead Sea, 1.5 km west of the modern city of Jericho, 2 km south of Tel Jericho, and about 27 km east-north-east of Jerusalem. The site encompasses palatial, residential, administrative and storage buildings, aqueducts, pools, water installations, balsam and date plantations and gardens (see Figures 16 & 17 above).

The area around Jericho is balmy and generally dry all year round, with average summer temperatures of 32-39° and average winter temperatures of 20-23°. The rainfall is between 50 mm and 200 mm, falling almost entirely between October and April in short heavy showers during which the desert soil can only absorb a limited amount of water, which results in sudden (and often dangerous) wadi floods.[291] As a result of the unpredictability of the rain, ancient Jericho relied on aqueducts, cisterns, wells and springs for its water supply and there was and still is a plentiful water supply from the nearby springs at Ain es-Sultan (Elisha's Spring: 2 Kings 2:19-22), Ain Duq, Ain Nu'eima, the three springs of Wadi Qelt, and the springs of Auja el-Tahta, and Na'aran in the hills just northwest of the Hasmonaean/Herodian site.[292]

Because of its location, we may surmise that the royal estate was built to take advantage of the local climate, the nearby water resources and agricultural conditions on the oasis. And whilst we do not know who originally built the estate, we do know a little about the agricultural produce of the estate because Jericho was a centre for the production of balsam and dates. From the scale of the

[291] Günter Garbrecht and Yehuda Peleg. "The Water Supply of the Desert Fortresses in the Jordan Valley", in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Volume 57, No. 3 (1994): 161-162.
[292] Ehud Netzer. *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 43; G.W. Bromiley, E.F. Harrison, R.K. Harrison, W. Sanford LaSor, L.T. Geraty and E.W. Smith (eds.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume Two, The Paternoster Press, Exeter, (1982): 995; and Ephraim Stern (ed.), "Jericho", *NEAEHL*, Vol. 2, IES and Carta, Jerusalem (1993): 683.

palatial estate, the variety of dates and the valuable balsam produced there along with the quality of the architectural decoration of the site as a whole, it is possible to say that it was a place of some commercial importance to both the Hasmonaeans and later to the Herodians.[293]

Adding to the problem of the paucity of historiographic material, the site itself is difficult to access. It is located in the Palestinian territories 1.5 km west of the modern town of Jericho. Israelis have not been permitted to visit the site since the Intifada of 2000, and foreign schools do not excavate there. Getting through the border checks (both Israeli and Palestinian) can be tense. The site is not on the tourist trail and few locals know it exists. Tourists who do venture into the area are taken to see nearby Tel Jericho and the Arabic site of Hisham's Palace (Khirbet al-Mafjar), but not Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho. Moreover, the site is not actively protected by the Palestinian Authority and Bedouins camp on the site.[294] Bedouin families farm the arable land of the oasis and graze goats, which means visitors have to walk through their fields to get to the site. The site is directly overlooked by the Israeli military posts at Cypros and Doq high in the hills above (see Figures 16 and 17 above). All of this combines to make visiting the site something of an unsettling experience.[295]

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[293] Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo* (translation by H.L. Jones), Loeb Classical Library London: William Heinemann, New York: GP Putnam's Sons (1930): 16.2.41

[294] Among the Bedouin who live on the site is the same family – though a different generation – mentioned in Egon Lass's memoir *The Seasons of Tulul* (Xlibris Corporation, USA 2005). *Seasons* is a memoir of the period between January 1974 and April 1976 during which Lass, one of the archaeologists working on the excavation of Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho, lived alongside and befriended a Bedouin family camped at the Wadi Qelt.

[295] I visited and photographed the site four times: the first just before the Intifada of 2000, the second in 2004, the third in 2006 and most recently in February 2009. Each time I visited, less of the archaeology was visible. There is now a Bedouin family camped on top of the main Na'aran aqueduct that runs past the building complex with which this chapter is concerned, and the aqueduct has partially collapsed as a result.

The ancient sources

The most informative of the ancient references available to us are from Strabo, Pliny the Elder and Josephus, and these relate to the geography and agricultural produce of the area. As already stated, the ancient references to Jericho are few and far between and those that do refer specifically to the Hasmonaean estate are even fewer. None refer to religious activity and none to the existence of a synagogue anywhere on the site.

In Strabo, we find a description of the area and the balsam and dates which were grown there.

> Hiericus is a plain surrounded by a kind of mountainous country, which, in a way, slopes towards it like a theatre. Here is the Phoenicon[296], which is mixed also with other kinds of cultivated and fruitful trees, though it consists mostly of palm trees; it is one hundred stadia in length, and is everywhere watered with streams and full of dwellings. Here are also the palace[297] and the balsam park. The balsam is of the shrub kind, resembling Cytisus[298] and terminthus[299], and has a spicy flavour. The people make incisions in the bark and catch the juice in vessels. This juice is a glutinous, milk white substance; and when it is put up in small quantities it solidifies; and it is remarkable for its cure of headache and of incipient cataracts and of dimness of sight. Accordingly, it is costly; and also for the reason that it is produced nowhere else. Such is also the case with the Phoenicon, which alone has the caryotic palm,[300] excepting the Babylonian and that beyond Babylonia towards the east. Accordingly, the revenue derived from it is great. And they use the xylobalsam[301] as spice.
>
> (Strabo, *Geographies*, 16.2.41)

Strabo's text seems to refer to Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho and to the plantations and palaces on the royal estate and gives us some insight into how the

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[296] Palm grove.
[297] Herod's palace.
[298] *Medicago Arborea*. The Jericho balsam was a plant with a resinous secretion whose effects were healing and/or soothing. We cannot identify the exact plant from which ancient balsam was produced, but we do at least know that Jericho was a centre for its production.
[299] The terebinth tree, *pistacia terebinthus*, from which turpentine is extracted and which also produces edible nuts.
[300] *Palma caryota*, with a walnut-like fruit.
[301] The liquid that oozes from the cut branches of the plant.

economy of the area must have functioned, given that the balsam produced there apparently grew nowhere else.

Pliny the Elder refers only to the administrative district of Jericho and to the palm groves and numerous water sources there:

> Beyond Idumaea and Samaria stretches the wide expanse of Judaea. The part of Judaea adjoining Syria is called Galilee, and that next to Arabia and Egypt Peraea. Peraea is covered with rugged mountains, and is separated from the other parts of Judaea by the river Jordan. The rest of Judaea is divided into ten Local Government Areas in the following order: the district of Jericho, which has numerous palm-groves and springs of water, and those of Emmaus, Lydda, Joppa, Accrabim, Jufna, Timnath-Serah, Beth-lebaoth, the Hills, the district that formerly contained Jerusalem, by far the most famous city of the East and not of Judaea only, and Herodium with the celebrated town of the same name.
>
> (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book 5.15.70)[302]

Pliny's text does not specifically mention Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho, but does mention the plantations and the numerous water sources. Our next source is Josephus who, while he wrote a great deal about the palace estates in the time of the Hasmonaeans and Herod, and who we can assume visited the site (because his descriptions of the buildings and layout are so detailed) does not mention a synagogue (or the lack of one). He too makes particular reference to the palm trees and to the balsam produced in the area:

> Now when Pompey had pitched his camp at Jericho (where the palm tree grows), and that balsam which is an ointment of all the most precious, which, upon any incision made in the wood with a sharp stone, distils out thence like a juice) [...]
>
> (Josephus, *AJ* 14.54)

[302] Pliny the Elder. *Natural History* (translation by H. Rackham), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, USA, William Heinemann Ltd, London (1969).

While Josephus's text does not directly refer to the Hasmonaean/Herodian estates, it seems clear that he is discussing them when he discusses Cleopatra's desire to control their agricultural produce during the Herodian period:

> When Cleopatra had obtained thus much, and had accompanied Antony in his expedition to Armenia, as far as Euphrates, she returned back, and came to Apamea and Damascus, and passed on to Judaea; where Herod met her, and farmed of her parts of Arabia, and those revenues that came to her from the region about Jericho. This country bears that balsam, which is the most precious drug that is there, and grows there alone. The place bears also excellent palm trees, both many in number, and those excellent in their kind.
>
> (Josephus, *AJ* 15.96)

The next Josephus text also refers to the royal estates, but only relates to the Herodian period, where it appears the economy remained reliant on the produce of the plantations:

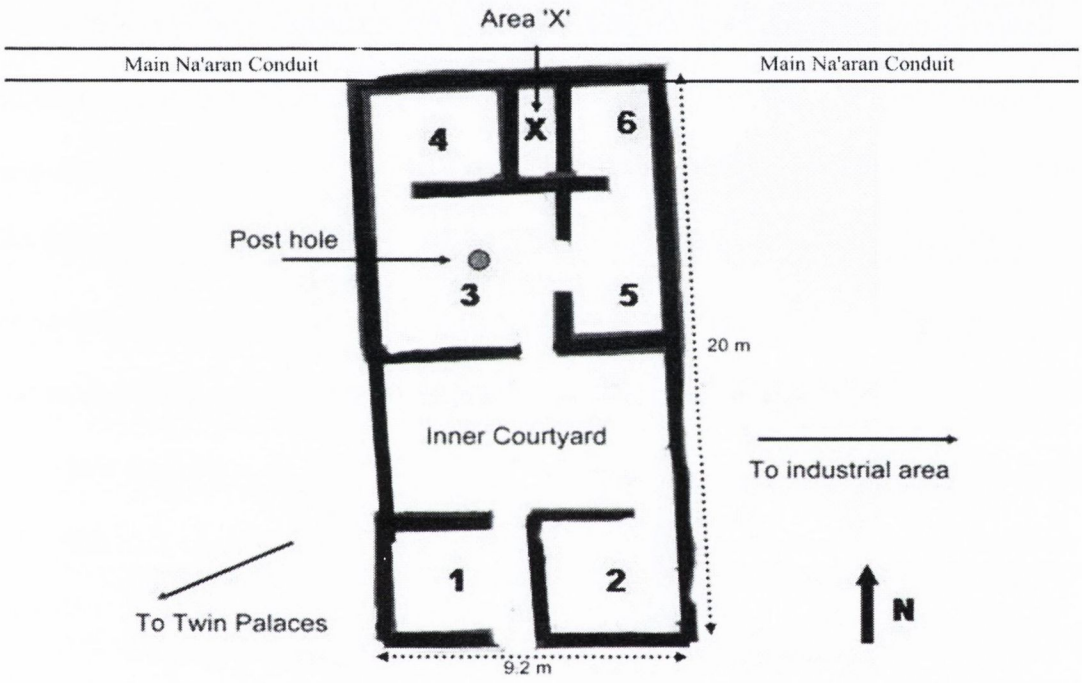
> Indeed, this spring [at Jericho] irrigates a larger space of ground than all others, and passes within a plain of seventy furlongs long, and twenty broad; wherein it affords nourishment to those most excellent gardens that are thick set with trees. There are in it may sorts of date palms that are watered by it, different from each other in flavour and name; the better sort of them, when they are pressed under foot, yield an excellent kind of honey, not much inferior in sweetness to that of bees, which are also abundant in this region. Here, too grow the juicy balsam, which is the most precious of all fruits in that place, cypress trees also, and those that bear myrobalanus, so that he who would pronounce this place to be divine would not be mistaken, a spot in which the rarest and the most excellent plants are produced in abundance.
>
> Josephus, *BJ* 4.467-46

Unfortunately, not one of the foregoing texts provide any assistance in terms of a discussion of the existence of a synagogue on the Hasmonaean palace estate. We are therefore left with nothing but archaeology through which to analyse the structure the excavators identified as a Hasmonaean period synagogue; that is, the courtyard house complex in the eastern sector of the estate. Because there is no corroborating textual or epigraphic material, the interpretation of the archaeological material is particularly important.

THE EXCAVATION REPORTS (PHASE 1)

The building identified as a synagogue is a courtyard house that forms part of a complex of buildings along the northeastern section of the Hasmonaean estate. It belongs specifically to the Hasmonaean period, as it was destroyed by an earthquake in 31 BCE and never reconstructed or reused after that.

Figure 18 – The courtyard house (phase 1)



The courtyard house (phase 1)

The courtyard house is located at the western end of a row of nine residential buildings. At the eastern end of this row of buildings, which stretches some 165 m, is an industrial area. To the southwest of the courtyard house is a large villa structure the excavators describe as twin palaces. To the west of the courtyard house complex is a large swimming pool complex and a garden. As the courtyard house complex is located between an industrial area and the twin palaces, it may have marked some sort of delineation between the industrial area to the east and

the series of palace complexes to the west. The main water conduit from Na'aran runs east across the northern wall of the courtyard house.[303]

The courtyard house was the first phase of this building complex to be constructed. According to the excavators, it was built slightly off-axis to the plan of the neighbouring buildings abutting the industrial area to the east. It is more or less rectangular in shape and measures some 20 x 9.2 m. It is comprised of a central courtyard between rooms on the north and south and was built of local materials – that is, mud brick on top of rough stone foundations and rubble from the wadi.[304]

Throughout the entire Hasmonaean (and the Herodian) palace estates at Jericho, mud brick and fieldstones were used for construction and then plastered over so as to look more substantial and costly; a common economy. This technique was used in many parts of the site, including the courtyard house referred to in this section.

While in use the courtyard house would have been indistinguishable from buildings constructed of solid masonry.[305] It is of a size that would suggest it was used by some official of the ruling household, be it an estate employee or a family

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[303] Ehud Netzer. *Hasmonaean and Herodian Palaces at Jericho. Final Reports of the 1973 – 1987 Excavations.* Volume II. Israel Exploration Society, Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (2004): 159.

[304] Netzer (2004): 160.

[305] As the excavator Ehud Netzer rightly and persuasively argues – in an unpublished article and in a conversation with me in Jerusalem in September of 2006 – the building he identified as a synagogue would undoubtedly have provoked much more public attention had it been constructed of stone ashlars, even if it lacked mosaic floors, carved architectural features and other decorative elements. "A Synagogue in Jericho from the Hasmonaean Period", unpublished article emailed to me following my conversation with Prof. Netzer in September 2006, and very kindly translated from Hebrew to English by Dr. Orit Peleg of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

member, and is of a type common throughout the Mediterranean area in the late Persian, Hellenistic and early Roman period.[306]

The floor plan of the first phase of the house reveals six rooms built around an internal courtyard (see Figure 18 above). The rooms are divided into two rooms to the south and four to the north. The entrance to the courtyard house is at the southern end of the building and leads into the courtyard from between the two southern rooms. Internally, the courtyard leads into the rooms of the northern part of the house.

As they are accessed only by one door, the rooms on the north side of the courtyard may have been part of the private quarters of whoever lived and worked in this building. The rooms on the south of the courtyard could have been reception rooms, office spaces or for other use altogether. Indeed, their use need not have been fixed as many elements used in the household would have been portable (desks, chairs, braziers, cooking equipment, etc). Sleeping quarters would have been on upper floors and on the roof.

Water was easily accessible and the main aqueduct from the springs at Na'aran in the hills above the palace site runs beside and partly underneath the northernmost wall of the courtyard house for the entire width of the building.[307] The importance of this will become clear when we come to look at Phase 2 of the courtyard house,

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[306] See, for general examples, residential houses in Y. Hirschfeld, *The Palestinian Dwelling in the Roman-Byzantine Period*, Franciscan Printing Press, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Minor 34, *Israel Exploration Society*, Jerusalem (1995); N. Cahill, *Household and City Organization at Olynthus*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London (2002): 125, 201, 231; the axonometric reconstruction of the *Mason de la Colline* on Delos and the *Herdraum* house at Ammotopos in L.C. Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1999): 24-25; the comparisons of courtyard houses in Thorikos in B.A. Ault and L.C. Nevett (eds.), *Ancient Greek Houses and Households*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (2005): 86.

[307] Netzer (2004): 184.

its water installations and what Netzer has identified as a niche and possible *genizah.*[308]

The entrance (room 1)

The entrance room is located at the southern end of the courtyard house and measures 4.4 m x 3.4 m. A doorway from the outside of the building leads through the entrance room into the central courtyard.[309] The floor of the entrance room was made up of beaten earth above wadi rubble. Underneath the floor of the entry room, in line with the doorway, there is a small water channel that comes from the Na'aran conduit.[310] This channel feeds part of a later water installation (see phase 2 below).

Room 2

Room 2 is located directly to the east of the entrance room. It measures some 3.65 m x 3.4 m. This room was accessed via the courtyard on the east side of the building. The floor consisted of the same material as that of the entrance room, that is beaten earth above wadi fill.[311]

The internal courtyard

The internal courtyard is located in the centre of the courtyard house, along its entire width, and situated between Rooms 1 and 2 on the south and Rooms 3 and 5 on the north. It measures 9.2 m x 5.1 m wide and was entered from the south via the entrance between Rooms 1 and 2. A doorway on the north of the

[308] Storage archive for sacred and important documents which have gone out of use but cannot be destroyed for religious reasons.
[309] Netzer (2004) 162.
[310] Netzer (2004): 162.
[311] Netzer (2004): 162.

courtyard provided access to Room 3, from which the other rooms on the north could be reached.[312] The floor of the courtyard consisted of beaten earth.[313]

Room 3

Room 3 is the large southwestern room on the northern end of the building and measures 5.45 x 4. 85 m. The room was accessible from the courtyard on the south via a doorway on its eastern side. There are two other doorways leading from Room 3 to other rooms in the northern part of the courtyard house; one on the east providing access to Rooms 5 and 6, and two on the north, both leading into Room 4 in the northwestern part of the house. The excavators thought this might have been a second courtyard.[314]

The floor was covered with a layer of mud brick debris which contained Hasmonaean pottery sherds, and was made up of beaten earth over soil. Since the ground surface was not entirely horizontal here, wadi material was piled on top of it to form a level base for the floor. In the centre of the room there is evidence of what might have been a setting for a wooden column base. It consisted of red burnt clay and ash.[315]

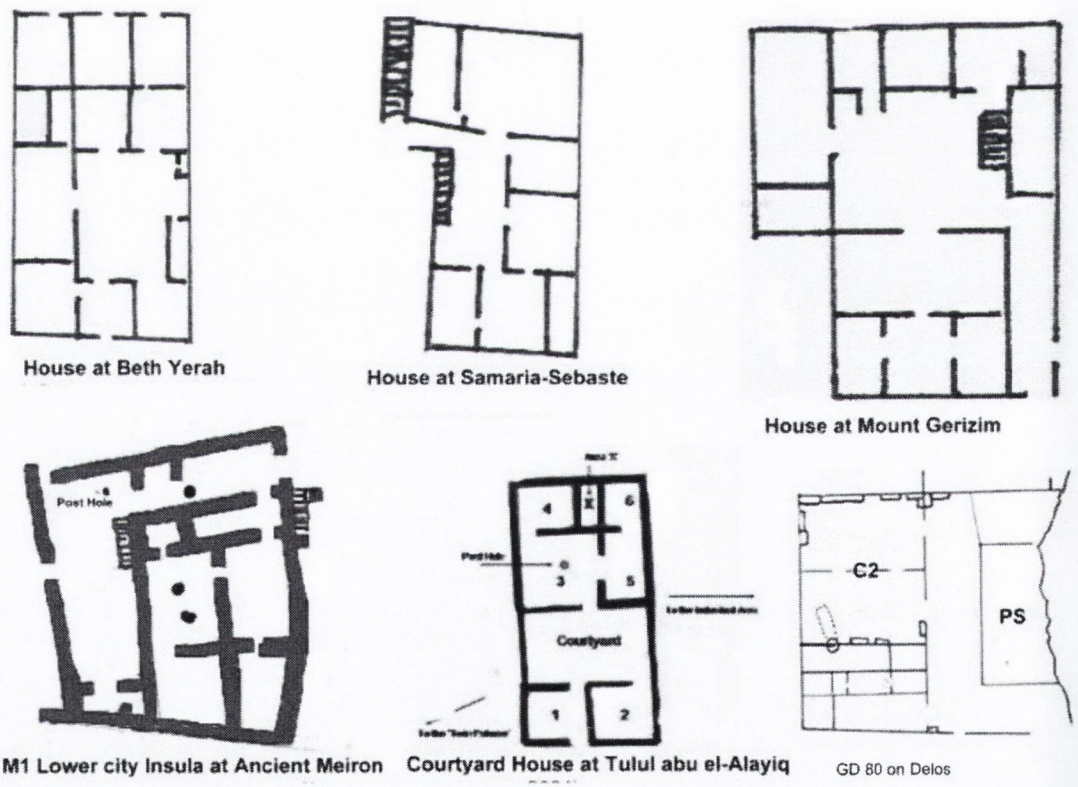
It may be assumed that this was the location of a column or pillar to support a partially roofed section of the courtyard as the placement of this post hole is directly analogous to a second-third century CE insula in the lower part of the city

[312] Netzer (2004): 162.
[313] Netzer (2004): 163.
[314] Netzer (2004): 164.
[315] Netzer (2004): 164.

of ancient Meiron, where we see a pillar base in the same place as the Jericho courtyard house posthole.[316]

However, posthole aside, the second-third century CE insula at ancient Meiron is not the only analogue to the second/first century BCE courtyard house at Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho. There are other similar buildings, such as a third-fourth century BCE house at Beth Yerah, a second century BCE house at Mount Gerizim, a third-second century BCE house at Samaria-Sebaste, and as countless others not listed here. [317]

Figure 19 – Comparison of courtyard houses



[316] Eric M. Meyers, James F. Strange, Carol L. Meyers, Dennis E. Groh, Martin Goodman, Patricia Smith, Joseph Zias, *Excavations at Ancient Meiron, Upper Galilee, Israel 1971-2, 1974-5, 1977*, Meiron Excavation Project Volume III, The American Schools of Oriental Research, Cambridge, Massachusetts, (1981): 34-35 (the posthole is in the upper left of the plan).
[317] Meyers, Strange, *et al* (1981): 34-35. The posthole is in the upper left of the floor plan at Figure 18 above.

This type of domestic building construction was used from as early as the beginning of the second millennium BCE and can be seen all over the Mediterranean and the ancient Near East.[318] These buildings are constructed around central courtyards because the Mediterranean climate enables extensive use of outdoor space, and means that various activities needed only be moved indoors during the rainy or cold season.[319]

Room 4

Room 4 of the Jericho courtyard house, located in the northwestern corner of the house, measured 4 x 3 m. Some mud brick was preserved on top of the fieldstone foundations of part of the eastern and western walls of this room. The room was originally entered from the south via two doorways but, at some point, the eastern door was eliminated.[320] The floor consisted of beaten earth over soil. Some lime plaster remains on the south face of the northern wall of this room.[321]

Room 5

Room 5 is located to the east of Room 3 from which it is entered. It measures 4.8 x 2.75 m. In it, there is an internal doorway leading to another room (room 6) on the north. The floor consisted of beaten earth over virgin soil and covered with ash, above which was a layer of mud brick debris which contained Hasmonaean pottery sherds.[322]

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[318] Hirschfeld (1995): 57.
[319] Hirschfeld (1995): 272.
[320] Netzer (2004): 164.
[321] Netzer (2004): 165.
[322] Netzer (2004): 164.

Room 6

Room 6 is located in the northeastern corner of the house, and measures 2.8 x 2.5 m. Some mud brick is preserved on part of its western wall. Entry to the room was via room 5. The floor of Room 6 also consisted of beaten earth over virgin soil. A small installation consisting of a quarter-circle formed by a row of pebbles and containing ash was revealed in the northeastern corner of the room. This may have served as a small fixed fireplace or oven.[323]

Area X

Area X, a narrow space measuring 2.8 x 1.25 m in size, is located between rooms 4 and 6. No doorway was found here. The excavators argued that this space was entered via an opening located at a higher level in one of the walls.[324] However, it is more likely that this space represents the base of a stairway that accesses the upper storey of the house. This argument is supported by the fact that the floor in this area, when excavated, was some 32cm higher than that of the other rooms, suggesting it had been compacted to a degree sufficient to support the base of a stairway.[325] Indeed, a direct parallel to this can again be seen in the insula of the lower city of Meiron, where a stairway lays along the eastern wall of the internal courtyard and leads to the upper floor of the house (see Figure 19 above).[326]

In many ways, the insula at ancient Meiron corresponds to the layout of the courtyard house under discussion here. The centremost element of the insula has the same rectangular structure with an entryway, two rooms just inside, a central courtyard and then rooms leading off to the north, east and west of the building.

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[323] Netzer (2004): 165.
[324] Netzer (2004): 165.
[325] Netzer (2004): 165.
[326] See also Figures 9 and 10 on Delos.

In the first phase of the Jericho courtyard house complex, the room marked "3" (in Figure 18 above) is similar to the internal courtyard in the insula in ancient Meiron, where there is a column post in the same place as in the corresponding room at Jericho.

Netzer suggests that the entire internal courtyard at Jericho was covered. As an analysis of the lower city insula at Meiron reveals, only a small portion of the courtyard was covered (see Figure 19 above).[327] This makes a great deal of sense in terms of utilisation of space and retention of views of the lower parts of the house and the courtyards (both the internal one and the porticoed one).[328] This applies to the Jericho courtyard house as much as it does to the insula at ancient Meiron.

Moreover, from observations and photographs of the site at Jericho, it appears that the entirety of the courtyard house complex has not been excavated and that, in fact, there are at least two further ground floor rooms on the east side of the original building. Again, this is directly analogous to the lower city insula at ancient Meiron and elsewhere (see examples at Figure 19 above) and I would suggest that at least the ground floor structure of the Hasmonaean courtyard house and the insula in the lower city of ancient Meiron, and the other examples given, share many commonalities. The excavators say that the courtyard house is not built along the same axis as the residential row to the east.[329] However, if I am correct about the ground floor layout, and the unexcavated walls, then the

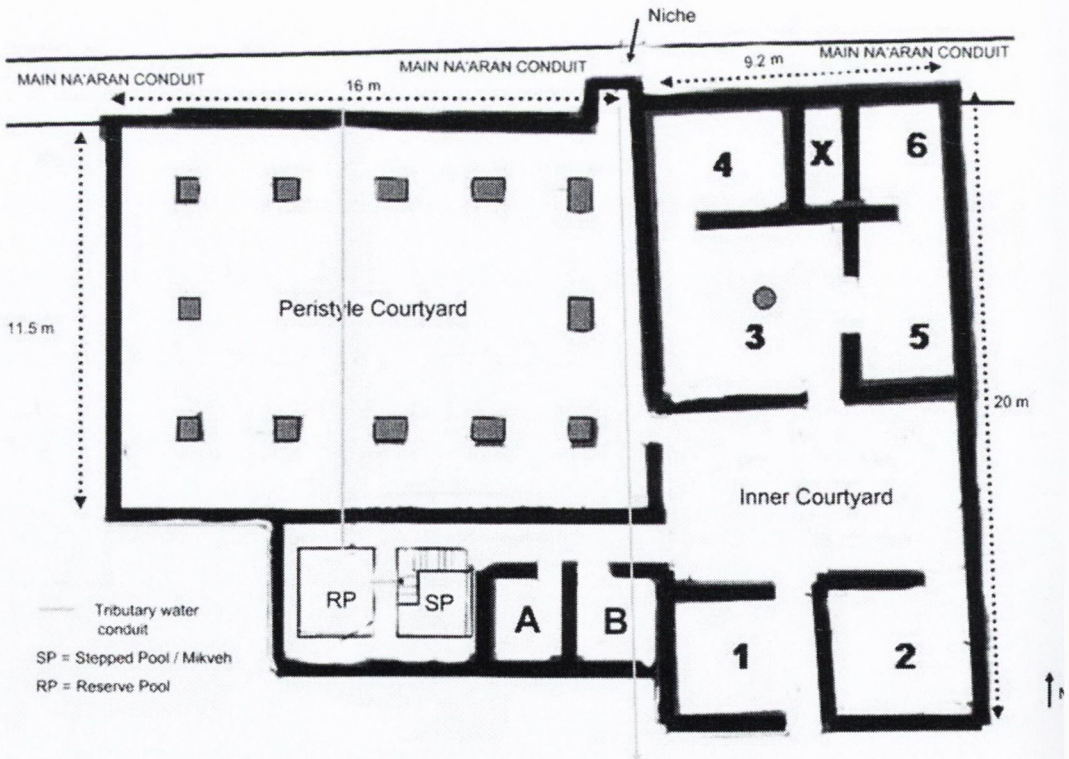
[327] Meyers, Strange, *et al*, (1981): 34-35.
[328] Meyers, Strange, *et al*, (1981): 34-35.
[329] Netzer (2004): 160.

easternmost wall abuts the residential area precisely, thus utilising the available space fully, as with the insula at Meiron.

THE EXCAVATION REPORTS (PHASE 2)

In the second phase of the building, according to the excavation reports, what the excavators describe as an assembly hall (measuring 16 x 11.5 m) was added along the western wall of the original courtyard house, with some reconstruction taking place to accommodate those changes. This included opening up two doorways in the western wall of the courtyard house; one leading to the new space, and one leading into the chambers on the south.

Figure 20 – The courtyard house (phase 2)



The courtyard house (phase 2)

What the excavators describe as an assembly hall is a simple peristyle courtyard and is part of an architectural tradition which reflects Graeco-Roman influences.[330] That this style is seen in the building programmes of the Hasmonaeans is interesting, but should not trouble us, as it is a common feature of Hellenistic and Roman houses throughout the Mediterranean region.

The excavator, Netzer, argues that what he describes as the assembly space could not be a second courtyard because other courtyards in the estate had a visual connection with the buildings with which they are connected.[331] In fact, a second, usually larger and more formal, peristyle courtyard is a standard component of a courtyard house of this type in the Hellenistic period.[332] The visual connection the excavator refers to would certainly existed in the view from the upper floor(s) of the original courtyard house to the peristyle courtyard below. Netzer contradicts his own argument on line-of-sight when he argues that in a later phase of the building one of the columns between the courtyard and the triclinium was moved to provide a line of sight from the triclinium to the courtyard. Thus, there were actually *three* lines of visual connection to this second courtyard; the first from the upper floors of the original courtyard house, the second from the triclinium and the third from the entrance of the original courtyard house into the peristyle courtyard (see Figure 20 above).

The excavator argues that the so-called assembly hall was originally covered because the floor consisted of beaten earth, which is normally used in covered

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[330] Hirschfeld (1995): 85-86.
[331] Netzer (2004): 184.
[332] Boardman, Griffin & Murray (1988): 388.

rooms.[333] However, there is a practical problem with his thesis, as covering the peristyle courtyard would have removed the light source for most of the rest of the ground floor of the original courtyard house.[334] The ground floor rooms looking onto both of the courtyards would have had windows, so that any light blockage (ie, by roofing the space) would cut off that light source[335]. Moreover, the use of beaten earth (pulverised with hoes and rakes) had another purpose. It reduced moisture evaporation from parched soil and helped drainage so that pooling of rainwater would have been minimised.[336]

The excavators also argue that it was the custom to have a peristyle courtyard at a slightly lower level in order to drain rainwater and that therefore the assembly hall could not be a courtyard.[337] However, while in the Hellenistic period double-courtyard houses sometimes had one of the courtyards built at a slightly lower level, this was designed to enhance the view and entrance into the house proper.[338] The fact that the peristyle courtyard of this building is at the same level as the rest of the complex is irrelevant to drainage, but adds substance to the line-of-sight argument.

Another of the excavators' contentions about the assembly hall is that it was covered and had clerestory windows because, otherwise, there is no explanation for the use of the massive pillars in its construction.[339] The pillars themselves do not survive. However, the bases on which they stood survive and these are

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[333] Netzer (2004): 185.
[334] This is illustrated in Figure 9, the photograph of the House of the Hermes on Delos in the previous chapter. There is building *around* the courtyard, but it is not covered.
[335] Nevett (1999): 24-25.
[336] R.J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, Vol II, Second Edition, Leiden, E.J. Brill (1965): 43-44.
[337] Netzer (2006): unpublished.
[338] Boardman, Griffin & Murray (1988): 388.
[339] Netzer (2006): unpublished.

rectangular in shape and vary in diameter, averaging some 85 x 70 cm.[340] The pillar bases sit on top of the remains of a stylobate and the best preserved base stands only 50 cm high. The fact that the bases are not of a uniform size lends further credence to the argument that they were not designed to support a full roof. Moreover, as with other structural elements on the estates, the bases are constructed of local field stones bonded with mud and were probably plastered over to make them look like stone (see Figure 21 below). The upper parts of the pillars that do not survive were most likely mud brick (made in the industrial area to the east). They were likely to have been of a narrower gauge than the bases and would have been plastered and painted to look like solid masonry.

Thus, the pillars referred to by the excavator were in no way massive and were there to support a colonnade which would have been no higher than the external walls of the courtyard. The colonnade was designed to be a decorative feature of such courtyards and to provide some shade in the glaring summer heat and some protection from the winter rain, whilst simultaneously leaving the central area open to the elements and to line of sight. Covering a walled courtyard and building clerestory windows (with the consequent bulking out of the courtyard house complex) is highly unlikely and would be a redundant design feature. Not only would a covered courtyard have been aesthetically unappealing and out of character for this type of building,[341] but it would also have been unnecessary and, more importantly, would have interfered with light penetration into the ground floor of the house. There would have been no external windows looking out onto

[340] Netzer (2004): 166-167.
[341] Cahill (2002); Nevett (1999); Ault & Nevett (2005); Hirschfeld (1995); Meyers, Strange, *et al* (1981).

the external street, whereas there would have been windows looking into the courtyard and these would have been thereby rendered obsolete.

The excavators say that the assembly hall is not in proportion to the size of the courtyard house, and that this adds support to the argument that the building is a synagogue, as there is otherwise no reason for the scale of the assembly/reception hall.[342] They also say that the assembly hall is missing a proper residential building which would justify a reception hall on this scale and that the courtyard house itself is not a residence for this hall.[343] However, as is clear from the parallel examples given, both in Israel and Greece, not only is the courtyard house entirely in proportion to the peristyle courtyard, but was also at least a two storey building.[344] And, as already stated, there were probably at least another two more rooms on the ground floor of the eastern side of the house, as in the parallels at Meiron and elsewhere. The original courtyard house was therefore wider and more capacious than the excavation reports would suggest. The walls of the easternmost end of the building would then abut, at a slight angle, the residential buildings to the east. There can be no question that the courtyard house is the residence attached to the peristyle court. This is a normal configuration, as is seen from the floor plan and the examples of other courtyard houses given above.

The excavation reports describe the peristyle courtyard as a nave surrounded by aisles with square pillars along all four sides and argue that the aisles are situated about 40 cm higher than the nave and that this 40 cm difference enabled the supportive walls that were built between the pillars and separated the nave from

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[342] Netzer (2004): 186; Meyers, Strange *et al* (1981).
[343] Netzer (2004): 186, n. 67.
[344] Cahill (2002); Nevett (1999); Ault & Nevett (2005); Hirschfeld (1995); Meyers, Strange, *et al*, (1981).

the aisles to be used as benches which then allowed about 150 people to sit in the hall. [345]

There is, however, no evidence of benches having been in place, there are certainly no visible remains of such. The only raised areas are the platforms on which the pillar bases stand, and this simply encircles the courtyard (see Figure 21 below). There is no regular differentiation in floor levels between what Netzer called the nave and the aisles. The few irregular differences in the ground level can be accounted for by soil erosion, earthquake damage and the excavation process itself. This is a peristyle courtyard and is, like the design of the original courtyard house itself, a fairly standard feature of houses of this type.[346]

Figure 21 – The peristyle courtyard (looking east)[347]



[345] Netzer (2004): 165-166.
[346] Boardman, Griffin & Murray (1988): 388.
[347] Taken in February 2009, this photograph also shows a Bedouin habitat sitting on top of the main Na'aran conduit along the northern wall of the original courtyard house complex. The line cutting through the middle of the courtyard is one of the Na'aran conduit's tributaries and leads from the main conduit south and into the water installations, which are just visible on the right of the photograph. The courtyard house lies beyond the peristyle, just beneath the caravan. The wall at the bottom of the photograph is part of a later Herodian palace complex built over the earthquake damaged Hasmonaean structure.

Of course, even if the structure was a courtyard and not an assembly hall, this would not preclude its use as a synagogue. There is no question but that the layout of the courtyard could easily have been used for the reading of the Torah to people gathered there. But, equally, any sufficient space – exterior or interior – could serve this purpose.

Finally, Netzer finally sets up a straw man argument, positing his position against a group of unrealistic alternatives. He asks what the space could possibly have been used for if not as a meeting place and a place for receptions and banquets. He says that it was unlikely to have been used for industrial activity, and unlikely to have been a storage facility and unlikely to have been a place for housing animals and that therefore it must have been the assembly hall of a synagogue.[348]

Netzer is clearly correct that this space was not used for industrial activity, or for storage or for animals, but this argument ignores and avoids the conclusion that it was a straightforward peristyle courtyard for use by the occupants of and visitors to the courtyard house complex. Here, in this courtyard house complex, a peristyle courtyard is merely a peristyle courtyard.

The aqueducts of Hasmonaean-Herodian Jericho

Providing the supply of water to the palace estates were extensive Hasmonaean and Herodian aqueducts. Excavations conducted from 1973 through 1981 near where the Wadi Qelt flows into the western plains of Jericho found remains of extensive water systems linked with the Hasmonaean estate.[349] Sections of these

[348] Netzer (2004): 187.
[349] E. Netzer & G. Garbrecht, "Water channels and a royal estate of the late Hellenistic period in Jericho's western plains", in D. Amit, J. Patrich and Y. Hirshfeld (eds.), *The Aqueducts of Israel*,

aqueducts are still visible along the surface near the western edge of the Jericho plain and were first surveyed by the British Survey of Palestine in the 1880s.[350]

The excavations of the 1970s and 1980s revealed that there were two separate systems drawing water from the springs in the Wadi Qelt and from the springs at Na'aran and Ain el-Auja.[351] These systems brought the water directly from the source to the palace estates using a system of channels and sluice gates set along the conduits to control flow to different areas.[352] A sluice gate (on an ancient aqueduct) is normally just a wooden, stone or metal plate which slides into grooves in the sides of the channel and is operated manually. Sluice gates were used to regulate the flow of water. Raising a sluice gate allows water to flow under it, and the level of the sluice gate can be adjusted to control the volume and speed of the water passing through the aqueduct. While the excavators found stones on either side of some conduit openings to facilitate sluice gates in the Hasmonaean estate, they did not find any built-in grooves for them, which suggests that the sluice gates were a later or even an *ad-hoc* addition to the system as the water systems were extended and adapted.[353]

There are two main systems of aqueducts in the Wadi Qelt. One runs along the north bank of the wadi, while the other runs along the south bank, and there are also three channels that are fed by seasonal rains.[354] The longest of the aqueducts

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Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series Number 46, Portsmouth, Rhode Island (2002): 367.

[350] Netzer & Garbrecht (2002): 367. n. 3: C.R. Wonder & H.H. Kitchener, *The survey of western Palestine III: Judaea* (London 1883): 190, 222, 227-28).

[351] Netzer & Garbrecht (2002): 367.

[352] Netzer & Garbrecht (2002): 377.

[353] Netzer & Garbrecht (2002): 377.

[354] Y. Porath, "Hydraulic plaster in aqueducts as a chronological indicator", in D. Amit, J. Patrich & Y. Hirshfeld (eds.), *The Aqueducts of Israel*, Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series Number 46, Portsmouth, Rhode Island (2002): 29.

is the one that travels from the Wadi Qelt to the hill fortress of Cypros and then back downhill into the plantations of the Hasmonaean/Herodian palace estate.[355]

Bearing in mind the tentative nature of the dating of the site, the excavators thought it may have been during the reigns of Alexander Jannaeus (106-76 BCE), or his widow Alexandra (76-67 BCE), that the Na'aran Conduit was built along the mountain ridges and down to the Hasmonaean site.[356] While this aqueduct served many parts of the Hasmonaean estate, its main conduit went directly to the plantations on the eastern end of the estate.[357] The addition of this aqueduct allowed tributary conduits for swimming pools, cisterns, ritual baths and irrigation and drainage systems to be constructed.[358]

The Na'aran and other later aqueducts also enabled the production of rich harvests, particularly of balsam[359] and dates. Balsam plants take several years to reach maturity before they can be harvested and processed into perfume oils and various other unguents. Date palms likewise become productive only after a dozen or so years and, according to Josephus (*BJ* 4.467-46), and as seen in the literary texts above, Jericho produced a number of distinct varieties which could be processed into various varieties of food and wine. Given the long-term planning and expense involved in producing balsam and dates, and the horticultural expertise required to maintain productive plantations, it would appear that the estate of the Hasmonaeans and Herodians at Jericho functioned as an

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[355] D. Amit, J. Patrich and Y. Hirshfeld (eds.), *The Aqueducts of Israel*, Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series Number 46, Portsmouth, Rhode Island (2002): 19.
[356] Porath (2002): 31.
[357] Netzer (2006): 42.
[358] Stern (1993): 685.
[359] Balsam is a plant resin that is healing and/or soothing in its effect. It is not possible to identify the specific plant from which ancient balsam was produced, but Jericho was a centre for its production.

administrative, trade and agricultural centre as well as a pleasant winter resort for the Hasmonaean and Herodian royal courts.

The niche/genizah

Another reason the excavators identified this building as a synagogue was that they found what is described in the excavation reports as a 'niche' in the northeastern corner of what they describe as the assembly hall (see Figure 20 above).[360] According to the excavators, the floor of this niche was half a metre lower than the floor of the main assembly space.[361] They said that the niche contained a wooden cupboard which was later replaced by a cupboard made of fieldstones and mud divided into two compartments, one above the other. The lower one, they argued, could have served as a *genizah*, or storage space for worn-out scrolls and documents. A wooden plate (a sort of a horizontal door) would have covered the lower space of the niche and the upper space could have been accessed more often.[362] The reconstruction of this niche in the excavation report allows for a horizontal 'door' to be raised or lowered to allow access to the internal compartments, one above the other. According to the excavators, the lower compartment may have been used to store sacred scrolls and other important documents. The excavators say that what was initially a wooden interior to the niche was eventually replaced with stone, transforming the space into a two-tiered compartment[363] and that the wooden structure was replaced because of fire destruction.[364] They claim that because the niche (both the upper and lower

[360] Netzer (2004): 168.
[361] Netzer (2004): 171.
[362] Netzer (2004): 171.
[363] Netzer (2004): 168.
[364] Netzer (2004): 171.

tier) was entirely coated with lime plaster, it was used for the storage of sacred scrolls and was, in fact, a *genizah.*[365]

Figure 22 – The niche (looking south)



There are obvious problems with the excavators' understanding of this space. One is that the 'niche' is an integral part of and lies directly *beneath* the main Na'aran conduit. In Figure 22 above, looking south[366], you can clearly see the Na'aran channel running east and west and the tributary channel running south (through the peristyle courtyard and down towards other areas of the estate including the palaces and swimming pools).[367] This structure is quite obviously part of the aqueduct system, and is in fact a sluice gate designed to regulate water flow in the main channel (see Figures 20, 21 and 22 above).[368] The branching off into the south-flowing channel that runs under the centre of the peristyle courtyard

[365] Netzer (2004): 171.
[366] A photograph I took in February 2009.
[367] This channel can also be seen towards the background of Figure 6, another photograph I took in February 2009.
[368] Although I formulated this theory about the function of the so-called "niche" back in 2004, it wasn't until I visited the site in February 2009, when quite a lot of erosion had taken place on the site, that it was possible to get a photograph showing the sluice gate as a clear component of the aqueduct. Before this, all other photographs just showed a hole in the ground.

disrupted the flow of water from the main aqueduct, and a sluice gate system to the tributary channel leading south was needed to control the still fast moving water of the aqueduct. Without this mechanism to control the disruption of flow, the water would have transmitted a shockwave backwards and forwards along the main aqueduct, damaging it and flooding the surrounding area.[369] This shockwave is known as *water hammer* and it can destroy the conduit or pipe through which it passes.[370]

There are a number of points leading to and within the courtyard house building where the flow of water along the main conduit and its tributaries is controlled by sluice gates. The sluice gate, referred to by the excavators as a niche or *genizah*), makes certain that any water hammer could be safely contained. The tank could then be accessed for maintenance (and water collection) from the upper compartment.[371]

The excavators' reconstruction of the niche in the excavation reports is correct in almost all other respects. The placing and removal of a horizontal door between the two compartments is precisely how the overflow mechanism would have functioned. The horizontal door would have been able to stay in place as long as the flow along the main Na'aran conduit was slow and regular. If the water was moving faster or deeper than usual, the upper compartment could have been opened to extend its containment.

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[369] T.A. Hodge, *Roman Aqueducts & Water Supply*, Second Edition, Duckworth, UK (2002): 233.
[370] Hodge (2002): 154.
[371] An overflow for a water conduit, in much the same position as at Jericho, can be seen at the fountain house of Theagenes: see Hodge (2002): 26.

At the very least, it would be an eccentric act to use such a mechanism in such a location for the safekeeping of sacred or valuable objects. All things taken into consideration, what the excavation reports describe as an assembly hall is a peristyle courtyard and the niche is a simple overflow tank, an integral part of the water system in this building and in the palace estates as a whole.

The cistern/mikveh

Also belonging to the second phase of the building are the three rooms south of the peristyle courtyard, the largest of which contains a substantial water installation. This installation consists of two pools, one with steps for access and the other a reserve tank of equal size, but without the stepped access. The excavation reports identify the water installation as a *mikveh* and a reserve tank, and argue that the other two small rooms in this row of three rooms were probably dressing rooms or changing facilities.[372]

A small channel connects the reserve to the immersion pool and that reserve pool is connected to the small tributary channel of the Na'aran conduit which runs under the floor of the peristyle courtyard some 8 metres west of the sluice gate discussed above. Two channels emerge from the corridor above Rooms A and B and then follow a line towards to the entranceway to the original courtyard house, leaving the building to the south. There is what appears to be another small sluice mechanism just along the wall of Room 1 on the courtyard side, controlling the flow of water out of the building and further down the north-south incline.[373]

[372] Netzer (2004): 180.
[373] Netzer (2004): 163.

In the event that this building is not a synagogue and that the water installations represent the totality of the water supply to the household, it would appear that this is not a mikveh complex, although, of course, it could also be a mikveh without being part of a synagogue complex. However, it appears that the water installations are rather too deep and too steep to be used for ritual purposes. The stepped pool is 2.25 x 2.25 m in size, is 3.65 m deep, and has ten steps, of unequal height. The reserve pool is 2.65 x 2.4 m in size and is 3.78 m deep.[374]

Figure 23 – The stepped cistern[375]



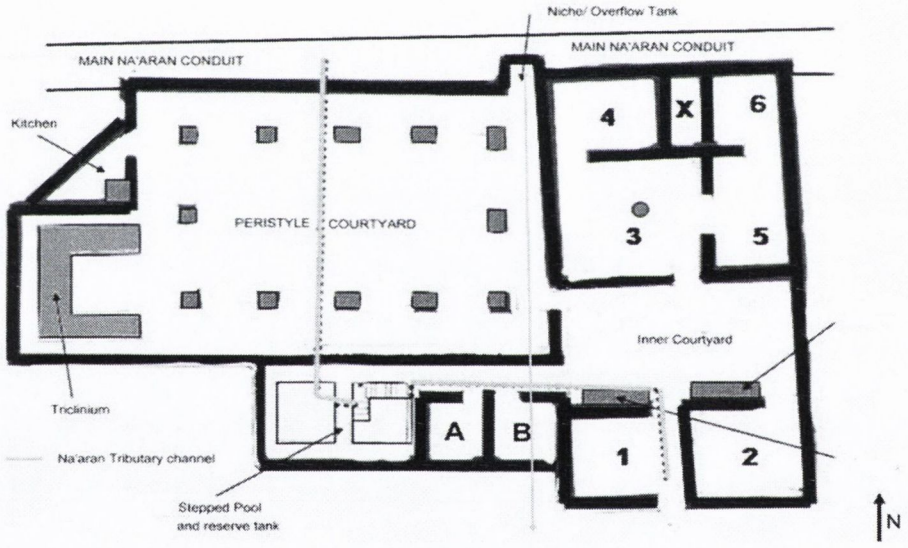
With a water supply and sufficient space so readily available, it would have been more than possible to build a shallower and wider-stepped mikveh here specifically for ritual purposes. The pools are fed by a tributary channel of the Na'aran Conduit and were contained within a walled building, which was certainly covered. It seems that this is not a mikveh, but rather a cistern and reserve for the provision of water to this large household.

[374] Netzer (2004): 178-179.
[375] Taken in 2004, the author is standing at the bottom of the stepped pool.

THE EXCAVATION REPORTS (PHASE 3)

In the third phase of the building, a triclinium was added to the assembly hall and this is another of the excavators' reasons for believing that this building was a synagogue, again based on similarity with other sites, such as the synagogue with triclinium at Herodium (see chapter on Herodium herein).[376] The reconstruction involved in this latter phase involved a wall being dismantled, and one corner of the building being completely eliminated. In order to add the triclinium, changes were made in courtyard.

Figure 24 – The courtyard house (phase 3)



The courtyard house (phase 3)

To build the triclinium, part of the western wall was dismantled and one of the pillars (directly outside the triclinium) was moved about two metres to the north, so that there was a direct line of sight between the triclinium and the peristyle courtyard. The excavators argued that this was so that people dining in the triclinium could see the rest of the synagogue assembly during meals. It is more likely that the line of sight was altered so that diners could enjoy the decorative

[376] E. Netzer, Y. Kalman & R. Laureys, "A Synagogue from the Hasmonean Period Recently Exposed in the Western Plain of Jericho", *IEJ* 49:3 & 4 (1999): 203-221; E. Netzer "The Hasmonaean and Herodian Winter Palaces at Jericho", *IEJ* 25 (1975): 95.

space, pleasant evening temperatures and the probably fragrant garden outside. Adjacent to the triclinium is a triangular room that Netzer says was probably a kitchen. A podium in the right-angled corner bears evidence of fire and suggests that it may once have supported a stove. I have no argument with this interpretation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shanks (2001)

Herschel Shanks, responding to Netzer's identification of the 'synagogue' in Hasmonaean Jericho, takes the view that the building complex is important because of its architecture, but questions whether it is a synagogue on the basis that there is no clear archaeological evidence – that is, no architectural indicators, no epigraphy and no donor plaques.[377] He lists the clues that led Netzer to consider the building complex a synagogue, and says that the first clue is the immersion pool and its reserve. Shanks also accepts this pool as a mikveh because it is a stepped pool with a supply coming from the Na'aran conduit and because it complies with the prescriptions for a mikveh. He concurs with Netzer that the other rooms along this section of the complex were probably dressing rooms.[378] Shanks repeats the Netzer's assertion about the triclinium being the second clue to the building complex's identification as a synagogue and goes on to say that triclinia are well known in the Roman world, but rare in Palestine.

He comes to the third clue, the niche, and has apparently accepted Netzer's contention as to its construction and use. Shanks asks if all these clues are

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[377] Hershel Shanks, "Is It or Isn't It—A Synagogue? Archaeologists disagree over buildings at Jericho and Migdal" *Biblical Archaeology Review* (*BAR*) 27:06, Nov/Dec 2001 (online version at: http://www.basarchive.org/bswbBrowse.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=27&Issue=6&ArticleID=4&UserID=2297).

[378] Shanks (Nov/Dec 2001).

sufficient to identify the Jericho building as a synagogue and cites Netzer's claim that the most important basis for his conclusion is its similarity to the Gamla synagogue. He leaves acceptance or rejection of Netzer's thesis to the reader, but applies no scrutiny to Netzer's claims.

However, in his acceptance of Netzer's interpretation of the construction of the building, he necessarily leans towards agreement rather than otherwise. There is nothing in Shanks' brief discussion that adds anything to the debate, it is basically a recitation of Netzer's findings and conclusions.

Yehudah Rapuano (2001)

Rapuano approaches Netzer's identification from a different angle. He looks at what the purpose of a synagogue might have been in the Hasmonaean period, when the earliest part of the courtyard house complex was built. He does not question Netzer's interpretation of the architecture of the building, nor of the uses to which it could have been put.[379] He asks whether the eastern part of the Jericho complex could have been used for the convening of a small core of original members or leaders, while the pillared hall, added at a later stage, was designated for larger assemblies.[380] This however does not seem particularly realistic, as the original phase of the courtyard house points towards its having been a residence, as already shown.

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[379] Y. Rapuano. "The Hasmonaean Period 'Synagogue' at Jericho and the 'Council Chamber' at Qumran", in *IEJ* 51 (2001): 54, n. 16; Netzer, Kalman & Laureys (1999): 216.
[380] Rapuano (2001): 55.

Holger Schwarzer and Sarah Japp (2002).

Of the scholars who have looked at Netzer's identification, Schwarzer and Japp have looked the most closely and have offered various explanations for how the courtyard house complex might have developed throughout its three-phased existence until its destruction in 31 BCE. Because of the general lack of evidence to prove the identification, they do not accept Netzer's argument that the structure was a synagogue or that any part of it was designed as a synagogue.[381]

But whilst they do not reject Netzer's interpretation and reconstruction of the niche out of hand, they do say that its function is unknown and, further, that whilst it is clear that the niche at the synagogue at Gamla was used to store something valuable, this is not the case for the Jericho niche.[382] Schwarzer and Japp were unable to correctly identify the niche as what it actually is (an overflow tank or *sluice gate*; one of the components of the courtyard house complex's water supply directly linked into the main Na'aran Conduit), but they were able to say that it may not have functioned as a genizah as had been suggested by Netzer.[383]

Inge Nielsen (2005)

Nielsen rejects arguments that compare the courtyard house complex to other synagogue buildings.[384] She says that one must take the surroundings and the cultural context into consideration. She accepts Netzer's interpretation of the

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[381] H. Schwarzer & S. Japp, "Synagoge, Banketthaus oder Wohngebäude", in Antike Welt 3 (2002): 280.
[382] Schwarzer & Japp (2002): 279.
[383] Schwarzer & Japp (2002): 279.
[384] I. Nielsen, "Synagogue (synagogé) and Prayerhouse (proseuché): The Relationship Between Jewish Religious Architecture in Palestine and the Diaspora", in *Hephaistos* 23 (2005): 75.

remains, including a *mikveh* and a genizah and, having accepted his explanation, accepts the identification of a synagogue.[385]

Lee I Levine (2005)

Levine acknowledges that *if* Netzer's identification were found to be correct then this site would be the earliest known synagogue in the land of Israel but that "when all is said and done, there is very little hard evidence on which to base such a conclusion".[386] Levine says that there is no known synagogue parallel to the Jericho building, no evidence to suggest that the niche was ever used to store scrolls, and more differences between Jericho and the comparator Netzer used, Gamla, than commonalities. Moreover, he says that the location of this building is curious, as whom could it possibly serve, and that it is indeed similar to many Hellenistic and Roman villas.[387] Levine says that future excavations on the site may clarify the situation further.[388]

Conclusions

Of the courtyard house complex at Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho identified as a synagogue, Ehud Netzer said that it was "an important contribution to a clearer picture of the appearance and functioning of synagogues from the Hasmonaean period (if not earlier), at least until the destruction of the Second Temple".[389] In a conversation in 2006 in Jerusalem, Prof. Netzer told me that his identification would be taken more seriously if the structure was monumental, and built of stone.

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[385] Nielsen (2005): 75.
[386] Levine (2005): 73.
[387] Levine (2005): 73.
[388] Levine (2005): 74.
[389] Netzer, & Laureys (1999): 203-221.

It is clear that the contemporary historical record provides little in terms of our understanding of the Hasmonaean estate at Jericho. What we do have comes to us almost wholesale from the excavation reports. Given that there are so few historical references to this estate, there is no meaningful way in which we can assign ownership of particular areas of the site to any one group or person and so, even the excavators have only tentatively dated the site .

Curiously, the excavators do not consider what they have identified as Hasmonaean-period synagogue to have been part of the Hasmonaean palace complex and think it is not necessary that the palace had a synagogue. The excavators believe that this was a synagogue designed for and built by workers. They argue that there can be no reasonable alternative explanation for the function of the building, other than its being used as a place of assembly.[390] However, has been shown, there are very obvious alternative explanations and there is no evidence whatsoever in any shape or form for the existence of a workers' synagogue at Hasmonaean-Herodian Jericho.

The excavators identification and argument is also flawed in saying that this is a *prototype* of a synagogue and that it fulfilled the requirement for assembly. This building did not survive far into Herod's use of the site, but was destroyed in the earthquake of 31 BCE and was left in ruins until part of Herod's second palace was built over it some 5 years later.

The excavators' arguments are highly speculative, arguing that the Hasmonaean stimulus to build in Jericho was the pursuit of pleasure: and that the main purpose

[390] Netzer, & Laureys (1999): 203-221.

of the lavish and splendid pools complex was for entertainment and leisure, and that the gardens were areas of tranquillity.[391] As has been already stated, the excavators are extrapolating backwards from Herod (and his particularly lavish building programme), to the Hasmonaeans.[392]

All things considered, it would appear that this building complex, from its first phase as a courtyard house, through its second and third enlarging phases, was the dwelling of an official of the estate or even a member of the Hasmonaean household. It is wedged between the industrial estate to the east and the more luxurious elements of the estate to the west and its use should therefore be related to its location.

Finally, adding to the delicate framework of the chronological development of the synagogue requires a great deal of care and attention, and more evidence is required before a building should be identified as being of religious significance. In the particular case of the courtyard house complex at Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho, there is no reason to do so.

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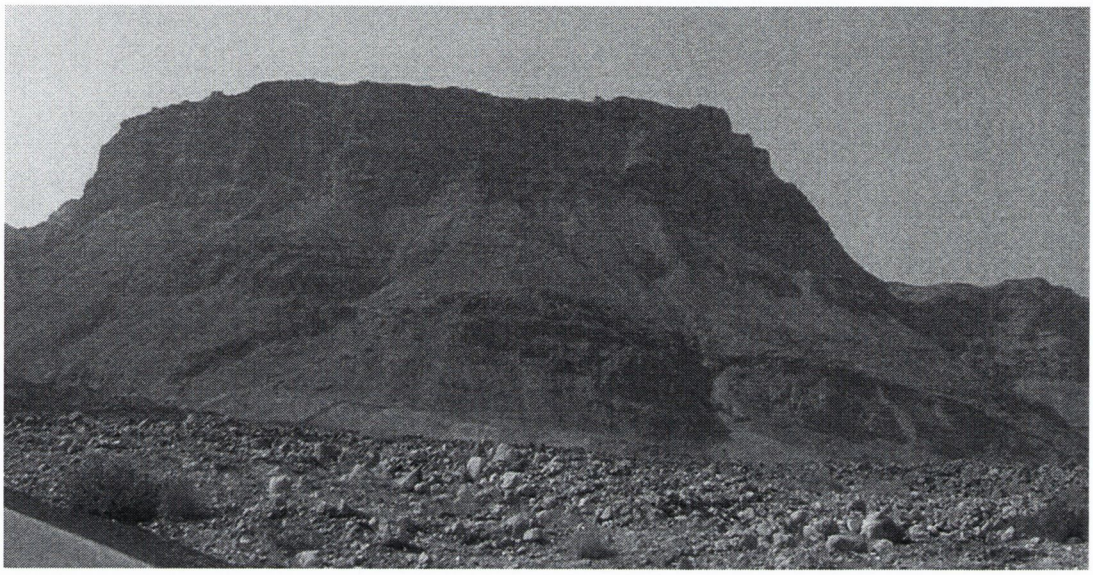
[391] E. Netzer, *Hasmonaean and Herodian Palaces at Jericho. Final Reports of the 1973 – 1987 Excavations.* Volume I. Israel Exploration Society, Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (2001): 335.

[392] D. Stacey, "Was there a synagogue in Hasmonaean Jericho?", in *The Bible and Interpretation* (2000): (http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Hasmonean_Jericho.htm).

CHAPTER 4
Masada

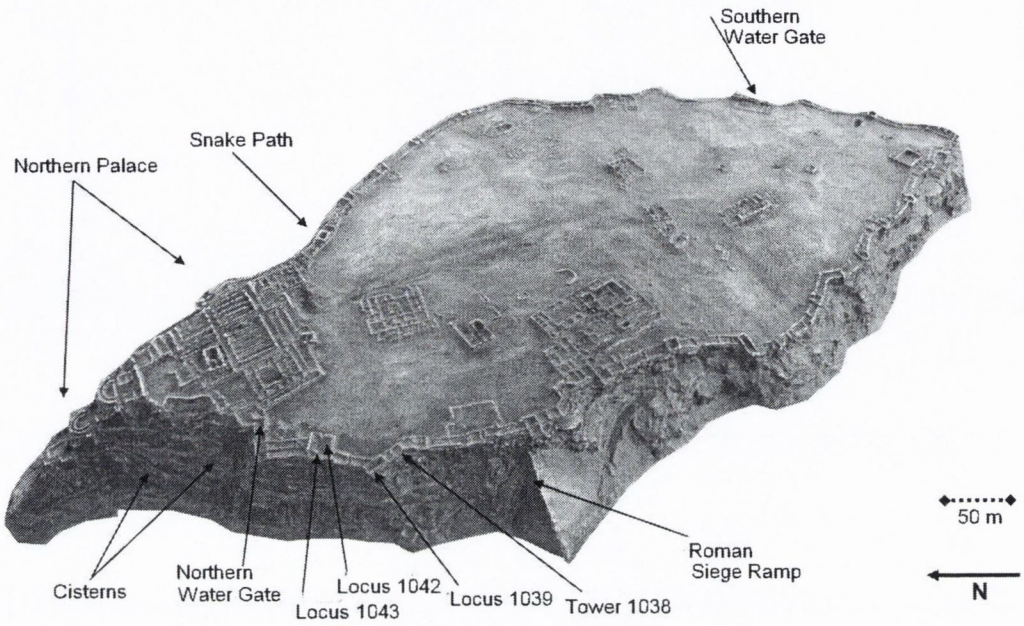
Figure 25 –Masada (looking west)



Introduction

Masada is a huge and complicated archaeological site and, while many of its elements, particularly those related to the period of the first rebellion and the Roman siege of Masada, are interrelated an examination of its many elements and phases is not possible here, and we shall focus on the building identified as a synagogue by Yigael Yadin in 1963/64. Nevertheless, it is necessary to summarise Josephus's Masada narrative dealing with the period of the first Jewish rebellion against Rome, along with some details of geography and chronology, and the history of the excavations, to set the subject of this chapter, Locus 1042 (the synagogue), into context.

Figure 26 – Masada (context and locations)[393]



All buildings and structures on Masada with which we are here concerned will be referred to by the locus numbers they were assigned during the Yigael Yadin excavations. The relevant buildings here are Locus 1042 ('the Synagogue'); Locus 1043 (the 'Genizah'), and Locus 1039 (The 'Casemate of the Scrolls'), and all of these locations are identified at Figure 26 above. Locus 1042 is located on the northwestern side of the acropolis of Masada, near the Herodian northern palace complex, and was identified as a synagogue in the 1963/64 excavations run by Yigael Yadin.

Josephus's Masada Narrative

Other than Josephus, the primary sources on the subject of Masada are limited to passing references to its geography in Strabo and Pliny the Elder. The only material we have relating to evens on Masada at the end of the first Jewish war against Rome are found in Josephus, in *AJ*, *BJ* and *Vitae*. Josephus gives no

[393] Author's photograph of the scale model of Masada (on Masada).

account of the period between the death of Herod and the occupation of the site by the rebels.[394]

During the military and political turmoil that accompanied Herod the Great's struggle to become King of Judæa in 40 BCE, and immediately prior to his journey to Rome to appeal to the Roman Senate for help, he sent members of his family and court to Masada (*BJ*, 1.267-285) to keep them safe from Malichus (an enemy of the Herodian family and the person who supposedly had Herod's father, Antipater, poisoned only four years earlier[395]). This Malichus, at some earlier point, had maintained his own garrison on Masada (*AJ* 14.296; *BJ* 1.237-238).

Once Herod was established as king of Judæa with the assistance of the Romans he began an enormous and ambitious construction programme on Masada, involving building palaces, barracks, baths, storehouses, workshops and water systems (*BJ* 7.285-300), including the subject of this chapter, Locus 1042, which is situated in the northwestern section of the acropolis (see Figure 26 above).[396] Josephus says that Herod began building the fortress on Masada as a refuge in case there should be an attempt to oust him, either by his own people or by Cleopatra VII's machinations. Thus, he probably began building on Masada somewhere between 37 and 31 BCE (during which time Cleopatra's relationship with Mark Antony, according to Josephus (*BJ* 7.300), threatened Herod's relationship with Rome. It is generally thought that Josephus must have visited Masada, as his descriptions of the Herodian building programme including the

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[394] H.M. Cotton & J. Geiger, *Masada II: The Latin and Greek Documents, The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963 – 1965. Final Reports*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, (1989): 3.

[395] *AJ* 14.282. This was in 44 BCE, the same year that Julius Caesar, patron and friend of the Herodian dynasty, was assassinated.

[396] A. Negev & S. Gibson (eds.), *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, Continuum, New York and London (2001): 320.

palatial structures, barracks, cisterns, swimming pools and storage facilities are often accurate. Unfortunately, he makes no references to any of the casemate chambers that are the focus of this case study, nor to the existence of a synagogue at any stage before, during or after the occupation of Masada by the rebels.

Nothing is known about Masada between the years following Herod's death in about 6 BCE and the Jewish war against Rome from 66-73 CE. When Josephus picks up the story of Masada again, it is 66 CE, at the start of the war against the Romans. A Roman garrison at Masada has been taken over by Jewish rebels using some sort of "treachery" (*BJ* 2.408). Josephus refers to the rebels involved as *Sicarii*, and says they were led by a man named Eleazar (*BJ* 7.297).[397]

Josephus reports that these *Sicarii*, and other rebel factions who joined them later, held the fortress of Masada until May of 73 CE, when it fell to the Roman Tenth Legion *Fretensis*, commanded by Flavius Silva. Josephus said that in the hours before the fortress fell, Eleazar, the rebel leader, had ordered his men to destroy everything except their food supplies to show that they had chosen to die rather than be captured by the Romans. According to Josephus's account, the rebels drew lots and killed one another in turn, each man killing his family, on down to the last man, who would be the only one to have to take his own life (Josephus, *BJ* 7.389-401).

The siege of the Masada ended in 73 CE with the Romans breaking through the defensive walls only to find that all but two women and five children had died (*BJ* 7.405-406). According to Josephus, these two women and five children had

[397] Josephus, *BJ* 2.425.

survived the suicide on Masada by hiding inside one of Masada's many cisterns and it was from the women that the Romans learnt of events. After the siege and the re-establishment of a Roman garrison at Masada, the site was lost to the historical record until the nineteenth century.[398]

This, then, is broadly what Josephus tells us about Masada through to the end of the first Jewish war. It is important to note that there are some problems and inconsistencies with Josephus's accounts – which will not be explored here because they do not relate to the identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue.[399] In any event, while Josephus's descriptions of the palatial and military buildings on Masada have proved to be quite accurate in their detail, he never refers to a synagogue – or a requirement for one – in his narrative.

The Masada Acropolis

The acropolis of Masada is encircled by a fortified double casemate wall (part of the Herodian construction phase), except for the area of the three-tiered Northern Palace of Herod the Great (see Figure 26 above). All of the rooms adjoining this wall were occupied during the period of the rebellion, and many were modified by its occupants for their use.[400] Objects, such as clothes, leather articles, papyri, sandals, nails, baskets, and glass, stone, bronze vessels, food, gem stones, jewellery, seal rings, arrowheads, ballistas, and so on, were found scattered in the

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[398] Although there was occupation of the site after the Jewish rebellion, and there are late Roman/Byzantine church ruins on the acropolis and it is likely that some of the occupation of the casemate chambers dates from this period.

[399] See Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains and the Credibility of Josephus", in *JJS*, Volume 33 (Essays in honour of Yigael Yadin), Nos. 1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982): 385-405 and D.J. Ladouceur, "Josephus and Masada", in L.H. Feldman and G. Hata, *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit (1989): 95-113. There are many other discourses on the subject of Josephus's reliability, none of which is relevant to the identification of a synagogue at Masada.

[400] R. Reich, "Baking and Cooking at Masada", in *ZDPV*, Harrassowitz Verlag, 119 2 (2003): 144.

casemate rooms.[401] During the rebellion, towers along the casemate served as workshops, and some 350 bronze coins of the period of the rebellion lay scattered next to an oven in one of them.[402] Also discovered in the casemate rooms were hundreds of coins from the period of the rebellion, including a hoard of seventeen silver shekels, three of which were rare Year 5 shekels of the war (the year Jerusalem fell to the Romans) as well as a number of fragments of biblical and extra-biblical scrolls in Aramaic and Hebrew, letters in Latin and Greek, lists, and many *ostraca* and *tituli picti*.[403]

While many of the large buildings in the interior and at the northern end of the acropolis were razed during or at the end of the siege, few of the casemate chambers had been burned; but their miscellaneous contents were strewn around on floors, ovens, and in niches in the walls. Piles of burnt material containing the remains of many different articles were found in the corners of some of the rooms, indicating that they had been collected and deliberately set alight.[404]

History of the excavations at Masada

The site of Masada was first identified in 1838 from a distance, but not explored until 1867, when Charles Warren of the British Royal Engineers, climbed Masada's eastern side, tracing what Josephus referred to as the Snake Path.[405] All of the natural approaches to the summit of Masada are quite difficult: these are the White Rock on the west (*BJ* 7.305), the southern and northern sides, and the Snake Path on the east (*BJ* 7.282). There is also another route to the summit of

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[401] Netzer (1993b): 980.
[402] Netzer (1993b): 980.
[403] Netzer (1993b): 980. *Tituli picti* are commercial stamps, usually on amphora handles, jugs, etc, which give details of manufacture, origin, destination, etc.
[404] Netzer (1993b): 980.
[405] Netzer Netzer (1993b): 974.

Masada from the west, on a high sloping rock escarpment, along which the Roman siege ramp was built (*BJ* 7.305-309) (see Figure 26 above).[406]

Masada was excavated from October 1963 to April 1964 and again from December 1964 to March 1965 under the direction of the retired military general and archaeologist, Yigael Yadin (son of Eleazar Lipa Sukenik), and excavations and conservation continue, on a smaller scale, to this day.[407]

The Zealots and *Sicarii* on Masada

It is worth mentioning here that both Yigael Yadin (under whose leadership the excavations of Masada began) and Ehud Netzer (who wrote the text for the third volume of the Masada Final Reports, including the analysis of Locii 1042 and 1043, the subjects of this chapter) refer throughout to the rebels on Masada as the 'Zealots'. That this came about because of his pre-existing expectations is clear when we look at what he said in relation to the excavations on Masada:

> Before starting the excavations at Masada, we dreamed of the possibility of finding scrolls there. I say "dreamed" because the hope that we would could not be very bright. Hitherto, all the scrolls which had been found in the vicinity of the Dead Sea had been discovered only in caves, where they had been hidden intentionally, and where the damage they had suffered – comparatively slight – had been damage by nature, such as mild dampness, or by the nibbling of small animals. Now, as we approached Masada, we asked ourselves: 'Had the Zealots hidden their writings before committing suicide? And if they had, would any of them still be preserved? And would we find them?'"[408]

Yadin had a clear idea of what he was looking for, the form of the historical narrative he accepted, and where he intended looking for evidence to support his view before even starting to dig. There are a multitude of possible socio-political

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[406] Netzer Netzer (1993b): 973-4.
[407] Netzer Netzer (1993b): 974.
[408] Y. Yadin, *Masada. Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*, Abacus, London, 1979, 168.

and personal reasons for Yadin to have taken this approach to digging on Masada, but they all fall outside the scope of this dissertation, and are not relevant to the analysis of the archaeological material relating to the subject of this chapter (Locii 1042 and 1043).

Because his work has reached such a wide audience, Yadin's use of the term 'Zealot' has had a major impact on the interpretation of the archaeology and on the accepted history of Masada. It has fuelled much of the mythology around the Masada story, so that almost every reference to Masada includes a description of the Zealots who occupied it and who died defending it.[409] Certainly, there were zealots on Masada during the rebellion, but there were also *sicarii*, members of the priesthood and general refugee groups, including women and children. The population of Masada during the seven years of the rebellion was not static, and there was a constant shifting of individuals and groups in and out as people fled

[409] There are a multitude of discussions about who the *Sicarii* and the Zealots were, how and where their roles overlapped, see (for example): K. Atkinson and J. Magness, "Josephus's Essenes and the Qumran Community" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Summer 2010, Vol. 129 Issue 2, 317-342; S.J.D. Cohen, "Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains and Credibility of Josephus", *JJS*, 33 (1982): 385-405; L.H. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship (1937-1980)*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York (1984); M. Hengel, *The Zealots*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh (1989); D.J. Ladouceur, "Josephus and Masada", in L.H. Feldman and G. Hata, *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit (1989): 95-113; E. Netzer, "Masada", in *NEAEHL*, Ephraim Stern (ed.), The Israel Exploration Society, Carta, Jerusalem (1993b): 973-985; E. Netzer, "The Rebels' Archives at Masada", Israel Exploration Journal 54.2 (2004b): 218-229; M. Pearlman, *The Zealots of Masada*, Hamish Hamilton, London (1967); M. Ramazzotti, "Where was Josephus' Lying — in his Life or in the War?", in F. Parente and J. Slievers (eds.), *Josephus and the History of the Graeco-Roman Period. Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, Leiden: Brill (1994): 279-289; S. Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaean Politics*, EJ Brill, Leiden, New York, Köln (1990); M. Smith, "Zealots and Sicarii, Their Origins and Relation", *HTR* 64 (1971): 1-19; M. Stern, "Zealots" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book* (1973) 135-153; L. Ullmann, and J.J. Price, "Drama and History in Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum*", in *SCI*, Volume XXI (2002): 91-111; Y. Yadin, *Masada. Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*, Phoenix Illustrated, London (1966); Y. Yadin, "Masada", *EJ 11* (1971): 1078-1091; Y. Yadin and J. Naveh, "The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions", in *Masada I, Final Reports*, Volume I, Israel Exploration Society, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (1989); S. Zeitlin, "Masada and the Sicarii", in *JQR*, New Series Vol. 55, No. 4. (April 1965): 299-317; idem "The Sicarii and Masada", in *JQR*, New Series, Vol. 57, No. 4. (April 1967): 251-270, and many others.

from the Romans (and from each other, there being so much factional strife amongst the rebel groupings).[410]

As against this, since we only have one person's account of events on Masada, and since that source is Josephus, we must take some notice of his identifications of the involved parties, even though he can be confusing and contradictory.[411] It is also important, in the context of our discussion of the archaeological material pertaining to our site, not to place too much weight on who the *sicarii* and *zealots* on Masada were, how they interacted, and the reasons Josephus described them in particular ways because, as will become clear in this chapter, there is no way to associate any particular group with the buildings with which this chapter is concerned. However, it is apposite to say a little about both groups since the issue remains so vexed.

Stern, writing his seminal article about the possible connections between the *Sicarii* and the Zealots, sees the *Sicarii* as having been run out of Jerusalem and active on Masada only after the death of their leader, Menahem, at the hands of the Zealots then in control of the Jerusalem Temple. He says that the *Sicarii* "continued to exist and it was they who were destined to be the last to hold aloft the standard of rebellion."[412] Thus, the rebels under the leadership of Eleazar ben Jair (who took over leadership of the *Sicarii* after Menahem's death) entrenched

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[410] As the Roman historian Tacitus remarked in terms of the factions vying for control of Jerusalem during the rebellion (*Histories* 5.12.3-4) "There were three generals, three armies: the outermost and largest circuit of the walls was held by Simon, the middle of the city by John, and the temple was guarded by Eleazar. John and Simon were strong in numbers and equipment, Eleazar had the advantage of position: between these three there was constant fighting, treachery and arson, and a great store of grain was consumed. Then John got possession of the temple by sending a party, under pretence of offering sacrifice, to slay Eleazar and his troops. So the citizens were divided into two factions until, at the approach of the Romans, foreign war produced concord."

[411] N. Ben-Yehuda, *Sacrificing Truth. Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*, Humanity Books, New York (2002): 35.

[412] M. Stern, "Zealots" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book* (1973): 139.

themselves on Masada, but their sphere of operations was confined to the adjacent area around En Gedi (*BJ* 4:398-405).[413]

According to Stern, very few of the rebels fighting against Rome accepted the specific eschatological ideology of the *Sicarii* (as contained in Eleazar ben Jair's speech to his rebel cohorts before they committed suicide rather than be taken captive by the Romans after the fall of Masada).[414] Meanwhile, the Zealots retained overall control of Jerusalem and Stern says there is little reason to doubt that the priests of Jerusalem were the "fomenting element among the Zealots".[415] Josephus, in fact, describes the Zealots as "lawless" and says that there was no "villainy recorded in history that they failed to emulate zealously". And yet they took their name from their professed zeal for virtue, either in mockery of those they wronged, so brutal was their nature, or reckoning the greatest of evils good" (*BJ* 7.268-270).[416]

While some scholars see the Zealots as part of the same movement to which the *Sicarii* belonged, others reject the possibility of any connection. Stern concedes that there is "no clear evidence in the sources of any connection [...] during the Revolt", despite a [single] reference to the followers of the *Sicarii* under Menahem's leadership as "zealots" (*BJ* 2:444).[417] Even so, Stern argues that there does seem to be a link and suggests, cautiously, that there was some cooperation "between the founders of the Zealots and of the Sicarii during the census of

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[413] Stern (1973): 140.
[414] Stern (1973): 142. Of course, Stern ignores the view that ben Jair's speech and, all that follows it, is merely a literary construct designed by Josephus to induce some sympathy among his Roman audience for the Jewish rebels.
[415] Stern (1973): 145.
[416] Stern (1973): 142.
[417] M. Hengel, *The Zealots*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh (1989): 400. Hengel sees this reference as supporting evidence of the links between the *Sicarii* and the Zealots.

Quirinius, and that from the outset the difference between these two movements was a tangible one. This difference found its expression in the decisive schism which took place during the Revolt after a brief period of cooperation at its beginning."[418] Stern concludes that: "Although it cannot be denied that the picture given here of the various currents in the Jewish freedom movement is to a considerable extent hypothetical, one thing is nevertheless indisputably clear, namely, that the unifying factors among them outnumbered the divisive ones. From this point of view there is perhaps some justification for the view of those historians who are accustomed to speak generally of a Zealot movement which fearlessly raised the standard of revolt against the Roman Empire when it was at the height of its power."[419]

On the other hand, Hengel, ultimately sees the two groups as interconnected and with common origins.[420] "If today we give these groups, including the *Sicarii*, the name of 'Zealots', it is certainly a correct name since they were all orientated towards Phinehas' paradigmatic act.[421] Hengel concedes, however, that "it cannot be denied that the problem of the 'party names' raises certain questions on the basis of the language used by our main source, Josephus."[422]

Hengel describes the Zealots as having taken control of Masada after their flight from Jerusalem: "It was only when Jerusalem had decided to support the cause of revolt that the Zealots openly attacked the strongholds of the Roman occupation.

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[418] Stern (1973): 146.
[419] Stern (1973): 153.
[420] Hengel (1989): 88-89. Hengel also refers to Locus 1042 on Masada as a "synagogue" without any analysis of the archaeology of the site, nor to its physical location on the acropolis, and so has accepted Yadin's and Netzer's interpretation of the archaeological evidence.
[421] This Phinehas was described as a 'Zealot' in Numbers 25:10 ff; 4 Maccabees 18.12; and the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 82b.
[422] Hengel (1989): 403.

They made a surprise attack against Masada on the Dead Sea. This fortress had been built by Herod and was almost impregnable, but the Zealots overcame the Roman occupying forces, seized control of it and occupied it themselves with their own people. The weapons and equipment that they found there were divided by their leader, Menahem, the son of Judas the Galilaean, among his followers and the population of the country."[423]

However, Josephus is quite specific on this point, and describes the group who took control of Masada as the "*Sicarii*" (*BJ* 7.252ff). It is not clear why Hengel has chosen to refer to rebel group who took control of Masada as the "Zealots" when Josephus does not use that term.

At the same time, Hengel talks of the group of Zealots who "had demonstrated their military strength by their successful surprise attack against Masada. Either simultaneously or immediately afterwards, by virtue of his influential position and with the support of the Zealot majority of the lower clergy, Eleazar, the *sagan* who had come over to their side, managed to win the struggle for the Temple. [...] The Zealots had worked for two generations towards and had now achieved their aim. Almost the entire population had joined in the Holy War against Rome."[424]

This then implies that the only group in control of Masada was religiously founded which, again, does not appear to be supported in the archaeology and is most assuredly not supported in Josephus's accounts of the rebels' thuggish raids into the countryside around to obtain supplies (*BJ* 4.402-405), which seems to undermine Hengel's description of the *Sicarii* as a "closed and disciplined group

[423] Hengel (1989): 358-359.
[424] Hengel (1989): 363.

whose steadfastness was based on a determination to keep to the rule of God."[425] His central thesis, that the "Jewish freedom fighters" had been consolidating themselves as the "party of the Zealots" since the reign of Gaius Caligula (who wanted to erect a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple) which was evidenced by the "ordinary people" being prepared to die as had done their "Zealot models, the *Sicarii*, in Masada,[426] seems to be a circular argument, especially since the siege on Masada took place after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The rebels on Masada may indeed have represented the last pocket of Jewish resistance to the Romans but, by the time they fell, the war against Rome was over, the Zealot leadership vanquished, the Temple treasures already looted and taken to Rome and paraded as part of Titus's Triumph.

Josephus's tangled account of the parties involved in the fight for Jerusalem and the rebels on Masada makes it possible to claim, as Yadin did, that the rebels on Masada were Zealots, even though Josephus does not name them as such. Hengel has also, following Yadin, tied the Zealots and the *Sicarii* together, as forming different parts of one group, allowing him to refer to the rebels on Masada, uniformly, as Zealots. Neither Josephus's Masada narrative, nor Stern's and later Hengel's analyses of Josephus's account, unfortunately, leaves us much wiser or able to make definitive statements as to the identity of either group. Thankfully, none of this impacts on the discussion of the archaeology of the site that follows.

The identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue

Yigael Yadin's excavations on Masada in the 1960s revealed occupation layers from the Herodian through to the Byzantine period, including the period of the

[425] Hengel (1989): 261.
[426] Hengel (1989): 265-266.

Jewish rebellion (66-73 CE).[427] Almost all of the built-up areas of Masada were uncovered during this period, including Locus 1042; the subject of this chapter (see Figure 26 above).

In 1994, the World Heritage Committee launched the *Global Strategy for a Balanced, Representative and Credible World Heritage List*, aiming to ensure that the list reflected the world's cultural diversity of outstanding universal value and Masada became a World Heritage Site in 2001.[428]

The identification of Locus 1042 (see Figure 26 above) as a synagogue was made by Yigael Yadin during excavations on Masada in 1963/4. The first season of digging revealed a rectangular structure with benches around the walls.[429] In the northwestern corner of this building, the excavators found a separate small room attached (Locus 1043, the "genizah").[430] When Locus 1042 was identified as a synagogue, it was immediately received into the historical record as the first pre-70 CE synagogue to be identified in the land of Israel.[431] Locus 1042 is pivotal to this entire study because all other synagogues attributed to the first century CE are compared to it.

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[427] Although Josephus refers to earlier occupation.

[428] See UNESCO: www.http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1040. "Under criteria (iii), (iv) and (vi) of its charter: that Masada is a symbol of the ancient Jewish kingdom of Israel, of its violent destruction in the later first century CE, and of the subsequent Diaspora; that the palace of Herod the Great at Masada is an outstanding example of a luxurious villa of the Early Roman Empire, whilst the camps and other fortifications that encircle the monument constitute the finest and most complete Roman siege works to have survived to the present day; and that the events during the last days of the Jewish rebels who occupied the fortress and palace of Masada make it a symbol both of Jewish cultural identity and, more universally, of the continuing human struggle between oppression and liberty."

[429] Y. Yadin, *Masada*, Phoenix Illustrated, London (1997): 181.

[430] Yadin (1997): 181.

[431] L.H Feldman, "Masada: a critique of recent scholarship", in J. Neusner (ed.). *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty, Part Two, Leiden, E.J. Brill (1975): 224.

It is important to note that the original phase of Locus 1042, built by Herod as part of his palace complex, was in use for possibly up to eighty years before being adapted to the form that is preserved today, which was in use at the time of the first rebellion. Unlike the buildings identified as synagogues at Delos, Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho, Herodium and Gamla, there are no architectural comparisons to be offered here. This is not an adapted villa or house, as is the case with the structures identified at Delos and Jericho, nor was Locus 1042 designed as a public building in the same way as the building identified as a synagogue at Gamla. Nor is it a converted triclinium, such as the building identified as a synagogue at Herodium (see chapters on Delos, Jericho, Herodium and Gamla herein).

The excavators found some coins of the period of the first Jewish war in Locus 1042, and saw that the benches, where the plaster was damaged, had been made out of quarried stone and broken pieces of dressed stone which had been taken from other buildings on Masada. It was therefore clear to the excavators that the benches had been built after the various parts of the palace had been destroyed, and that this structure had the character of an assembly space. This led Yadin to wonder what its purpose might have been.[432] Yet, even in that first season of digging, Yadin thought that Locus 1042 was a synagogue, on the basis that the building was [unintentionally but fortuitously] orientated towards Jerusalem, that an ostracon with the inscription *priestly tithe* had been found on the floor, and that coins of the period of the first Jewish war were also found there.[433] Yadin argued that if it was a synagogue, then it was a very important discovery because, up until this point, the earliest synagogues discovered in the land of Israel belonged to the

[432] Yadin (1997): 184.
[433] Yadin (1997): 184.

end of the second or beginning of the third century CE.[434] As we shall see in the archaeological discussion below, there is no evidence of any sort that gives us any information in relation to how the earliest (Herodian) phase of Locus 1042 was used.

Excited by the prospect of identifying a first century synagogue, the Yadin's team of archaeologists continued to excavate Locus 1042 and, during the second season of digging, they discovered that there had been two clear stages of construction. In the first phase, the building was divided into two main sections comprising an antechamber and a main chamber with columns along its southern, western and northern sides. The benches belonged to the second phase, as did Locus 1043, the smaller room. According to Yadin, at the point when the 'Zealots'[435] came to add the small room and the benches they removed two of the pillars from the western row, tore down the wall dividing the antechamber from the main room to its west and set up two pillars in its place.[436]

While Yadin could not determine the function of the building in the original Herodian phase, he suggested that even then it might have been a synagogue. He made this argument on three bases: first, that it was unlikely that Herod would have denied a place of worship for the Jewish members of his family and other Jews who were members of his court; second, that the architectural plan is very reminiscent of the plan of several early synagogues discovered in Galilee[437]. The third argument, he said, was the existence of a strong conservative tradition in the

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[434] Yadin (1997): 184.
[435] This is Yadin's appellation, there is no reference in Josephus or anything in the archaeological record to suggest that a particular group was responsible for Locus 1042 and its conversion.
[436] Yadin (1997): 185.
[437] By which he means the second and third century CE synagogues he has referred to already as being the earliest discovered in Israel.

location of houses of worship, and that it would be in keeping with this tradition that the Zealots, when deciding on their synagogue, specifically chose this place knowing that it had previously served as a synagogue. This, he said, would explain, too, why even the original building had been oriented towards Jerusalem.[438]

While making exploratory cuts in the small room (Locus 1043), the excavators uncovered a piece of rolled scroll, which later turned out to be sections from the book of Deuteronomy.[439] When the area of the cut was examined more closely, the excavators found that a pit had once been dug in this spot. The scroll fragment had been found at the bottom of this pit which had later been filled with earth and stones. Yadin said that Locus 1043 had therefore been a *genizah*, and the scroll may have been buried while the Zealots lived there. This discovery spurred the excavators into removing the whole of the second-phase floor to see if there were any other such pits.[440]

During this process, Moshe Cohen, a chief petty officer in the Israeli navy and enthusiastic amateur archaeologist, discovered a portion of floor was missing in the southern section of Locus 1043. Beneath the missing section of floor was a pit full of stamped-down earth in which, when he rifled through it with his bare hands, he found the remains of another scroll. This second scroll fragment was identified as containing sections of Ezekiel 37; the vision of the dry bones.[441] Thus, according to Yadin, the synagogue identification was made on the basis that

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[438] Yadin (1997): 185-187. Again, it is Yadin's presumption that Locus 1042 was a synagogue used by the Zealots.
[439] The team architects Munia-Immanuel (Izaak) Dunayevsky and Ehud Menzel.
[440] Yadin (1997): 187. The removal of the floor will be important to an understanding of the phases of the building, which will be explored below.
[441] Yadin (1997): 187.

the structural adaptations were the work of the Zealots, coupled with the nature of the finds. He reiterated also that the back wall of Locus 1042 was orientated exactly in the direction of Jerusalem.[442] While Yadin acknowledged the lack of material to help identify the 'usual plan' of a Second Temple period synagogue, he said that we may assume that at this stage it served as a place of assembly and preaching and that there could be no doubt that in its second stage it served as a place of public assembly, and as such it resembles the *ecclesiasteria* known to us from the Hellenistic period onwards.[443] Yadin said that we may therefore assume that at this stage Locus 1042 served first and foremost as a place of assembly and preaching. From this Yadin concluded that first century synagogues were built on this model. He went on to suggest that if his hypothesis was correct, then this was not only the earliest synagogue ever discovered, but also the only one dating from the second temple period.[444] Since then, Locus 1042 has been treated as the standard paradigm of 'ancient synagogue' in the scholarship.

The ancient sources

Other than Josephus's accounts of Masada during the first Jewish war against Rome in *AJ* and *BJ*, there are few descriptions of the area (let alone of its inhabitants) in any of the ancient literature. In Pliny we find a passing reference to Masada:

> Next to it we come to Masada, a fortress on a rock, not far from Lake Asphaltites. Thus much concerning Judæa.
>
> Pliny, *Natural Histories* 5.17.29-31[445]

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[442] Y. Yadin, "The Excavation of Masada – 1963/64. Preliminary Report", *IEJ*, Volume 5, Numbers 1-2, Jerusalem, Israel (1965): 78.
[443] Yadin (1965): 78.
[444] Yadin (1965): 79.
[445] "And to the Essenes who lived in the area, as well as to the town of En Gedi: "Lying on the west of Asphaltites, and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations, are the Esseni, a

In Strabo there is a description of the area around the Dead Sea, including a reference to Masada:

> Many other evidences are produced to show that the country is fiery; for near Moasada are to be seen rugged rocks that have been scorched, as also, in many places, fissures and ashy soil, and drops of pitch that emit foul odours to a great distance [...]
>
> Strabo, *Geography*, XVI.2:44[446]

Finally, two documents were found at Wadi al-Murabba'at, located in the upper part of Nahal Dragot, which empties into the Dead Sea, near Kibbutz Mitzpe Shalem, not far from Qumran. The first document is a deed of divorce (on papyrus) between Yehoseph son of Naqsan and his wife Miriam dated the "First of Marheshvan in the Year Six at Masada" (around 111 CE).[447] The second is the text of an ostracon which reads, in part, "and I ascended from there to Masada", which is dated to around 200 CE.[448]

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people that live apart from the world, and marvellous beyond all others throughout the whole earth, for they have no women among them; to sexual desire they are strangers; money they have none; the palm-trees are their only companions. Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them, driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune, and wearied with the miseries of life. Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence, without a single birth taking place there; so fruitful a source of population to it is that weariness of life which is felt by others. Below this people was formerly the town of Engadda, second only to Hierosolyma in the fertility of its soil and its groves of palm-trees; now, like it, it is another heap of ashes. Next to it we come to Masada, a fortress on a rock, not far from Lake Asphaltites. Thus much concerning Judæa."

[446] "[...] and ruined settlements here and there; and therefore people believe the oft-repeated assertions of the local inhabitants, that there were once thirteen inhabited cities in that region of which Sodom was the metropolis, but that a circuit of about sixty stadia of that city escaped unharmed; and that by reason of earthquakes and of eruptions of fire and of hot waters containing asphalt and sulphur, the lake burst its bounds, and rocks were enveloped with fire; and, as for the cities, some were swallowed up and others were abandoned by such as were able to escape. But Eratosthenes [the work of Eratosthenes has been lost to history and is only known through reference to him by other historians and philosophers] says, on the contrary, that the country was a lake, and that most of it was uncovered by outbreaks, as was the case with the sea."

[447] P. Benoit, J.T. Milik and R. de Vaux (eds). *Discoveries in the Judæan Desert II. Les Grottes de Murabba'at*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press (1961): 106 ff.

[448] Benoit, Milik & de Vaux (1961): 173,

Outside Josephus's accounts of the first Jewish war and the part Masada played in it, there is little information to be gleaned from the ancient sources. There are no corroborating sources for Josephus's accounts of the siege of Masada, and consequently there are numerous arguments about the accuracy and/or veracity of his reports, but this does not impact on the identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue, since nowhere does Josephus discuss the religious practices of the rebels on Masada, let alone the existence of a synagogue there. On the other hand, since our only literary source for the occupation of Masada during the course of the Jewish war against the Romans *is* Josephus, we must turn to the archaeology for corroboration. A close analysis of the details of the excavation reports will be discussed below.

Ostraca, coins and documents

Over 700 ostraca in total were found on Masada.[449] More are continuing to be found as excavations and conservation work continue, many are still unpublished. Of those found, about half are inscribed with single letters or combinations of letters and most were found in or near the storerooms in the northern section of the acropolis, scattered about the place and/or in groups of the same type.[450]

The majority of the Hebrew and Aramaic (around 60%) were found in the area of the northern Water Gate (see Figure 26 above) and in an adjoining room. It is convincingly argued by the excavators that the Water Gate area was used to register the people who lived on Masada during the rebellion, and that it was therefore likely that personal or public documents were deposited here for

[449] In the excavation reports, *tituli picti* and *ostraca* are lumped together as though they are the same thing.
[450] Netzer (1993b): 982.

safekeeping.[451] The ostraca found fall into the category of public documents, as they appear to have been used to define work patterns, to distribute food, and to draw up lists of people. It is clear that without some system to record the growing number of people present at any given time (given the logistical difficulties of feeding and housing them), life on Masada during the rebellion would have been chaotic.[452]

The ostracon found in Locus 1042

Only one ostracon was found in Locus 1042, this was inscribed מעשר כהן (*priestly tithe*).[453] This was found just outside the threshold of Locus 1043 (see Figure 26 above and Figure 28 below). It is hard to know what to make of it, but certainly at the last stages of the siege on Masada, the population on Masada had been swollen by refugees from Jerusalem and elsewhere. The מעשר כהן ostracon certainly seems to imply the presence of some form of religious representation on Masada during the period of the revolt, but it does not follow that there was a synagogue to which this person was attached. And although this inscription is described as being on an ostracon, it was actually on the shoulder of a storage jar.[454] This is relevant because some people did not (or could not) deliver their tithes to the Temple in Jerusalem, but instead gave them to priests living in their villages and towns. It is possible that at least some of the rebels and/or refugees

[451] E. Netzer, "The Rebels' Archives at Masada", in *IEJ* 54 (2004): 221-222.
[452] Netzer (2004): 225.
[453] Yadin refers to a second one with the name *Hezekiah* written on it, but in the excavation reports it is listed as having been found in Locus 1044, in the storeroom to the north of Locus 1042, and not associated with Locus 1042 at all.
[454] Y. Yadin and J. Naveh, "The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions", in *Masada I, Final Reports*, Volume I, Israel Exploration Society, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (1989): 33.

on Masada followed this custom and kept their tithe offerings, hoping that the Temple in Jerusalem would be restored after the war was over.[455]

Texts found in Locus 1042/1043

Other than the small fragments of Ezekiel and Deuteronomy, no texts were found in Locus 1042/1043.

Texts found in Locus 1039 / The Casemate of the Scrolls

A large number of documents were found in Locus 1039 (the so-called "Casemate of the Scrolls". Locus 1039 (see Figure 26 above) was the location of a large hoard of documents and other materials, comprising biblical and extra-biblical texts, letters and lists, in Greek, Latin, Aramaic and Hebrew. This collection included a papyrus, written in Latin, and containing parts of lines from Virgil's *Aenid* 4.9 (the section in which Dido writes to her sister describing her nightmares).[456] But there were also many other items found here, which had apparently been collected together. For example, the excavators found a red-orange cornelian seal of Victory/Nike along with a hoard of 19 rebel period shekels, eighteen Latin papyri and four Greek papyri.[457] Also found were a broken and burnt bone sword pommel,[458] a scabbard mount and a dagger suspension loop,[459] shield fragments,[460] and a belt-buckle tongue,[461] amongst other things. Many hundreds of siege items were found in Locus 1039, including

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[455] Yadin & Naveh (1989): 39.
[456] H. Eshel, "Josephus' View on Judaism without the Temple in Light of the Discoveries at Masada and Murabba'at", in B. Ego, A. Lange & P. Pilhofer, *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen (1999): 235.
[457] M. Hershkovitz and S. Amorai-Stark, "The Gems from Masada", in J. Aviram, G. Foerster, E. Netzer & G.D. Stiebl (eds.). *Masada VIII, Final Reports*, Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (2007): 219.
[458] G. Stiebl and J. Magness, "Military Equipment from Masada", in Aviram, Foerster, Netzer & Stiebl (2007): 8.
[459] Stiebl & Magness (2007): 10.
[460] Stiebl & Magness (2007): 11.
[461] Stiebl & Magness (2007): 12.

ballista balls, arrows, arrowheads and rolling stones. The defensive and offensive militaria need not concern us, as they relate to the last stages of the siege rather than to the general occupation of Masada and use of the structure by the rebels.

The excavators had particular difficulties putting together the report on Locus 1039 because the audio recordings of the discussions held during the period 13-22 November 1963 (when the more important finds in the locus were made) were lost.[462] Whilst there are photographs, basket lists, some locus cards and a preliminary report, there is now nothing specifying the exact locations where items were found or the precise contexts in which they were found.[463]

Locus 1039 is more or less rectangular in shape. Like all the other casemate rooms, it was adapted during the period of the first rebellion, and all of the installations referred to herein relate to that period of occupation. In the southern part of the room, there is a small underground silo (perhaps for grain or oil), in the southeastern corner; there is a stove built against the eastern wall and a small lime-plaster lined basin (70 x 50 cm) built into the floor by the western wall. Finally, there is a pit dug into the southwestern corner of the room.[464]

A large concentration of material was found when clearing the upper layer of stone siege and roof debris from the southern extremity of Locus 1039. These objects were very closely packed together. First uncovered were fragments of

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[462] Daily meetings were held to discuss the finds and possible interpretations of each locus during the excavations. These were always recorded on audio tapes.
[463] E. Netzer, *Masada III: The Buildings, Stratigraphy and Architecture, The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963 – 1965. Final Reports*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1991b): 417.
[464] Netzer (1991b) 418.

reed baskets and fabrics and then the 19 silver shekels mentioned above, 52 other coins and well as eighteen Latin and four Greek papyri[465].

Also found in Locus 1039 were 15 parchment fragments written in Hebrew. These fragments included part of a Ben-Sira scroll[466] and a fragment of עולת השבת שרות ("Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice"), a document associated with Qumran and the Essenes in modern scholarship.[467] There were also fragments from Genesis, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and Psalms.[468] The audio discussions relating to the contexts in which these fragments were found are the ones that were lost.[469]

As digging continued in Locus 1039, it turned out that the layer with the most dense concentration of objects was about 40 cm deep. Beneath this, a new layer was exposed, containing a few hundred ballistas and rolling stones, which must have fallen in from a room or a rooftop above when the roof of Locus 1039 collapsed.[470]

While it is clear that Locus 1039 was occupied during the period of the rebellion, it is not clear to what use it was put. It may have been some sort of a workroom or cook room because of the basin, silo and oven. Perhaps this was one of many kitchens for the groups of the rebels on Masada. It should be noted that there are difficulties in associating Locus 1039 with Locus 1042, as there are two other chambers in between them which have the same sort of domestic installations in

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[465] Netzer (1991b) 418.
[466] Y. Yadin, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada*, Israel Exploration Society and the Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem (1965).
[467] C. Newsome & Y. Yadin, "The Masada Fragments of the Qumran Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice", *IEJ* 34 (1984): 77-88.
[468] S. Talmon, "Hebrew Written Fragments from Masada", in *DSD* Vol. 3, Part 2 (1996): 168.
[469] Netzer (1991b): 417.
[470] Netzer (1991b): 419.

them. The only noteworthy difference is the number and variety of materials, especially written texts, found in Locus 1039.

Although numerous documents were found in Locus 1039, many of them seem to have fallen in from the floor above when it collapsed. If we assume that the biblical and extra-biblical scrolls fell into this room from above, then it would appear that they had been or were being kept elsewhere. Much has been made of this room because of what was found in it (and it is publicised and published specifically as "The Casemate of the Scrolls"), but it seems rather unlikely that it was ever used as an archive.

Adding to these difficulties is the loss of the discussions about the finds as well as their specific contexts. This is important because the material lost relates to which of the items fell into Locus 1039 from above and which may have been gathered there from elsewhere. If Locus 1039 was not an archive, then why were such a variety of scrolls and Latin military papyri found there? Locus 1039 contained the great majority of Hebrew scrolls found on Masada. However, Greek and Latin papyri were also found here.[471] At the very least, it would appear that the collection of papyri and scrolls was placed there (or in the room above) deliberately at some point, probably in order to either prepare them for removal or for destruction, or perhaps even just as part of an inventory of items found for those who might divide the spoils between them.

[471] H.M. Cotton and J. Geiger, *Masada II: The Latin and Greek Documents*, *The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963 – 1965. Final Reports*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1989): 19.

We cannot assume that the random collection of written materials found in Casemate 1039 imply that it was used by the rebels as an archive. The archive or administrative centre is much more likely to have been the Water Gate, as discussed above, the place where people most likely entered onto the Masada acropolis. Much of the material found in Locus 1039 is unrelated to any religious purpose, being letters to and from Roman legionaries, receipts, bills of sale, and so on, suggesting that much of this motley collection of documents postdates the rebellion period and the end of the siege. That this particular casemate is designated in the mythology of Masada as bearing upon the identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue is difficult to understand outside the nationalistic fervour of the time of the excavations.

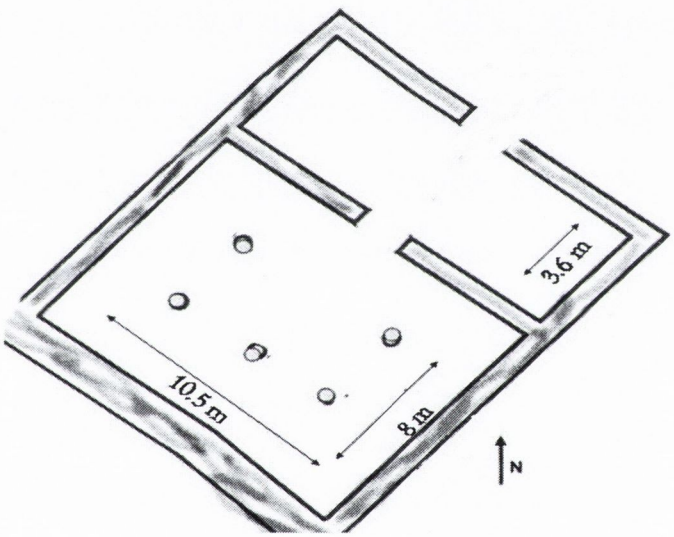
The presence of fragments of שרות עולת השבת ("Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice") could perhaps suggest the existence of a first century Jewish liturgy which might, in turn, imply that there was a fixed location wherein this liturgy was enacted.[472] This document may well have been brought to Masada from elsewhere in order to ensure its survival. If the connection with Jerusalem and Qumran was as simple as people fleeing to Masada after the destruction of those places, taking with them the moveable paraphernalia of their lives and religious beliefs, and parts of their libraries, then this is probably sufficient to explain the presence of such a wide assortment of objects, written and otherwise. The evidence, such as it is, does not lend itself to a more concrete conclusion as to the existence of a synagogue at Locus 1042 or the existence of an archive at Locus 1039.

[472] I am grateful to Dr. Benjamin Wold of Trinity College Dublin for advice about the Essenes, Qumran and first century Jewish liturgy.

Locus 1042 (excavators' phase 1)

According to the excavators, the Herodian building (Herodian construction on Masada began between 37-31 BCE) is basically – but not exactly – rectangular in shape, and measures 10.5 m x 12 m. It comprised a main chamber (10.5 m x 8.0 m), and an antechamber adjoining it on the east (10.5 m x 3.6 m). The entrance (1.35 m) to the building was in the middle of its eastern wall.[473] In the main chamber were five columns, in a U-shaped configuration (see Figure 27 below).[474]

Figure 27 – Locus 1042 (excavators' phase 1)



According to the excavators, the first phase of Locus 1042 belongs to the Herodian period, when it was constructed as part of Herod the Great's building programme on Masada (which commenced sometime after 37 BCE). During this phase, Locus 1042 was a rectangular building divided into two sections comprising a main chamber with five columns in a U-shape, and an antechamber. The entrance to the building is on the east.

[473] Netzer (1991b): 402-404.
[474] Netzer (1991b): 404.

In Locus 1042, all five columns stood on square (70 x 70 cm) bases, none of which are visible now. The floor of the building was white lime plaster laid on a thick gravel fill which levelled the ground above the bedrock[475]. There were no traces of white lime plaster on the inner walls either above or below the later floor. The inner facings of the walls were covered with earth plaster, patches of which have survived. The outer facing was coated with white lime plaster, large sections of which have been preserved, particularly on the northern wall. No evidence was found of installations or other details related to the original building.[476]

There is not very much to add to the excavators' description of the first phase of Locus 1042. No evidence of installations or other details related to the original building were found during the excavations, and it is therefore not possible to do other than speculate as to how it may have been used. In context, Locus 1042 stands just 25 m from Herod's Northern Palace; and just 50 m to its north is the Water Gate leading to the cisterns in the cliff face 80 m below (see Figure 26 above). Locus 1042 was close enough to the Northern Palace to have been used by some sort of support staff for some official function which was necessary to the occupants of the palace and/or garrison. At this original Herodian stage in its life, Locus 1042 did not have benches and could have been used for virtually any purpose. It is notable that its inner walls were coated with a rough earth plaster, and not a hard white lime plaster. At the very least, given that the original phase of Locus 1042 had a white lime plastered floor, it might be useful to assume that it also originally had white plastered or painted walls, but it is impossible to say if

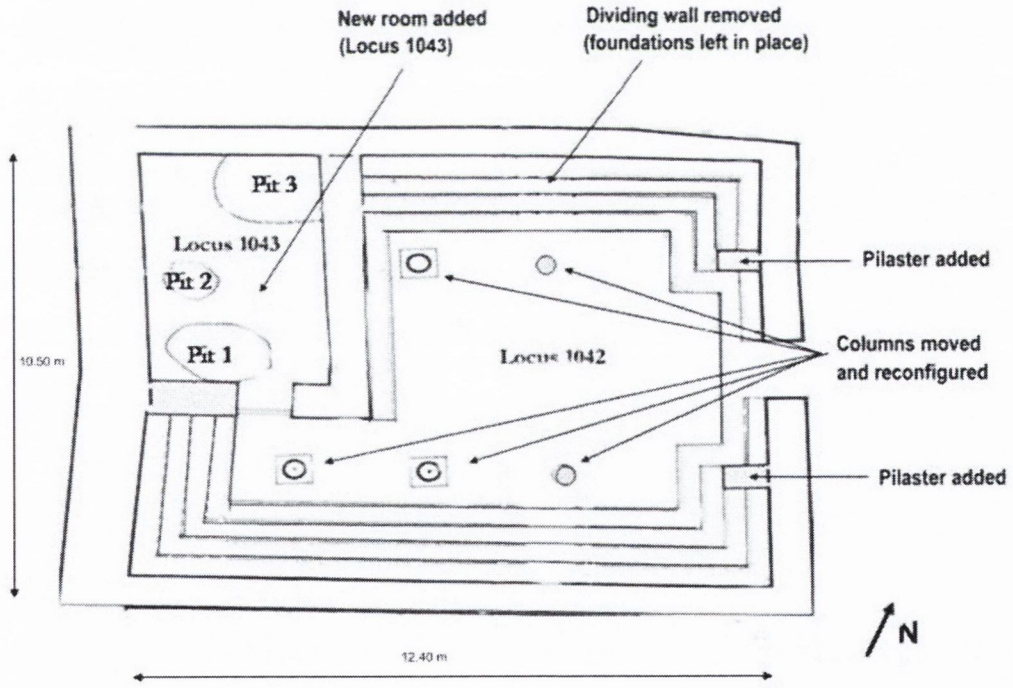
[475] Netzer (1991b): 405.
[476] Netzer (1991b): 405. As we shall see below, it seems that the earth-plastered walls relate to a later phase of Locus 1042.

this was the case. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to imagine why the builders of Locus 1042 would put a hard white lime plaster floor into a building with rough earth plastered walls. It may be that this brown earth plaster belongs to the post-Herodian period, and that it is related to the second and/or third phases of Locus 1042 (see below).

Locus 1042/1043 (excavators' phase 2/3)

Major structural changes were made in the second/third phase of the building's existence, and the excavators attribute these changes to the 'Zealots' (see Figure 28 below).[477]

Figure 28 – Locus 1042 (excavators' phases 2/3)



Once the building had undergone these major structural changes, benches were built in tiers along all sides of the merged chamber. Four tiers were located along

[477] Netzer (1991b): 406; M.J. Chiat, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, Scholars Press, Brown University, Chico (1982): 249-251.

most of the available wall space – the northern wall, the eastern wall (with the exception of the central section between the two pilasters), the southern wall, and the shortened western wall (up to Locus 1043). Only one tier was installed along the wall between Locus 1043 and the main chamber, facing the entrance. The average width of the benches was 45 cm, their average height 35 cm. They were built of fieldstones, sandstone, and fragments of capitals and other reused architectural elements. Like the walls of the hall, the benches were covered with earth plaster, much of which survived *in situ*.[478] Trial sections in the tiers of benches revealed how they were constructed. For some reason, the first to be built was not the lowest tier but the two upper ones. These two upper benches were erected on the *original* Herodian white lime plaster floor of the hall.[479]

The lowest bench was added later, above the plaster floor laid by the rebels. A similar technique was employed along the eastern wall, except that there the two upper tiers were built first and the lower ones added later. The excavators had two possible explanations for this: technical considerations or a change of plan while work was in progress.[480]

In the rebellion period, the floor of Locus 1042 was a grey ash lime plaster laid on a bedding of small stones intermixed with sherds.[481] Excavations revealed that this floor sat about 20 cm above the original Herodian floor. Below the new floor was a layer of soil which had been levelled and covered with gravel and stones. Also exposed in the excavations were the foundations of the wall that originally separated the inner and outer chambers. While the wall itself had been dismantled

[478] Netzer (1991b): 406.
[479] Netzer (1991b): 407. The reason this is important will become clear in my analysis of the construction phases of Locus 1042/1043 below.
[480] Netzer (1991b): 407.
[481] Netzer (1991b): 407.

down to the bedrock, its foundations were left intact to a height of 30 cm to support the new columns. Seventeen coins were found here.[482]

Twenty Herodian period lamps were uncovered in Locus 1042, most of which were found in the northwestern corner.[483] On the southwestern floor were fragments of glass vessels and the abovementioned ostracon inscribed with כהן מעשר.[484] This ostracon was found just outside the threshold of Locus 1043. Also in the southeastern corner of Locus 1042 were visible traces of a fire.[485]

The floor of the new room, Locus 1043, was beaten earth, and it was not plastered over when the new floor was laid in Locus 1042. This beaten earth floor was found covered with debris, including the remains of an oven and evidence of a fire. The oven led Yadin to suggest that this room served as a dwelling for the person responsible for the maintenance of the building, and he said that this person was a priest.[486]

Among the burnt items found scattered on the floor were fragments of clay chalices, portions of a bronze bowl and a large quartz hand-bowl. There were also some coins, cloth fragments and a strip of sacking, twisted and dipped in asphalt (possibly a torch), all overlying a layer some 10 cm thick (and as much as 20 cm or more in some places), of animal dung.[487] At some point, when the dung layer was already in place, three pits were dug in the floor of Locus 1043; one in the

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[482] Netzer (1991b): 409.
[483] Yadin (1965): 78.
[484] Y. Yadin & J. Naveh, "The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions" in *Masada I: The Yigael Yadin Excavations, 1963-1965: Final Reports*, edited by Ehud Netzer (Jerusalem: *Israel Exploration Society*: Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1989): 32.
[484] Netzer (1991b): 410.
[485] Yadin (1965): 78.
[486] Yadin(1965): 78-79.
[487] Netzer (1991b): 409.

middle, near the western wall, and the other in the southern section of the room, by the doorway, and one running beneath the wall that divided Locii 1042 and 1043.

The three pits in Locus 1043

The first pit found was roughly circular, about 80 cm in diameter and about 70 cm deep, and contained fragments of the book of Deuteronomy as well as 15 coins dating to the first century CE (but not the rebellion).[488] The second pit discovered was roughly oval, about 2.0 m long, 1.4 m wide and also about 70 cm deep. The second pit was later filled by a layer which included, as well as gravel; pottery sherds, dung, and small fragments of the book of Ezekiel. A further fill was then deposited, up to a height of some 30 cm, in layers consisting of ashes and dung. The third pit contained the same mix of gravel, pottery sherds, dung and four Latin *tituli picti*, (two of which related to consignments of wine for Herod).[489]

According to the excavators', in terms of the identification of the usage of this building in this phase as a synagogue, one should "envisage the Zealots' efforts to find the most suitable location for assembling in prayer and/or reading the Torah", where the only alternatives would have been either on the lower terrace of the Northern Palace or on the upper terrace, but that these rooms were situated in a section of Masada that may have been out of bounds for most of the Zealot community. Locus 1042 provided enough space, according to the excavators, for at least 250 persons, if some were seated on the floor.[490]

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[488] Netzer (1991b): 410.
[489] Netzer (1991b): 410.
[490] Netzer (1991b): 412.

My analysis of the excavation reports and building phases

The second/third phase of Locus 1042/1043 as set out in the final excavation reports above is confusing and needs to be unpacked. This is because, contrary to the excavation reports, there appear to be four to five discrete construction phases, not two to three.

The first phase of Locus 1042 (see Figure 27 above) seems straightforward, and I am in agreement with the analysis outlined under Phase One above, but my interpretation of the second and subsequent phases differs substantially from that of the excavators. Locus 1042 was used as a stable at some point (something the excavators themselves suggest, but only in relation to the original Herodian phase 1 of the structure).[491]

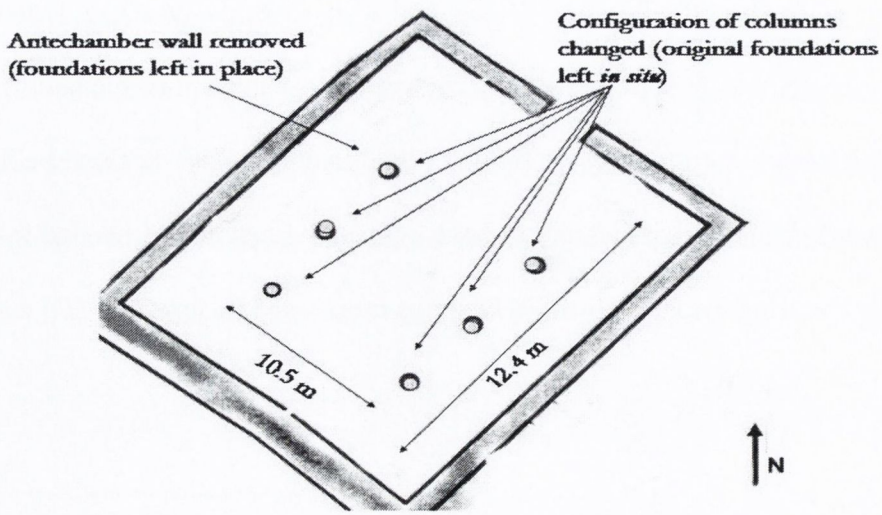
Locus 1042 is large enough to have contained wooden stalls and/or tethering areas for perhaps ten or fifteen mules, donkeys or horses, with the outer chamber being used for tack, equipment, feed, etc (it measured 10.5 x 12.4 m). At any rate, and in relation to its use as a stable, Locus 1042 was close to a number of buildings which might have need of such facilities. For instance, it is just 50 m south of the Water Gate; 60 m from the Western Palace; and 25 m from the Northern Palace (see Figure 26 above). It is possible that this was a place used to stable pack animals which were used to carry water up to the acropolis. During the rebellion period, it would have been necessary to have a place to keep horses needed for raiding neighbouring areas, such as En Gedi, as mentioned in Josephus (*BJ* 4.402-405).

[491] Netzer (1991b): 412.

Locus 1042 / My phase 2a

Whether its use as a stable extended into the rebel period is impossible to say, but at some point during the period of the rebellion, Locus 1042 was converted for use as an assembly space. The construction of the benches using architectural fragments from elsewhere suggests that other areas of the palace had gone out of use by the time they were put in place, and the fill in the pits in which the scroll fragments had been found contained dung. The construction of the benches, in particular, is quite interesting. The lowest bench was not added until *after* the rebel period floor was laid (discussed in detail below). In my Phase 2a (see Figure 29 below), the inner and outer chambers were merged into one large room by removing the partition wall and rearranging the columns to support a new roof over the entire structure.[492] As stated in the excavation reports, only three of the original column bases remained in place when this structural change was made, the other two (the northwestern and middle columns in the western row) were dismantled and moved (their foundations remained in place), and a sixth column was added.

Figure 29 – Locus 1042 (My phase 2a)



[492] Netzer (1991b): 404.

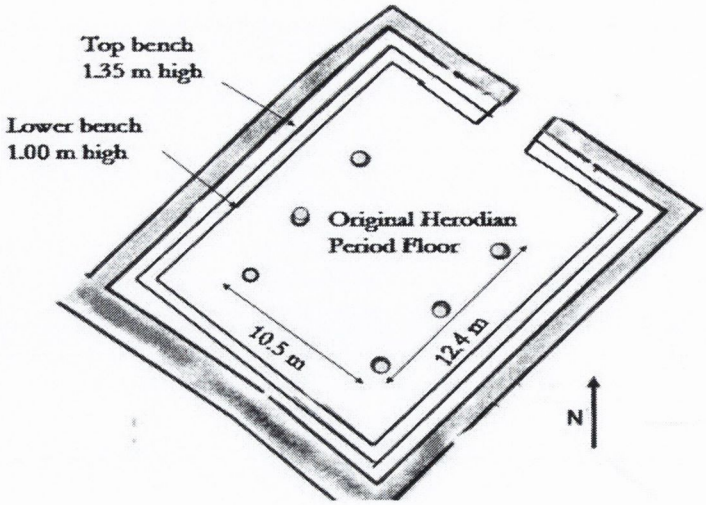
It is quite possible that these changes were made to make the stable (if that is what it was) more capacious. Given that its walls were coated in a rough brown earth plaster, it would appear to make sense that the earth plaster on the walls dates to this phase, and not to the earlier Herodian phase, otherwise, it is difficult to imagine why a structure with an expensive, hard white lime plaster floor could be plastered with rough brown earth plaster which also, in turn suggests that in its earlier phases (when it was white plastered) it was not a stable.

Locus 1042 / my phase 2b

In my Phase 2b of Locus 1042, two rows of benches were added above the original white plaster Herodian period floor (see Figure 30 below).[493] The top bench in this phase was 135 cm high and 45 cm wide. The second bench was 100 cm high and 45 cm wide. *The height of these benches is the clearest possible indication that they were not originally intended as seating, but as places for holding water troughs, hay, straw, feedbags, and other equipment for use with the animals housed in the building. It is important, for the purposes of the seating argument, to keep in mind the fact that the two benches of this phase rested on the original Herodian floor. The reason for this will be clear in relation to my phase 3.*

[493] Netzer (1991b): 407.

Figure 30 – Locus 1042 (my phase 2b)



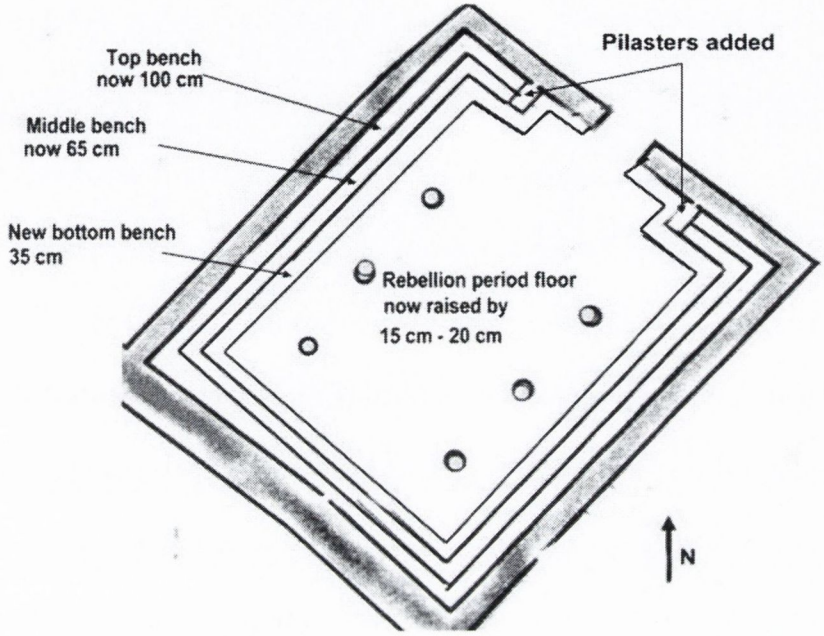
The argument in relation to the benches (or, perhaps more correctly, the *shelves*) not being used for seating is made on the basis that the first two rows of benches which are constructed over the original Herodian period floor are too high to be used as seating. The height of the *then* bottom row (100 cm) would make it difficult to step onto to get to the bench above it, but this height is ideal for shelves holding water, feed troughs and tack for animals standing in stalls. Furthermore, these two tiers of shelves were plastered with a simple brown earth plaster rather than a more stable white or grey hydraulic lime plaster, as were the internal walls of Locus 1042, and it must therefore be the case that the brown earth plastered internal walls of Locus 1042 probably belong to this phase.

Locus 1042 / my phase 3

Only in my phase 3 of Locus 1042, is the lowest (third) tier of benching added (see Figure 31 below). In the rebellion period, a new floor made of grey lime plaster was laid approximately 20 cm above the original Herodian period floor. The third (and lowest) bench was added only after the new floor was laid, and rests on it. It was at this point that the two pilasters at the entrance were also

added. It becomes clear *only* at this point that Locus 1042 had been converted from probable use as a stable to use as an assembly space.[494]

Figure 31 – Locus 1042 (my phase 3)



There is no way of knowing whether the merging of the two original chambers and the construction of the benches was contemporary, immediately consecutive or separated by an unknown period of time, but we can say for sure that the bottom row of benches and the two pilasters went in only *after* the new floor was laid. This is certain because the excavations revealed that the first two rows of benches sat on the original Herodian floor, and the bottom row of benches sat on the rebellion period floor, and, the pilasters sat on the same level as the bottom row of benches.[495] The addition of the lowest row of benching and the new floor meant that the two upper benches were now easily accessible for people stepping from one row to the next.[496] The bottom row was now 35 cm high, the middle

[494] Netzer (1991b): 407.
[495] Netzer (1991b): 407.
[496] Netzer (1991b): 407.

row was 65 cm high and the top row 100 cm high, making it possible to step up onto them.

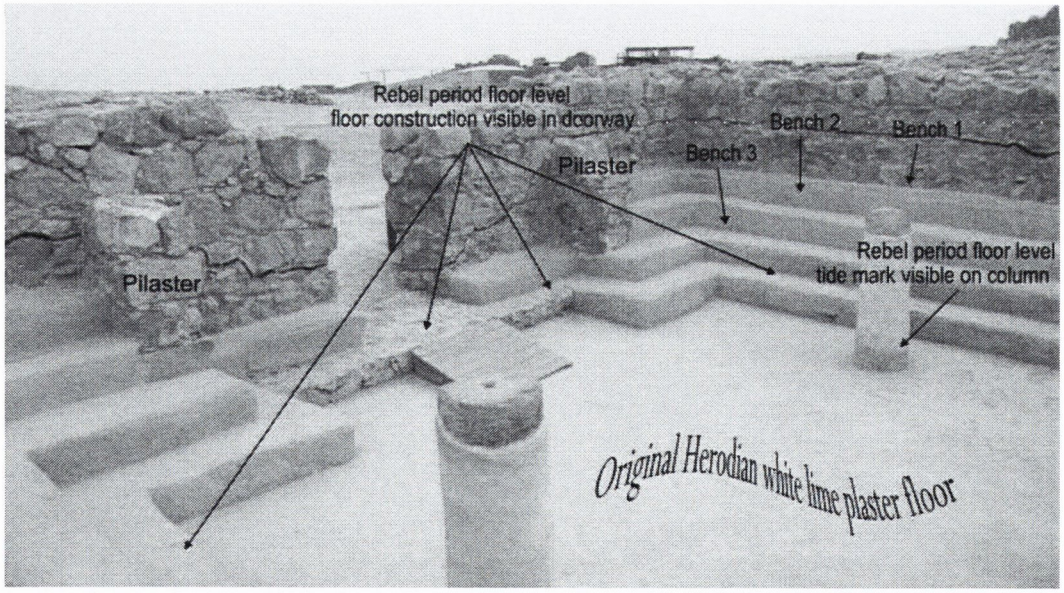
Another major difference between the excavators' understanding of this phase and mine is that the way in which the benches were constructed makes it evident that there therefore are only three rows of benches along the north and south walls of Locus 1042, not four. Somewhere between Yadin's excavations, the subsequent conservation work (including the replastering of the benches) and the writing-up of the final excavation reports, some information seems to have been lost. The loss of this information (pertaining to the removal of the entire rebel period floor) appears to have happened at the point at which conservation and plastering was carried out and the rebel period floor level was mistaken for a bottom bench. Because this lowest tier is not a bench, there is also no single bench along the western wall.[497]

The proof for this is a simple physical observation, and one which can be made from the photographic evidence, even without referring to the supporting information in the excavation reports. The composition of the rebel period floor – which the excavators removed in its entirety to search for more pits which they hoped would contain more scrolls/scroll fragments – can still be seen in the entranceway of Locus 1042 in the photograph at Figure 32 below.[498] In the photograph, you can also see that the rebel period floor was level with what the excavators described as the bottom tier of benches.[499] After the excavations were completed, the conservators of the site plastered the benches with white plaster as

[497] Netzer (1991b): 406.
[498] Netzer (1991b): 407.
[93] Yadin (1997): 187. Here Yadin describes the events around the discovery of the pits containing the scroll fragments, and how this "spurred" the excavators on to remove the *entire* rebel period floor level.

part of the reconstruction of Locus 1042, which has added to the confusion. Lending still more support to this observation is the fact that you can clearly see tide marks on the columns showing where the rebellion period floor reached before the excavators removed it. These tide marks are visible on all of the columns in Locus 1042, although only one is in view in this photograph (there is another view of the columns at Figure 35 below). You can also see in the photograph above that the two pilasters are sitting on the bottom row of benches, which was laid above the rebel period floor. In the photograph, you can also clearly see where the rebellion period floor *would have been* had it not been removed during the excavation process. The excavation reports themselves refer to the removal of the rebel period floor in its entirety.[500]

Figure 32 – Locus 1042 (floor level and benches)



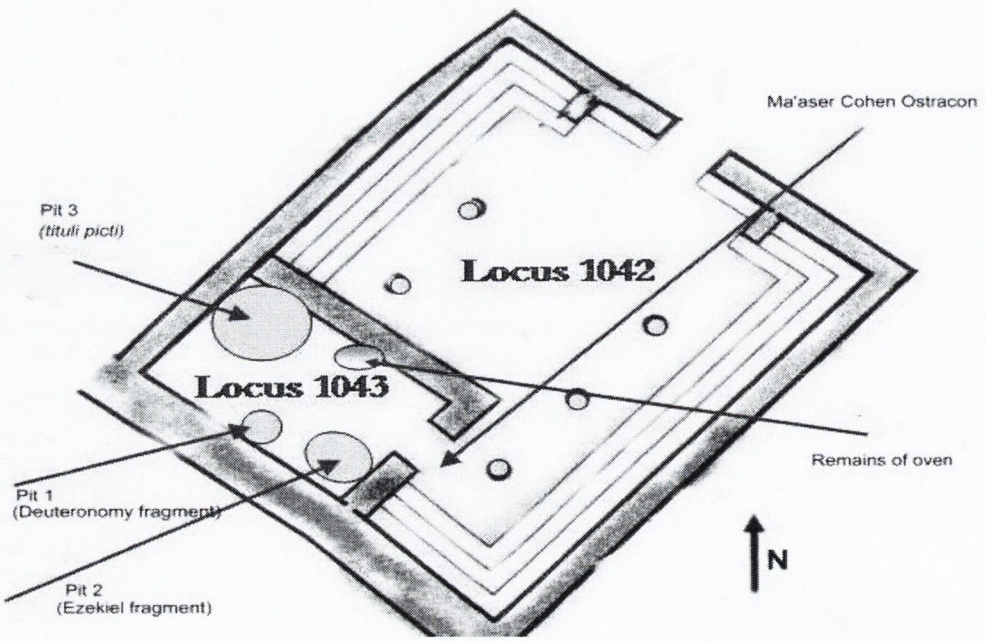
The absence of the fourth row of benches along the western wall has implications for the seating, which I will discuss detail below.

[500] Netzer (1991b): 407.

Locus 1042 (my phase four)

The final structural change to Locus 1042 was the addition of the smaller inner room (see Figure 33 below). This necessitated the removal of the benches along the western wall, which is why the benches as preserved today have such a peculiar configuration. Leading up to the construction of Locus 1043 (*before* Locus 1042 was used for assembly but *after* it was used as a stable) dung was brushed into the northwestern corner of the building and never removed. This corner of the building ended up being contained within the walls that created Locus 1043. The dung which had been brushed into the corner of the two merged chambers was left in place, and a layer of beaten earth was laid over it. The fact that the floor of Locus 1043 was never plastered, but rather had a covering of beaten earth, suggests that it was something of an *ad hoc* addition to the structure of Locus 1042, during the period of the rebellion, and was put in place *after* the first two rows of benches had been first constructed and then amended and, therefore, probably *after* the structure had begun to be used as a meeting space.

Figure 33 – Locus 1042/1043 (my phase 4)



Three pits were excavated in Locus 1043. They are numbered in Figure 33 above in the order in which they were uncovered. But despite the excavators' interpretation (see above), there is nothing in the contents of the pits to differentiate their ages or their fill.

Pit 1 was found in the middle of the room, near the western wall, it was roughly circular, some 80 cm in diameter and about 70 cm deep. This pit was found to contain a small scroll fragment from the book of Deuteronomy. Pit 2 was roughly oval, some 1.4 m in diameter and about 70 cm deep. It contained a fragment of the book of Ezekiel. Pit 3, ran underneath the wall between Locus 1042 and Locus 1043, suggesting it predated the wall which, in turn, suggests that the other two pits also predated the wall, since they contained the same fill mix. In any event, contained within this pit were, besides gravel; potsherds, organic material (dung), four Latin *tituli picti* (two of which specified shipments of wine for Herod), and coins. A further fill was then deposited, up to a height of about 30 cm, in layers consisting of ashes and more dung.

It is worth repeating that all three pits contained the same fill mixture, comprising potsherds, burnt material and dung – a clear indication that they were contemporary. Pit 3 also contained Latin *tituli picti*, and coins, covered over with layers of burn material and more dung, but was not identified as belonging to the 'genizah'.[501] The scroll fragments from Pits 1 and 2 were found near the sides and bottoms of the pits.[502] It was the discovery of these fragments of biblical text that resulted in Locus 1043 being identified as a genizah. However, there are considerable difficulties with this interpretation in that the random nature of the

[501] Netzer (1991b): 410.
[502] Netzer (1991b): 410.

items found in the pits in Locus 1043 is confused and the pit fill from all three pits includes the dung that was found all over the floor of Locus 1043.[503] It is this which rules out a genizah identification, as it would seem to be impossible for anyone of a religious sensibility to deliberately dispose of sacred texts in a dung-filled pit. Moreover, unlike Locus 1042, there was never any separation between the pits and the dung because the floor of Locus 1043 was never plastered over. It is no longer possible to know why the items found in these three pits came to be buried there, but they would appear to be a random mix, rather than a deliberate method of putting textual fragments out of use.

Of course, it is also possible, that the scroll fragments found in Pits 1 and 2 could have been disposed of during the frantic last hours or minutes of the siege, thereby explaining the carelessness of the deposit. They could also have been deposited during the inevitable looting by the Romans after the siege had ended. There is also another possibility, that the pit deposits were made during a later period, for instance, when Masada was occupied by Christian monks during the Byzantine period.[504]

Locus 1043 was not the only structure in which biblical scroll fragments and other items were found. Only two chambers away to the south, in Locus 1039 (the "Casemate of the Scrolls") there was a large collection of scroll fragments, in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin, as well as numerous other articles all apparently deliberately gathered together (see section on Locus 1039 above).

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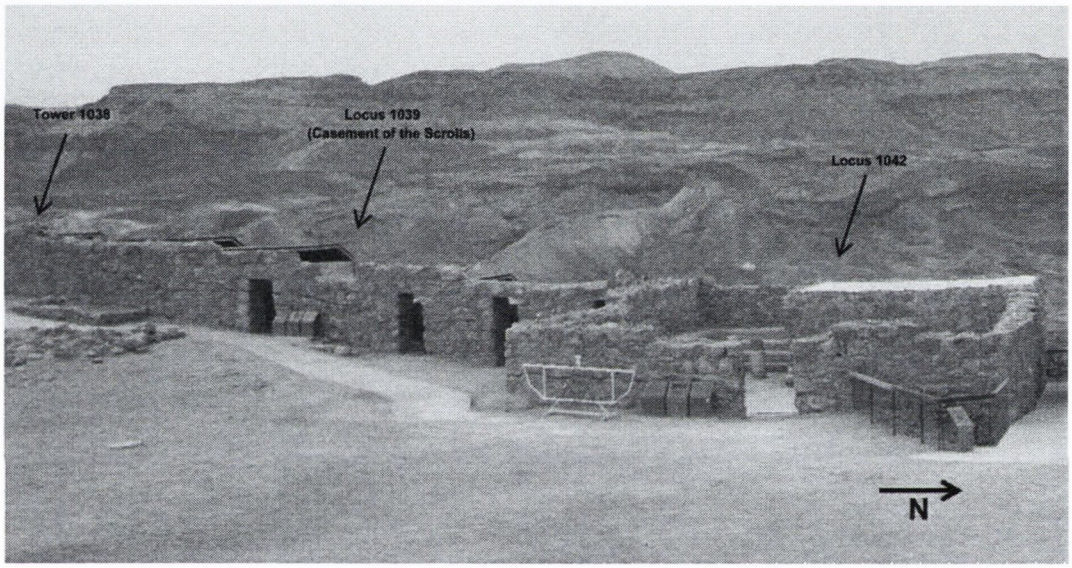
[503] Netzer (1991b): 409.
[504] Feldman (1975): 224.

It is something of a leap of faith to assume that Locus 1042 was used by zealots for the purposes of assembly and for reading Torah. Locus 1042 is a strategically important place. It is just two casemate rooms away from Tower 1038, which looks out over the Roman siege ramp (see Figure 34 below) and which was used for defensive purposes.

Figure 34 – View of Loci 1038, 1039 and 1042 (looking west)



It makes far more sense to interpret Locus 1042 as a military field office designated for planning battle strategies, especially in light of the seating capacity available. Remains of a rebellion period oven were found in Locus 1043 (see Figure 33 above), and certainly it would make sense to have cooking facilities available for people using this Locus 1042 for strategic planning or other meetings.[505]

[505] See chapter on Jericho herein.

Seating in Locus 1042

Now, to the number of people Locus 1042 could contain: the excavators' estimate of 250 is highly suspect, even with people sitting or standing on the floor.[506] Unfortunately, during my many visits to Masada, I never thought to measure the building and now have a sadly unfulfilled sense that the excavators' measurements relate to the external dimensions of Locus 1042, not its internal dimensions. At most, 100 people could have sat in this building; 12-13 people on each row of benches and the rest standing or sitting on the floor. Even if I am wrong about the existence of a fourth tier of benches, only another twenty or so people could fit in. Either way, these people would have been very cramped indeed and their presence would have rendered the space impossible to use for anything other than squashing people into it. There would be no logical reason to have a community assembly area located in such a confined space.

Moreover, if this was a synagogue for the general community, services would have had to have been conducted in shifts to accommodate everyone, adding another level of improbability to the argument for use of this space as a synagogue in a military and strategically significant area.

Even packed in like sardines, and including people standing on the floor, nothing like 250 people could have fitted into this space: there are only two walls of three rows of benches available (or four, if my explanation for the structure of the benches is rejected). Figure 35 (below) is a photograph taken in February 2009, showing six people sitting along the northern wall of Locus 1042, which is the

[506] Netzer (1991b): 412.

wall with the most available seating space and I am standing on the middle bench of the southern wall to take the photograph.[507]

Figure 35 – Locus 1042 (seating capacity)



While Locus 1042 could of course have been used as a synagogue or a place to read the Torah, or just a multi-purpose assembly area, there were plenty of locations far away from the siege engines and assorted offensive weaponry of the Romans which could have been used for this purpose. It is difficult to envisage a situation where the rebel commanders of Masada could allow such a strategically important space to be used by one group, and a group, moreover, which was made up of men, women and children. It simply does not make sense to have Locus 1042 used for this purpose, when it would have been important to the rebels as an enclosed defence and strategic planning area.

[507] You can also see in this photograph that the so-called single bench on the western wall is in fact the floor level of the rebel period chamber. Note also the tide marks on the columns, showing where the rebel period floor level reached. The floor you can now see in Locus 1042 is the *original* floor level from Phase 1 (the Herodian period building). See also Figure 40 in the Herodium chapter, a comparison of the seating there and at Masada.

The excavators have claimed that there were only two possible alternatives for the location of an assembly area: one on the lower terrace of the Northern Palace and one on the upper terrace, and that these "may well have been off bounds for most of the Zealot community."[508] This is demonstrably a straw man argument. There were any number of places that could have been used for religious or other assembly. The southern end of the acropolis was relatively open (see Figure 26), the casemate chambers there were occupied by refugees, rebels and their families during the siege, and there was no immediate risk of attack by the Romans as it was inaccessible, there being no southern access to the Masada acropolis. There was a southern gate (see Figure 26 above), but it led only to a group of cisterns in the southeastern cliff, not to the bottom of the mountain, and it was not accessible from the ground.

If there was a synagogue on Masada, the southern end of the acropolis would be the likeliest and safest place for it to be. Moreover, many huts had been built on the southern end of the acropolis during the period of the rebellion to solve a housing problem. These huts were built of mud and stones and were concentrated around the Herodian structures on the southern end of the acropolis, adjacent to the walls. These were built during the final stages of the rebellion, when there appears to have been an influx of refugees. Most of the coins from Year 4 of the rebellion were found in these huts.[509] It would seem logical to construct an assembly hall here, where the refugees lived, not at the northern end of the acropolis where the rebels were based, and where *all* of the defensive action against the Romans took place.

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[508] Netzer (1991b): 412.
[509] Netzer (1993b): 980.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hershel Shanks (1979)

According to Shanks, readers unfamiliar with the history of synagogues assumed that Yadin's discovery of a synagogue on Masada was the only evidence for a pre-70 CE synagogue but, in fact, Yadin's discovery only marked "the first synagogue *remains* which predated the Roman destruction".[510] Shanks goes on to say that we even "have archaeological evidence for a synagogue in Israel which pre-dates the Masada synagogue, although no trace has been found of the synagogue building itself, and only the dedication inscription survives: this is the synagogue referred to in the Theodotos inscription.[511]

According to Shanks, in 66 CE a small group of Jewish "Zealots" occupied Masada and held it until 73 CE when it fell to the Romans. Describing Locus 1042, Shanks says that a small room was built in the corner of the synagogue, and that we do not know the purpose of the small room, but it could only be entered from the synagogue. Perhaps, he says, Torah scrolls and a wooden ark to house them were stored here. The portable ark would then be brought into the synagogue for service. Shanks says that "this was a common arrangement before a permanent structure for the Torah ark was built into the synagogue's prayer room."[512] He asks how we know this building was a synagogue and answers that the evidence is provided in the two pits which the "Zealots" dug in which biblical scrolls were found. This, he says, was the "Zealot" genizah, the traditional burial ground for worn out holy writings.[513] Shanks offers other reasons to support his

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[510] H. Shanks, *Judaism in Stone. The Archaeology of Ancient Synagogues*, Harper & Row, New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London, Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington DC (1979): 17.
[511] Shanks (1979): 17-18.
[512] Shanks (1979): 23-25.
[513] Shanks (1979): 25.

argument: that the architecture is similar to some Galilaean synagogues; that an ostracon inscribed "priestly tithe" was found in Locus 1042; and that the building was clearly used as a public structure.[514]

Shanks began his discussion of Masada with reference to the Theodotos inscription and the synagogue to which it belonged, stating that it belongs to the pre-destruction period in Jerusalem. He noted that the synagogue itself had not been found. He does not mention, however, that there is debate about the dating of the Theodotos inscription, that it was found *entirely* out of context (see introduction), and that we do not know to what period it belonged. It is far too ambiguous a piece of evidence on which to hang an argument about pre-70 synagogues.

Shanks goes on to describe how Locus 1043 might have been used to house a wooden ark and Torah scrolls for use in the synagogue. Here, he has made an assumption about the use of Torah shrines and arks – the use of which are not, in any event, established until at least the third century CE – and projected the assumption backwards in time, with no evidence – archaeological or otherwise to support the claim. Moreover, as I have shown above, the dating of the pit finds in Locus 1043 is by no means clear, and the deposits contain other material, such as *tituli picti* and potsherds, which would not be required to be disposed of in a genizah. If Locus 1043 really was a genizah, then surely a better method of disposing of sacred texts could be found than burying them in a crudely dug and unlined pit with rubble and rubbish?

[514] Shanks (1979): 26.

Shanks's final argument, that the identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue was made because the architecture is similar to other first century and Galilaean synagogues, is entirely circular since all other supposed first century synagogues (*all of them!*) are compared with Locus 1042 on Masada and are identified on the basis of their similarity with Masada. Compounding this problem, Locus 1042 on Masada is then compared to those other sites!

To this, Shanks adds the evidence of the ostracon inscribed "priestly tithe" and the fact that the building was used for assembly. The ostracon, as we have seen above, is interesting, and there is some evidence that the ostracon was in fact the shoulder of a jug in which something was contained which was probably kept for a tithe. Not that this means, of course, that a priest could not have lived in Locus 1043. A priest could have lived in Locus 1043, but we do not know this. And if a priest did live in Locus 1043, how can this possibly support a genizah identification? In a debris-strewn context, one small ostracon/potsherd does not an identification make.

As to the use of Locus 1042 as an assembly space: there is no question about this. In its last phase, whenever that was, Locus 1042 was clearly and unequivocally designed to be used as an assembly space. However, it is quite small and its location in terms of use by the general civilian population is problematic in that it is slap-bang in the middle of the most heavily besieged area of the acropolis of Masada, it sits beside Tower 1038 (see Figure 34), which was itself just above the Roman siege ramp. Is it likely that a place of religious assembly was located amongst the military activity of the rebels when there was ample and relatively peaceful space hundreds of metres away to the southern end of the acropolis?

Gideon Foerster (1981)

Foerster concurs with the excavators, although his article was written some ten years before the volume of final archaeological reports dealing with Locus 1042. He says that the structure at Masada in its initial Herodian phase was divided into two elements: a vestibule and a hall. During the rebellion, he says, the partition between the two chambers was removed and a smaller room was built in the northern corner. Along the walls of this expanded hall, three rows of stone benches were constructed, built of ashlars taken from Herod's palace structures.[515] He goes on to say that while no fixed place was found for a torah shrine at Masada, the smaller room (Locus 1043) might have functioned as such.[516]

Foerster also says that early synagogue plans might be compared with theatre-like structures, such as the *pronaoi* of the Greek temples at Arargatis, Artemis, and Tyche, in which benches are arranged in a horseshoe shape around the walls, and the general plan resembles a very small theatre or *Odeon*; and which may be either covered or open. In these structures, the benches along two or three walls are also plastered. Foerster says that these halls served for the assembly of worshippers who were barred from entering the temples proper.[517] The most characteristic feature of the assembly halls at Masada and Herodium is their uniform orientation, the entrance is from the east, as in the Temple in Jerusalem, he says, and this uniformity cannot be regarded as coincidental, but must be seriously considered in any discussion of the function and date of these structures.[518]

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[515] Foerster (1981): 24.
[516] Foerster (1981): 26.
[517] Foerster (1981): 28.
[518] As already noted, the orientation of Locus 1042 is not towards the east. The excavators described the axis of Masada as facing north for convenience, but it actually faces somewhat to the northwest.

Foerster has accepted Yadin's and Netzer's identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue, and while he does suggest interesting architectural comparisons for the building in Greek architecture, he does not examine the reasons for the identification, or the difficulties and inconsistencies inherent in that identification, such as the fact that Locus 1042 is not actually orientated towards Jerusalem.[519] In mitigation of this, however, and as stated above, he wrote this article before the excavation reports had been published. Nevertheless, other than the Greek architectural comparisons, this is a straightforward recitation of Yadin's and Netzer's opinions.

Shaye Cohen (1982)

Cohen does not deal with the identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue, but does discuss Josephus's suicide narrative, which at least sheds some light on the nature of the people on Masada. He says that Josephus exaggerated and embellished events, and that it is safe to suppose that the Masada narrative is not "an unalloyed version of the truth."[520] Cohen argues convincingly that the speeches made by Eleazar on Masada were literary devices and that this being the case, the use of lots as described by Josephus must be fictitious too. As twelve ostraca (not ten) were found, they cannot *a priori* have been the lots described in Josephus, even if Josephus's account was a precise representation of what had transpired at the end of the siege on Masada.[521] He goes on to say that perhaps some Sicarii killed themselves at the end of the siege, but it is most unlikely that all of them did so. The very idea that all of the rebels on Masada killed themselves is derived from another instance of this motif used by Josephus in his

[519] Netzer (1991b): 410.
[520] S.J.D. Cohen, "Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains and the Credibility of Josephus", in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Volume 33, Nos. 1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982): 393.
[521] Cohen (1982): 33: 397. For details on the *twelve* lots found, see Yadin &. Naveh (1989): 30-37.

account of the episode at Jotapata, where he and another commander survived the same sort of suicide pact and where he then surrendered himself to the Romans.[522] Cohen points out that had the Romans massacred the Sicarii, Josephus would have had no reason to disguise this fact because, from the Roman point of view, they deserved to die since they had participated in the siege of the royal palace in Jerusalem in 66 CE and had killed some Romans during that siege (*BJ* 2.434-440). Moreover, from the Jewish point of view, the Sicarii deserved death since they had raided and killed 700 women and children in the town of En Gedi (*BJ* 4.402-405). Finally, from Josephus's point of view, the Sicarii were guilty of all sorts of crimes, not the least of which was the launching of the war against Rome (*BJ* 7.253-262).[523]

Cohen's arguments are cogent and convincing, and while they do not help with the identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue, they do go some way to explaining why a literal interpretation of Josephus's Masada narrative has served to skew the historical record, both in terms of the nature of the people occupying Masada and their likely behaviour. The confusing representation of the Sicarii on Masada as both heroic and despicable is particularly troubling, given the foregoing, but there does not seem to be a clear way to resolve this issue.

David Ladouceur (1989)

Like Cohen, Ladouceur does not deal with the identification of Locus 1042, but he does reinforce Cohen's arguments (above), in terms of the mythology of the Masada narrative. He says that the archaeological excavations neither "serve nor discredit" the central suicide story, but that there might be a nugget of truth in the

[522] Cohen (1982): 397.
[523] Cohen (1982): 399-400.

story and perhaps a unknown number of the defenders did commit suicide rather than be taken captive by the Romans. Like Cohen, he notes the fictivity of Eleazar's speeches, that they are part of an ancient and traditional historiographic rhetorical pattern and prove nothing. He concludes in the end that the suicide narrative at least is not entirely implausible.[524]

As Ladouceur's article covers much the same ground as Cohen's, there is little to disagree with in terms of Josephus's rendering of the Masada narrative. Like Cohen, he says that it is entirely possible that some of the rebels may have killed themselves rather than be taken captive by the Romans and that in this respect the narrative is not entirely implausible.[525] There is perhaps some issue to be taken with Ladouceur's comment that the suicide narrative "is not entirely implausible because some Sicarii probably did commit suicide". He seems to suggest that there was some truth to the Eleazar's speeches and to the casting of lots *because* there might have been some suicides. In other respects, Ladouceur's article, like Cohen's, is a useful survey of suicide motifs in the ancient world.

Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (1995)

Flesher says of Masada that its structure does not have any features that identify it as a synagogue. Even the architectural features that have been used to identify it as a synagogue – such as the benches and the columns – also appear in other buildings that are not identified as synagogues, not all of which are Jewish. He also says that the discipline of archaeology is dependent on the timely publication of excavation reports to allow scholars access to the information and that in the case of Masada, these reports took almost three decades to appear, and thus most

[524] D.J. Ladouceur, "Josephus and Masada", in Feldman & Hata (1989): 109.
[525] Ladouceur (1989): 109.

discussion of on the subject has been on the basis of brief preliminary remarks, rather than on a complete presentation of the data.[526] Flesher describes the building that Yigael Yadin identified as a synagogue, and notes its construction during the Herodian period. He notes Yadin's claim that the rebels on Masada converted it into a synagogue by removing a wall, adding a floor, constructing a storage room, and adding four levels of stone benches around the inside walls. He acknowledges Yadin's reasons for the identification as being: that it was an assembly hall; that it was orientated towards Jerusalem, and; that fragments of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel were found buried in the storage room.[527]

Flesher deals with Yadin's claim on the orientation, by saying that it derives not from the rebels but from the original Herodian structure, and is therefore coincidental. However, since Locus 1042 is actually aligned on a northwest-southeast axis for convenience, the orientation argument is not in any event correct.[528] Flesher goes on to say that the original (Herodian) floor of the building was covered with a deep layer of animal dung, indicating that it had been a barn. The dung was not removed before the new floor was laid down. Finally, he argues that the buried scroll fragments do not prove that this was a synagogue on the basis that the literary and archaeological evidence from Qumran show that there was no synagogue there and since Qumran's scrolls are nowhere associated with a synagogue, Masada's fragments cannot on their own indicate such a structure.[529] Flesher says that the identification of this structure as a synagogue is uncertain. Indeed, it could have been a place for the rebels to meet and plan

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[526] Flesher (1995): 35.
[527] Flesher (1995): 35-36.
[528] Flesher(1995): 36.
[529] Flesher (1995): 36.

strategy, a need common to most armies. Certainly, it is well situated for that purpose, overlooking the area where the Romans built their siege ramp.[530]

Flesher's discussion was the only truly critical one in the scholarship. While he has not dealt with the archaeological evidence closely (for example, he has not noticed the problem with the number of benches identified by the excavators, or the fact that the second ostracon ascribed to Locus 1042 came from Locus 1044), he comes to the conclusion that Locus 1042 was used as a strategic centre for military planning, because of its location so close to the siege ramp and access to Masada from the valley below.[531] He clearly wrote this article on the basis of all the evidence available to him, and not on the basis of a pre-existing theory which he wished to shore up. He has looked for evidence to support the synagogue identification, but has not found it. In methodological terms, this is the ideal approach to take.

E. Jan Wilson (1996)

Wilson reiterates Yadin's description of Locus 1042, saying that it was identified on the basis of its orientation and the presence of the ostraca inscribed "priestly tithe" and another marked "Hezekiah".[532] She adds that although it had been modified by the "Zealots", it was quite likely to have been constructed as a synagogue by Herod.[533] Wilson goes on to say that if "any doubts remained that this structure represented a synagogue, those doubts were removed during the

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[530] Flesher (1995): 37.

[531] I came to these same conclusions independently before I had read Flesher's account. His account provided both a deflation of ego – because he had come to these conclusions long before I even began to study the subject, and a sense of comfort and reassurance – because I was not the only person who thought this way about early synagogue identifications.

[532] In fact, the Hezekiah ostracon, as I have stated above, was found in Locus 1044, the storerooms north of Locus 1042. E.J. Wilson, "The Masada Synagogue and Its Relationship to Jewish Worship during the Second Temple Period", in *Brigham Young University Studies*, Volume 36, Part 3 (1996): 269.

[533] Wilson (1996): 269.

second season when Yadin's team discovered a *genizah*". Wilson describes the fragments of scrolls found and then asserts that since "these scrolls were buried there before the destruction of Masada by the Romans, they must be dated no later than AD 73."[534] Wilson argues that scholars "generally assume that the institution of the synagogue arose after the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple in 586 BC because of a need to find a substitute form of worship when temple worship was no longer possible." This is based on Ezekiel 11.16, where God states that although he has moved his people to distant places and scattered them in various lands, he will nevertheless be to them as a "small sanctuary".[535] Wilson also refers to Jeremiah 39.8, which refers to the destruction of a structure called a *beth ha'am*, saying that if the *beth ha'am* represents a synagogue or even a forerunner to the synagogue, then the institution was in place before the destruction of the first temple."[536]

Wilson states that one thing that may be very significant in relation to the Masada synagogue is the lack of a Torah shrine, adding that from the third century CE onward, it was always present in some form and that such a niche is lacking from all structures of the Second Temple period Masada, Herodium, Gamla and Delos).[537] The Masada, Gamla and Herodium synagogues, according to Wilson, also lacked the *bema* that was characteristically present in later synagogues. Wilson then argues that this supports the assumption that synagogues of the Second Temple period were not just religious structures, but instead were communal structures where religious functions *also* took place on specific days.[538]

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[534] Wilson (1996): 270.
[535] The same passage that *Tos. Sukka* 4,5 uses to interpret מקדש מעט (a small sanctuary), as *house of assembly* (בית הכנסת).
[536] Wilson (1996): 271.
[537] Wilson (1996): 272-273.
[538] Wilson (1996): 273.

In her article entitled "The Masada Synagogue and Its Relationship to Jewish Worship during the Second Temple Period", Wilson has not actually discussed the material pertaining to Masada. It is difficult to understand the reasons for this because when it article was written in 1996, *Masada III* – relating to Locus 1042 (amongst other things) – had been published, so there was certainly material available which could have been discussed. Moreover, Wilson has taken Yadin's argument that Locus 1042 was a synagogue even during the Herodian period literally, even though Yadin himself only offered it as a possibility.[539] At the very least, it would have been possible for Wilson to discuss the items found in the pits in Locus 1043 in some detail, had the excavation reports been consulted, since it is not clear whether in fact the pit fills do have a *terminus post quem* of 73 CE. As I have suggested above, this is not necessarily the case. Wilson argues that the *lack* of a Torah shrine in Locus 1042, shows that the "synagogues" at Masada, Gamla and Herodium were early stages in the development of the synagogues of the third century CE because they *share the same lack* of Torah shrine!

So, in the article entitled "The Masada Synagogue and Its Relationship to Jewish Worship during the Second Temple Period", the only work specifically about Locus 1042 that Wilson consulted, was Yigael Yadin's 1966 popular book. Otherwise, the works consulted in preparing this article were Azriel Eisenberg's 1974 work entitled *The Synagogue Though the Ages*, the referenced section of which refers only to the Ezekiel passage referenced in Wilson's work; Eric Meyers's 1994 article in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* relating to the same Ezekiel passage; Leopold Loew's 1875 work in *Gesammelte Schriften* (unnamed in

[539] Yadin (1997): 185-187

Wilson's article) on the same passage; Louis Finkelstein's 1975 work "The Origin of the Synagogue" in *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture*; Lee Levine's 1987 article "The Second Temple Synagogue: The Formative Years" in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* – but not in relation to Masada, only in relation to the theories around the development of the early synagogue; Richard Horsley's 1995 work, *Galilee: History, Politics, People*; Rachel Hachlili's 1976 article, "The Niche and the Ark in Ancient Synagogues", in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*; and Solomon Zeitlin's 1975 article, "The Origin of the Synagogue" in *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture*. Thus, despite its title, other than Yadin's 1966 book, Wilson's bibliography does not relate to the identification of Locus 1042 as a synagogue.

Wilson's article does not add anything to the scholarship on the subject of Locus 1042, and instead discusses tangential material relating to the development of early synagogues. While these materials are certainly not irrelevant to the subject of synagogue development, they are irrelevant to the subject of the identification of a synagogue on Masada.

Donald Binder (1999)

Binder, like Foerster and others, repeats Yadin's assertions about the identification and the interpretations contained in the later excavation reports. He says that because the renovated hall consists of rows of benches on four sides with columns intervening between the benches and the centre of the hall, and because scriptures were found deposited within the room adjoining the main hall, it seems

highly likely that the building served as a synagogue for the rebels and that this identification has been established.[540]

In relation to Locus 1043, Binder says that while this space was "certainly" used as a genizah, it must also be noted that the presence of an oven suggests that a priest lived in this room, a point originally made by Yadin,[541] and that the ostracon bearing the words "מעשר כהן" found near this room supports this contention.[542] He finds further support for this hypothesis in other ostraca attesting to the presence of priests at Masada during the revolt.[543] He also notes that stoves and personal items were found in other casemate rooms, pointing to the conclusion that many of the rebels had used these areas as dwelling places.[544] Finally, he notes that the placement of 'sleeping quarters' in the Masada 'synagogue' parallels the arrangement of the synagogue of Theodotos, which also contained such rooms.[545]

Binder turns to the size of Locus 1042 and its seating capacity. He notes Netzer's estimate of 250.[546] He says that since Josephus numbered the rebels at Masada at 967, including women and children, only a segment of the community could have met inside the structure at any one time. He adds that if the synagogue served as a Sabbath meeting place "as the literature indicates", perhaps this problem was solved by having different assembly times for different groups or by having the overflow crowds sit outside (or both).[547]

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[540] Binder (1999): 177.
[541] Binder (1999): 177.
[542] Binder (1999): 177.
[543] Binder (1999): 177.
[544] Binder (1999): 177.
[545] Binder (1999): 178.
[546] Binder (1999): 178.
[547] Binder (1999): 178.

Binder asserts that the discovery of the Ezekiel scroll in the small room of the synagogue suggests that not only did services include the recitation of Torah, but also readings from the Prophets. He supports this contention by reference to Locus 1039, where a number of additional scrolls were found, all dating to the rebel occupation. He says that these scrolls were all in Hebrew, and included fragments of Genesis, Leviticus, Psalms, and the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.[548] He makes a connection with Qumran here because the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* were also found there, and he says that it is possible that it too was used within services held in the synagogue. He goes on to claim that this also applies to the other scrolls found elsewhere at Masada, including fragments of Sirach and Jubilees.[549] Binder has accepted the identification of Locus 1043 as a genizah on the basis that the ostracon inscribed with the words מעשר כהן belonged there and that this contention is supported by the existence of other ostraca on Masada relating to the presence of priests.

There are a number of problems with Binder's assertions. The first, and most obvious one, is the contention that Locus 1042 is a synagogue on the basis of its internal configuration. It is not sufficient to say that because a space is intended for assembly that it is a synagogue. This, especially in the case of Masada, has created a circular argument where other so-called first century synagogues are compared to the structure at Masada and then the structure at Masada is compared to them. Moreover, as already stated, Locus 1042 is potentially one of the least likely places (in strategic terms), and certainly one of the least safe places on Masada, to locate a synagogue or even an assembly area for the community on Masada.

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[548] Binder (1999): 179.
[549] Binder (1999): 179.

Binder then turns to the fragments of scrolls found in Locus 1043, which he says served to establish its identification as a genizah.[550] Again, as stated above, the pit finds are by no means proof of a genizah. The fills are a mixture of items, including Herodian *tituli picti*, potsherds, dung and the Ezekiel and Deuteronomy scroll fragments. As stated above, while the excavators have claimed that the first two pits (with the scroll fragments) are contemporary and belong to the genizah, there is in reality nothing to separate them from the third pit which extends under the wall of Locus 1043 into Locus 1042 and which contains the same mix, including dung, *except* for scroll fragments.

Binder goes on to discuss the presence of the oven and the ostraca inscribed "priestly tithe". He suggests that a priest lived in this room and that the ostracon supports this. As I have said above and elsewhere, it is possible that a priest *did* live in Locus 1043, but it is highly unlikely given the location of Locus 1042 in the most heavily besieged area of the acropolis. Moreover, as stated above, the ostraca (or jar shoulder) could have come from elsewhere, since it was part of a debris layer.

Binder goes on to compare Locus 1043, the genizah, with the facilities available in the Jerusalem Theodotos synagogue (remains of which have never been found). As stated above, the Theodotos inscription has not been definitively dated, and it was found in rubble, entirely out of context. Moreover, even if the comparison was a valid one, one could hardly compare the 'hostel' arrangements described in

[550] Binder (1999): 177.

the Theodotos inscription, with the small rough, stamped earth and dung-floored chamber of Locus 1043.[551]

Binder notes, too, that stoves and personal items were found in other casemate rooms. This is of course correct. However, it does not lend any support to his genizah and/or hostel arrangement argument. Every single casemate room on Masada was occupied during the rebel period. Since there are other references on Masada to priestly tithes, and since there was an exodus from Jerusalem leading up to and after its fall, one might expect priests to be living in various places on Masada and elsewhere.

Next, and following Netzer's estimate of the seating capacity of Locus 1042 at around 250, and Josephus's assertion that there were 960 rebels on Masada, Binder suggests a sort of staggered synagogue service with groups of worshippers moving in and out. It bears repeating that this area is not suitable for the placement of a synagogue or even an assembly space for the general population. It was heavily besieged, heavily defended, and the notion that hundreds of men, women and children could have had access to this area and moved in and out of the defensive systems is incredible. How this could possibly have worked with the Roman siege ramp just 20 m away is impossible to imagine.

Binder then goes on to claim that the Ezekiel and Deuteronomy scroll fragments found in Locus 1043 indicate that services included a Torah recitation and readings from the prophets. He suggests that this claim is supported by reference to the scrolls found in Locus 1043 which, he says, "were ***all*** [my emphasis] in

[551] Discussed in the introduction chapter herein.

Hebrew, and included fragments of Genesis, Leviticus, Psalms, and the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice.*"[552] There is no evidence for any of this, it is an extrapolation from an assumption – and it is a faulty assumption to begin with: Binder has either misunderstood the excavation reports, and/or has ignored the other material found in Locus 1039. As listed above in the section on Locus 1039, these materials included biblical and extra-biblical texts, letters and lists in Greek, Latin, Aramaic and Hebrew, including a papyrus scroll which contained parts of lines from Virgil's *Aenid*, and many other items, such as a seal of Victory/Nike, a hoard of rebel period shekels, eighteen Latin and four Greek papyri, a multiplicity of militaria including a broken and burnt bone sword pommel, a scabbard mount and a dagger suspension loop, shield fragments, a belt-buckle tongue, ballista balls, arrows, arrowheads and rolling stones.

Binder has taken Yadin's claims on face value and has embellished them. Moreover, he has misunderstood the information contained in the excavation reports in relation to Locus 1039 in order to support his claims.[553] In any case, and in general, Binder's claims rely on assumptions and suppositions which the evidence does not support.

Avraham Negev and Shimon Gibson (2001)

Writing more recently, Avraham and Gibson reiterated, in a very short passage, the opinions of the excavators. They were careful not to deal too closely with the issue of the synagogue identification, and instead merely reported that it had been made by the excavators. They said that Locus 1042 was built over two construction phases. In the original Herodian phase the building had two rows of

[552] Binder (1999): 179.
[553] Much as he did in relation to the Delos material (see Delos chapter herein).

columns, three in each row, supporting the roof, while the entrance was on the east.[554] During the period of the Jewish rebellion, a room was built into the northwestern corner. Benches were also built along the walls, and in this way two of the columns went out of use. They also note that the excavators believe that this structure was originally a synagogue in the Herodian period and that it was certainly used as a prayer house at the time of the Revolt.[555]

Lee I. Levine (2000)

Levine says that Masada is "undoubtedly" the most famous synagogue from the Second Temple period and that it served the revolutionaries on Masada for meeting purposes generally, as well as for religious services, ie, it functioned as a synagogue.[556] Levine says that in synagogues such as those at Gamla, Masada and Herodium, the reading of scriptures would also have been carried out in the centre of the hall, since the benches and columns left no room for a platform at one end.[557] Levine notes that three synagogues from pre-70 Judæa, Masada, Gamla and Herodium had nearby cisterns, which could be mikva'ot. He goes on to say that there is no information for any other Judæan synagogues and generalisations cannot be made about these three in relation to others, although the practice of performing ablutions before worship is well attested in the ancient world.[558]

Levine says that the placing of stone benches in synagogue buildings is not uniform, and that generally they were placed along two or three walls of the main assembly hall, although at 'En Gedi and 'Anim in Southern Judæa they were

[554] This detail is incorrect; in the first phase it had only five columns, in a U-shaped pattern.
[555] Negev & Gibson (2001): 324.
[556] Levine (2000): 59-60.
[557] Levine (2000): 86.
[558] Levine (2000): 310.

found on only one side and at Gamla, Masada and Herodium they were found on four sides, and that only rarely were there no benches at all (such as at Sardis and Sepphoris).[559] He also says that up to the third century CE, focus in synagogue halls was in the centre of the room and that halls such as those at Masada, Gamla and Herodium seem to confirm this.[560]

Levine has been careful in what he has said about the synagogue identification at Masada in his 2000 work, *The Ancient Synagogue*, for he has not made any broad claims, except his apparent acceptance of the Yadin identification of the structure as a synagogue. However, on the other hand, he devoted only one paragraph to it.

Levine (2004)

By 2004, Levine was able to describe the "religiously motivated population" of Masada and the room adjacent to Locus 1042 which was "probably used to store Torah scrolls used in synagogue worship". He says that while there are no inscriptions or artistic evidence that point explicitly to the identification of any of those early structures (Masada, Herodium, Delos, or Gamla) as synagogues, it is reasonable to acknowledge the public nature of these buildings and consider the possibility that a (if not *the*) key role of a synagogue in the first century was its communal function, with the religious component being ancillary – as least as reflected in the building's architectural plan and physical appearance.[561]

Again, there can be no argument with that latter statement, because it opens the door of synagogue identification so wide that any building in a demonstrably

[559] Levine (2000): 313-314.
[560] Levine (2000): 354.
[561] L.I. Levine, "The First-Century Synagogue: Critical Reassessments and Assessments of the Critical", in D.R. Edwards (ed.), *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine. Old Questions, New Approaches*, Routledge, New York and London (2004): 79.

Jewish context and capable of accommodating communal activity becomes a possible synagogue. In the context of Levine writing specifically about Masada, there is nothing new here as he has, *ipso facto*, accepted the identification on the grounds put forward by Yadin and the other excavators.

Stephen K. Catto (2007)

Catto's discussion of Masada is another recitation of Yadin's and the excavators' opinions. He is careful, however, not to refer to the occupants of the building as 'Zealots', and instead uses the term 'Sicarii'.[562] He says of Locus 1043 that it seems likely that it was used to house the Torah when it was not in use.[563] He further says that the discovery of scroll fragments in pits in Locus 1043 makes it certain that this was a genizah and that while the foregoing are individually poor arguments, cumulatively they add up to a stronger conclusion.[564]

There is nothing in Catto's text that in any way advances the scholarship on the subject identification. However, as noted above, he is careful not to make assumptions about who the rebels were, and unlike the excavators does not refer to them generally as Zealots.

Runesson, Binder and Olsson (2008)

This work contains a 2-paragraph recitation of the Yadin's and the excavators' arguments, and is not particularly useful in relation to the plethora of material evidence available to us. It is notable, however, that in the bibliography for the

[562] Catto (2007): 91.
[563] Catto (2007): 92.
[564] Catto (2007): 92.

section, the authors do not include any reference to Flesher's contrary and cogent opinions.[565]

Conclusions

Unfortunately, with Locus 1042, it is only possible to suggest a number of functional possibilities for the building's use without being able to link it with specific texts and even with the material found within it and nearby. While there is certainly material evidence at Masada that suggests the possibility of some sort of religious activity during the period of the rebellion, none of it relates to the identification of a synagogue or to whether those materials belonged to the rebels on Masada or were brought there by refugees fleeing Jerusalem and elsewhere. Indeed, if there had been a synagogue on Masada (or even an assembly hall for the general population), Locus 1042 would have been a terrible choice because of its location among the defensive structures overlooking the Roman siege ramp (see Figure 34 above) and would therefore have been a dangerous place for non-combatants to have access to.

The evidence uncovered in Locus 1042, such as the ostracon with מעשר כהן written on it, seems to point towards some elements of religious activity on Masada but, even so, this activity, whether simple observance and a continuance of temple-based practices, simply cannot be tied to Locus 1042 because of the jumble of materials found both there and elsewhere after the fall of Masada. According to the Yigael Yadin, it was during the period of the war that Locus 1042 was used as an assembly place and as a synagogue.[566] According to Yadin,

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[565] A. Runesson, D.D. Binder & B. Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 CE*, Brill: Leiden & Boston (2008): 55-57.
[566] Netzer (1991b): 402; Netzer (1993b): 974.

while the original function of Locus 1042 is not known, it was converted into a synagogue between 66 and 74 CE. In the same work, he also made a suggestion that Locus 1042 could have been used as a synagogue even during the Herodian period, and described Locus 1043 as a *genizah* where sacred documents were put out of use.[567] His argument for this was threefold: that it was unlikely that Herod would have denied a place of worship for the Jewish members of his family and for other Jews who were members of his court; that the architectural plan of Locus 1042 with its pillars and benches is very reminiscent of the plan of several early synagogues discovered elsewhere and that there is a strong tradition in the siting of houses of worship which would also explain why the original building was oriented toward Jerusalem.[568]

As it turns out, this is an entirely circular argument. Locus 1042 was the first structure in the land of Israel to be identified as a first century synagogue and is invariably used as the comparator for all subsequent identifications, as I have stated above. Locus 1042 is therefore, in effect, being compared to itself. Furthermore, the orientation of Locus 1042 is not towards the east; the excavators described the axis of Masada as facing north for convenience, it actually faces north-northwest.[569] Moreover, there is no mention in Josephus or elsewhere of a synagogue or multi-purpose assembly hall at Masada. Ultimately, only the rebels on Masada, and possibly the Romans, could have known whether Locus 1042 was used as a place of religious significance and a place of general assembly or, indeed, as a synagogue. While there are some archaeological and historical reasons to support the argument that this might have been the case, the

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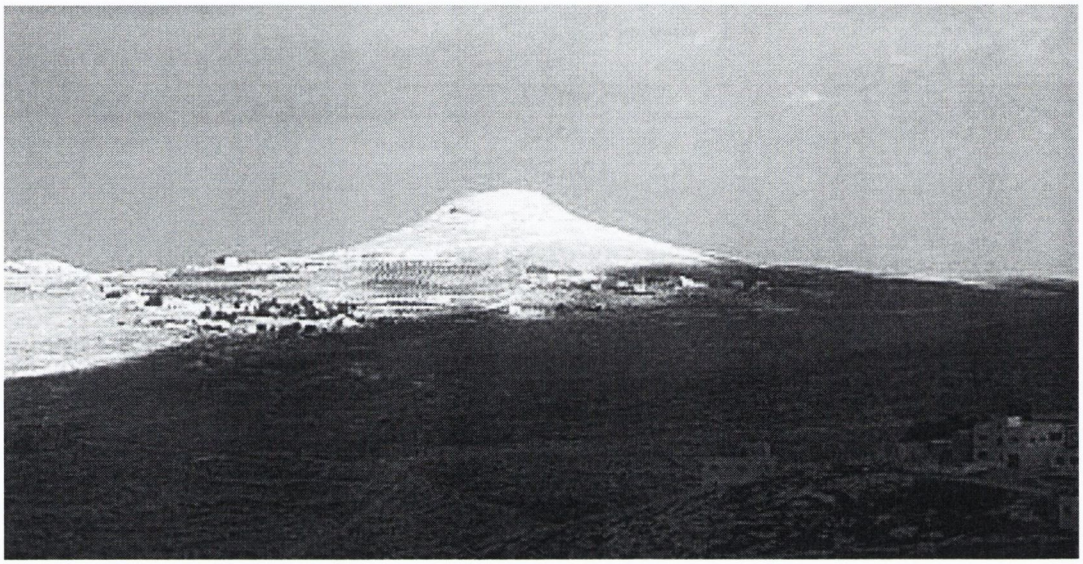
[567] Yadin (1997) 20-21.
[568] Netzer (1991b): 411. In any event, Locus 1042 is not oriented towards Jerusalem. The north-south axis of Masada is not precise and is used for convenience only. Locus 1042 actually faces south-east.
[569] Netzer (1991b): 410.

interpretation of that material is far from being beyond dispute and I would suggest points to a location elsewhere on Masada, if a synagogue existed there at all.

In sum, there is no evidence to support the claim that Locus 1042 was a synagogue or general assembly hall or, indeed, that there was *any* synagogue or general assembly hall on Masada during the period of the first Jewish rebellion or any other time.

CHAPTER 5
Herodium

Figure 36 – Herodium (looking south from Bethlehem)



Introduction

Herodium is one of Herod the Great's mountain fortress sites in the Judaean desert, built during the years he was establishing his kingship in Israel and is a site at which a first century synagogue CE was identified. The identification is generally accepted in the scholarship, but when we look at the archaeological and epigraphical evidence, many flaws are revealed. Herodium (consisting of an upper fortress and a lower palatial area) is located 12 km south of Jerusalem, just below the hills of Bethlehem (see Figure 36 above).

The archaeology of upper Herodium is such that destruction layers from both Jewish rebellions against Rome are mixed together.[570] Indeed, there is only one space in the immediate area of the building identified as a synagogue that could be

[570] First Jewish rebellion: 66-73 CE; second Jewish rebellion (the Bar-Kokhba rebellion): 132-135 CE.

specifically identified as belonging to the period of the first rebellion. This chapter addresses the basis on which the synagogue identification was made, using the excavation reports, as well as the epigraphical and source material relating thereto.

Virgilio Corbo, who excavated Herodium, uncovered a Roman triclinium in the upper fortress of Herodium, which he said may have been adapted for use as a synagogue. He attributed the structure as belonging to the period of the Jewish *Wars*, deliberately avoiding any specific chronological ascription. By the time the final excavation reports were published, however, Corbo had found sufficient archaeological evidence to be able to say that *if* the triclinium had been adapted for use as a synagogue, then that usage belonged to the period of the second rebellion. Other scholars have since then argued that the changes to the triclinium belonged to the period of the first Jewish rebellion, and it is this argument that is generally accepted in the scholarship.

There is a strange disconnect between the two arguments, primarily because those who have ascribed the changes to the triclinium as belonging to the period of the first Jewish rebellion have quite simply ignored Corbo's findings. There is a paucity of primary material, both textual and archaeological, relating to Herodium for the period of the first Jewish rebellion. Josephus, our only comprehensive source, deals with the construction of Herodium by Herod the Great, and his funeral procession to that place, but barely mentions it in the context of the first rebellion, something that is again ignored by scholars who chose to ascribe a synagogue identification to the earlier period.

Josephus's Herodium narrative

Josephus tells us that Herodium was built on the spot where Herod, retreating from Jerusalem to Masada in flight from Antigonus and the massed Parthian armies in 40 BCE, achieved one of his most important victories over the Hasmonaeans and their allies. Herodium was built sometime between 24 BCE and 15 BCE (*AJ* 14.359-360; *BJ* 1.265), and consists of a lower palace with gardens and swimming pools, and an upper palace-fortress. This layout, according to Josephus, gave Lower Herodium the appearance of a town, and Upper Herodium the appearance of a castle stronghold (*AJ* 15.323-325, *AJ* 17.196-199; *BJ* 1.419, *BJ* 1.670-673, *BJ* 3.55).

Josephus said that Herod furnished both the upper and lower parts lavishly and brought in an abundant water supply to an area which was generally arid. He says that the upper site was adorned with round towers and that there was a route to the summit via two hundred steps of pure white marble (*AJ* 15.323-325; *AJ* 16.13, *AJ* 17.196-199; *BJ* 1.419, *BJ* 1.670-673, *BJ* 3.55).

As well as building Lower and Upper Herodium, Herod also designed Herodium as the site of his mausoleum, and Josephus tells us of the lavish funeral procession culminating in his burial (*AJ* 17.199; *BJ* 1.670-673).[571] The account of the funeral procession is the last mention of Herodium by Josephus until he begins his account of the Jewish rebellion against Rome in the late 60s CE.

[571] In 2009, Ehud Netzer, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem discovered what he has identified as Herod's tomb on the southeastern side of the hill of Upper Herodium.

Josephus tells us that during the Jewish rebellion, the mountain fortresses of Herodium, Masada and Machaerus were the last three rebel desert strongholds to still hold out against Roman forces. In 71 CE, Herodium became the first of these three to fall to the Tenth Legion *Fretensis*, then under the command of Legate Lucilius Bassus (*BJ* 4.554-555).

Given the foregoing, we might expect that Josephus would have then spent some time describing what happened at Herodium during the first Jewish rebellion but, in fact, he barely touches on the subject. The rebel occupation of Herodium does not seem to have posed much of a threat to the Romans, and was captured by them *en route* to Machaerus (*BJ* 7.163). Josephus does not give us any detail relating to the fall of Herodium to the Romans. For Herodium during the first Jewish rebellion, there was to be no grand narrative relating heroic deeds by brave defenders, no motif of mass-suicide, no account of the final desperate hours before the fall, and no mention of survivors or deaths on either side.

The ancient sources

Most references to Herodium prior to the second Jewish rebellion relate to its construction, during the reign of Herod the Great, to its location, and to Herod's burial there. Material relating to the occupation of Herodium during the first Jewish rebellion is sparse and what we do know comes to us in its entirety from Josephus. Unlike his descriptions of the fortress at Masada (in the following chapter), Josephus does not give any details of numbers, time-span, alterations, or even details of the siege and eventual taking of Herodium by the Romans.[572]

[572] See *BJ* 1.265; *BJ* 1..419; *BJ* 3.55; *AJ* 14.359-360; *AJ* 15.323-325; *AJ* 16.12-13; *AJ* 17.196-199; *BJ* 1.670-673; *BJ* 7.163; *BJ* 4.554-555; *BJ* 4.503-508; *BJ* 4.509-513; *BJ* 4.514-520; and Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book 5.15.

> [...] When Cerealis had conquered them he went to Hebron, another very ancient city. I have told you already, that this city is situated in a mountainous country not far off Jerusalem; and when he had broken into the city by force what multitude and young men were left therein he slew and burnt down the city; so that as now all the places were taken, excepting Herodium and Masada, and Machaerus, which were in possession of the robbers, so Jerusalem was what the Romans at present aimed at.
>
> Josephus, *BJ* 4.554-555

In the foregoing passage we are told only that the strongholds of Masada, Herodium and Machaerus were in the hands of the rebels. The Roman strategy was to deal with the rebellious cities such as Hebron and Jerusalem before concerning themselves with ridding themselves of the rebels at Masada, Herodium and Machaerus:

> Meanwhile, Lucilius Bassus had been dispatched to Judæa as legate, and, taking over the command from Cerealis Vetilianus, had reduced the fortress of Herodium with its garrison to surrender. He next concentrated all the numerous scattered detachments of troops, including the tenth legion, having determined to march against Machaerus. This fortress it was absolutely necessary to eradicate, lest its strength should induce many to revolt; since the nature of the place was specially adapted to inspire its occupants with high hopes of security and to deter and alarm its assailants. [...]
>
> Josephus, *BJ* 7.163

In this second passage, it would appear that Herodium did not pose any great military difficulty to the Romans. The implication may be that the scattered troops referred to by Josephus were not deemed necessary to besiege Herodium and, perhaps, that only troops immediately available were sent. Josephus does not describe the capture of Herodium, but instead discusses the strategic importance of the mountain fortress of Machaerus. One might expect, if the rebels at Herodium had also posed a threat to the Romans, that Josephus would have included some detail as to its defensive systems and its occupiers, as he had done with Masada:

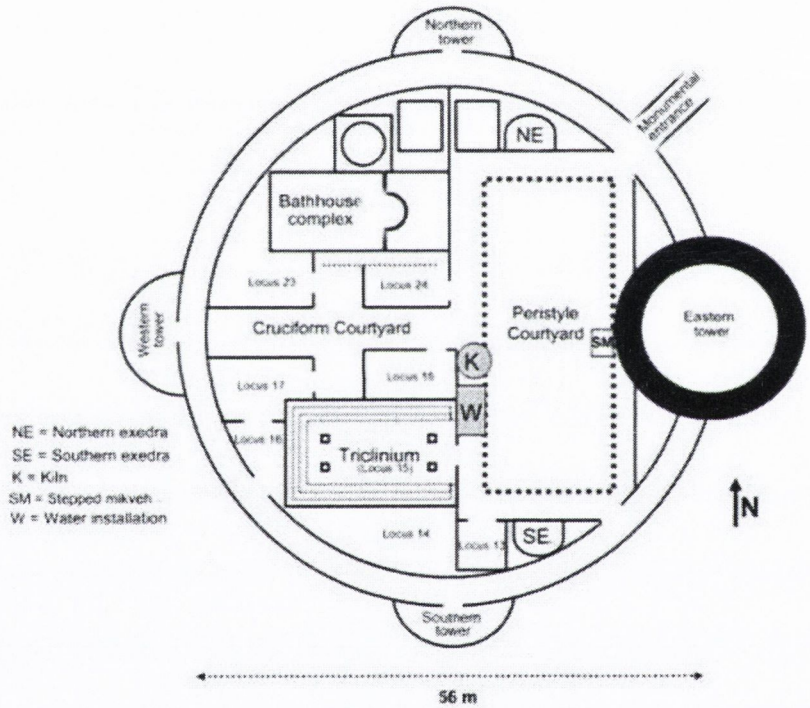
> The Zealots, in consequence, alarmed at his designs and anxious to forestall one whose growing strength was to their injury, went out with their main body under arms; Simon met them and in the ensuing fight killed many of them and drove the remainder into the city. Misgivings about his forces, however, still deterred him from an assault on the walls; instead he resolved first to subdue Idumaea, and now marched with an army of twenty thousand men towards the frontiers of that country. The chieftains of Idumaea hastily mustered from the country their most efficient troops, numbering about twenty-five thousand, and leaving the mass of the population to protect their property against incursions of the *Sicarii* of Masada, met Simon at the frontier. There he fought them and, after a battle lasting all day, left the field neither victor nor vanquished; he then withdrew to Nain and the Idumaeans disbanded to their homes. Not long after, however, Simon [bar Gioras] with a yet larger force again invaded their territory, and, encamping at a village called Tekoa, sent one of his comrades named Eleazar to the garrison at Herodion, which was not far off, to persuade them to hand over that fortress. The guards, ignorant of the subject of his visit, promptly admitted him, but at the first mention of the word "surrender" drew their swords and pursued him, until, finding escape impossible, he flung himself from the ramparts into the valley below and was killed on the spot.
>
> Josephus, *BJ* 4.514-520

This passage at least gives us some information about the group of rebels in control of Herodium, still, we do not know whether they occupied Herodium during the entire period of the first rebellion. We do not know when they arrived there, whether they had to wrest control of it from the Romans through force or treachery (as at Masada, *BJ* 2.408) or whether it was unoccupied and their taking of it was unopposed. We do not know what condition Herodium was in when it was occupied during the period of the first rebellion. Nor do we have any idea of the number of rebels there, or how they were organised. We know only that a faction of rebels who were opposed to Simon bar Gioras occupied and had control of Herodium, although we do not know how long for, or what people comprised that group. These three references represent the totality of material from Josephus relating to Herodium during the period of the first rebellion. They are clearly of no assistance in any discussion of a synagogue identification, nor are they of great assistance in identifying who exactly (or even approximately) occupied Herodium, and for how long.

Construction of the fortress of Herodium

Herod went to extraordinary lengths – even by his standards – to construct Upper Herodium, first creating an artificial hill on which to locate it, and then building the fortress on the hill, raising it well above the local landscape (see Figure 36 above). The circular upper palace-fortress is surrounded by a casemate wall with four towers protruding from it (see Figure 37 below).

Figure 37 – Plan of the upper palace-fortress



The outer diameter of the casemate wall is 63 m and the inner diameter of the palace-fortress is 56 m. The casemate is made up of two parallel walls 3.4 m apart, forming a circular corridor around the footprint of Upper Herodium. When it was built, this structure extended some 25 m above the artificial hill and was possibly divided into as many as seven storeys, including two underground cellar/cistern levels. The upper storeys had ceilings and floors supported on wooden beams and were each encircled by the casemate corridor/rooms, which

probably served for habitation, storerooms and access.[573] Four towers protrude out from the casemate wall; three semicircular ones (on the south, west and north) and one circular one on the east (see Figure 37 above). The circular eastern tower is the only one of the towers to extend inside the fortress as well as out.[574] Access to the palace-fortress was from the northeast, via a stairway that Josephus described as having 200 stone steps of white marble (*BJ* 1.420).[575] When the construction work was completed, earth and gravel was piled up around the walls of the upper palace-fortress, creating steep slopes and giving the hill its iconic conical volcanic shape (see Figure 36 above).[576]

Internally, the fortress is divided into two main sections. The structure with which this chapter is concerned – a converted triclinium – is located in the western section (see Figures 37 and 38 above). The western section contains the triclinium, various ancillary rooms and a bathhouse complex. A cross-shaped courtyard separates the triclinium and ancillary rooms from the bathhouse complex just 30 m to the north of the triclinium. The eastern section of the palace-fortress is almost completely taken up by a large peristyle courtyard.[577]

History of the excavations

Between 1962 and 1967, Virgilio Corbo conducted excavations at the site on behalf of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, during which time the main buildings on the summit were uncovered and mapped.[578] Between 1967 and 1970, Gideon Foerster of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem carried out

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[573] Netzer (2006): 183.
[574] V. Corbo, "L'Herodion de Giabel Fureidis", *Liber Annuus* 117 (1967): 74.
[575] Netzer (2006): 187.
[576] Netzer (2006): 2006, 188.
[577] E. Netzer, "Herodium", *NEAEHL*, Volume 2, Ephraim Stern (ed), The Israel Exploration Society and Carta, Jerusalem (1993a): 619.
[578] Corbo (1967): 103.

preservation and restoration works for the National Parks Authority. During these works, a network of cisterns and a system of tunnels dug in the hill that dated to the time of the Bar-Kokhba revolt were uncovered.[579] In 1970, Ehud Netzer excavated sections of Lower Herodium.[580] Netzer is currently involved in the ongoing excavation of what he has identified as Herod's tomb, as well as in preservation works on Upper Herodium.[581]

The identification of the converted triclinium as a synagogue

In his preliminary report published in 1967, Virgilio Corbo, the excavator of Upper Herodium, identified the triclinium as a synagogue. He said that the triclinium was occupied and transformed during the period of the Jewish *wars* ("les guerre giudache") and that it was the construction of benches around its walls that identified it as a synagogue.[582] Outside the northeastern wall of the triclinium he found a 3-pool water installation which he identified as a mikveh, as well as a large kiln (see Figure 38 below).[583]

In the final excavation reports published in 1989, Corbo went further than in his preliminary reports, and categorised the converted triclinium as belonging to the period of the second Jewish rebellion (132-135 CE).[584] Corbo's identification of the synagogue as belonging to the second rebellion period has given subsequent scholars something of a headache and, indeed, nearly all of those who have written about the triclinium/synagogue have simply ignored Corbo's reports and

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[579] Netzer (1993a): 618.
[580] Netzer (1993a): 618.
[581] *News@HebrewU*: "http://www.hunews.huji.ac.il/articles.asp?cat=6&artID=935 (accessed 2 September 2008).
[582] Corbo (1967): 103.
[583] V. Corbo, *Herodion: Gli Edifici della Reggia-Fortrezza*. Volume 1, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem (1989): 74-75.
[584] Corbo (1989): 74-75.

followed the line taken by Netzer, Foerster and others, saying that the use of the triclinium as a synagogue dates to the period of the first rebellion. However, as Corbo found, and as is discussed below, there is little or no evidence to substantiate a first Jewish rebellion period identification.

THE EXCAVATION REPORTS

Corbo's identification of the converted triclinium as a synagogue is based on the fact that the room has benches around three walls and, presumably, because it was occupied by Jews during the period of both rebellions.[585] It is worth noting here that Corbo made his identification in 1967, and Yigael Yadin had identified Locus 1042 on Masada as a synagogue (see previous chapter) in 1965.[586]

The converted triclinium

Corbo described the Herodian period triclinium as a large rectangular room measuring 15.15 x 10.60 m, with an entrance overlooking the peristyle courtyard to the east. There were a number of rooms around the triclinium, but only two of these were connected with it when it was excavated (Loci 14 and 18 - see Figure 38 below). Corbo said that these two loci were not related to its usage as a synagogue, since the northern and southern access doorways from the triclinium to those rooms had been bricked-up when the triclinium was converted. There were two windows on the eastern façade that had also been bricked up when the triclinium was converted.[587]

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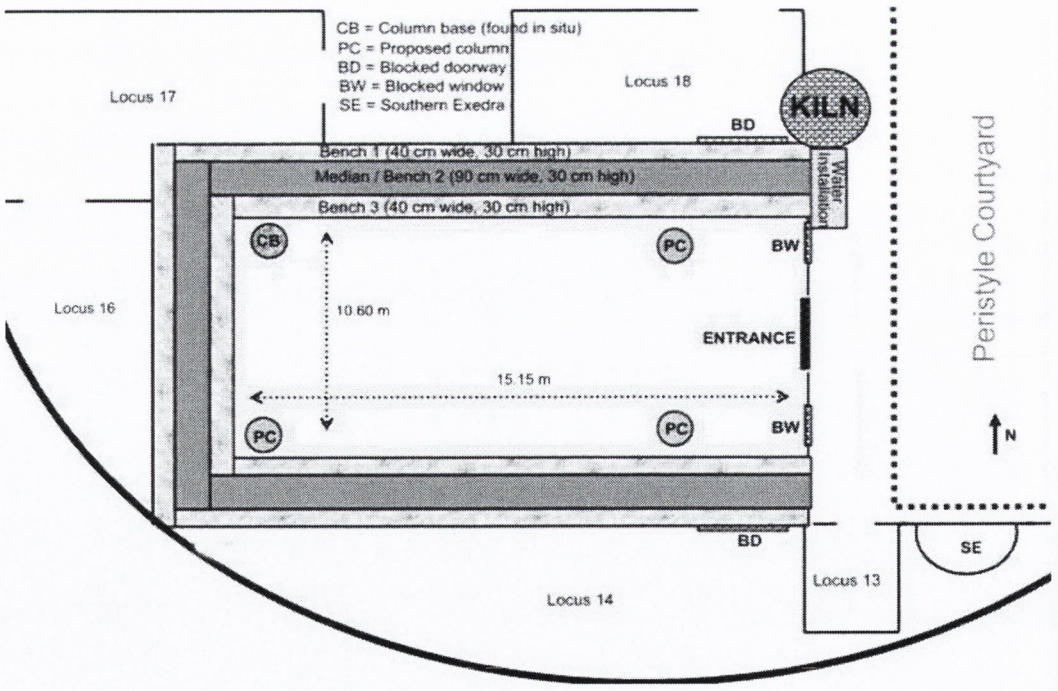
[585] Corbo (1989): 102.
[586] E. Netzer, "Masada", in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Ephraim Stern (ed.), The Israel Exploration Society, Carta, Jerusalem (1993b): 974.
[587] Corbo (1989): 101.

The area of the triclinium was the single largest space excavated in Upper Herodium. During the Herodian phase, according to Corbo, it had a wooden roof supported by four or possibly six columns, although only one column base was found *in situ* (see Figure 38 below).[588] The conversion of the triclinium into a synagogue, according to Corbo, involved the construction of benches around the walls and the blocking off of the northern and southern doors and the two windows on the eastern façade. The entrance on the eastern façade was also made narrower at this time.[589] Three benches/steps were added in the triclinium, and these were built of stone blocks taken from the walls of the triclinium and some reused architectural pieces from elsewhere on Upper Herodium.

Figure 38 – Plan of the triclinium



[588] Corbo (1989): 101.
[589] Corbo (1989): 102.

The top bench is 40 cm wide and 30 cm high, the middle bench (or median) is 90 cm wide and 30 cm high, and the bottom bench is 40 cm wide and 30 high. The benches/steps run from the jamb of the blocked door on the north wall, around the western wall and almost to the jamb of the blocked door on the southern wall (see Figure 38 above). Corbo could not determine whether the steps/benches broke off at the northern and southern doors intentionally, or whether this was due to subsequent destruction.[590] Corbo said that pieces of capitals built into the benches around the north, south and western walls may have come from the columns that originally supported the roof, and that the structural changes, such as the blocking up of the windows and doors and the construction of the benches, signalled the change of usage from triclinium to synagogue.[591]

By the northeastern façade of the triclinium, Corbo uncovered what he described as a 3-pooled mikveh.[592] Abutting the northern edge of this installation is a large kiln (see Figures 37 and 38 above).[593] Nowhere in the excavation reports does Corbo address the reasons a mikveh and a kiln might be associated together in this way. By the time he published the final excavation reports (the first volume was published in 1989), Corbo had come to the conclusion that the structural changes in the triclinium, which he said, transformed it into a synagogue, had to be attributed to the period of the second Jewish rebellion.[594] The basis on which Corbo came to this conclusion was very simply that that the material evidence pointed to the period of the second rebellion and that very little evidence existed

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[590] Corbo (1989): 103.
[591] Corbo (1989): 102.
[592] The water installation was completely buried beneath the sand in the years after the Corbo excavations. From 1999 through to my most recent visit to the site in February 2009, only the kiln remained visible above ground. However, since then conservation work being undertaken by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has uncovered the water installation again.
[593] Corbo (1989): 75.
[594] Corbo (1989): 75.

to point to an earlier period. In fact, the *only* evidence – other than coins – that could be safely attributed to the period of the first revolt, were some wooden plates found in context with some first rebel period coins. The wooden plates and coins were found in Locus 17, which had no connection with the triclinium itself. Its access was via the cruciform courtyard (see Figure 38 above).[595]

According to Corbo, the Herodian period floor of Locus 17 had been completely destroyed and was about one metre lower than the floor of the first rebel period. On the rebel period floor, sixteen coins were found (nine of year 2 of the rebellion, one of year 3, and six which were too worn to date).[596] Wooden plates were also found in this context.[597] Also found were a Corinthian capital, a section of hypocaust from the bathhouse and a large ballista.[598]

Locus 18 borders the triclinium and the cruciform courtyard (see Figure 38 above). Originally, there was a connection between Locus 18 and the triclinium. The original doorway between the north wall of the triclinium and Locus 18 mirrors the doorway between the south wall of the triclinium and Locus 14. However, both of these doors were blocked up during the conversion of the triclinium.[599]

Locus 13 is the room to the south of the peristyle courtyard, in front of the southern tower. It measures 4.21 x 4.10 m and to its east is the southern exedra (see Figure 37 above). Its entrance was via the peristyle courtyard. It was

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[595] Corbo (1989): 107.
[596] A. Spijkerman, *Herodion III. Catologo delle Monete*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem (1972): 21.
[597] Corbo (1989): 107.
[598] Corbo (1989): 107.
[599] Corbo (1989): 109.

occupied during the period of the second rebellion and when it was excavated was buried beneath a debris layer almost 2 metres deep. Amongst the debris of this layer was one coin from the second rebellion (which was too worn to be dated).[600] In the area between Locus 13 and the wall of the triclinium, a hoard of 770 second rebellion period coins and some scattered coins of the same period, were excavated.[601] The importance of the level around this area was derived, according to Corbo, from the fact that it dated to the period of the second rebellion and the deep destruction layer indicated the intensity the rebel defence of Herodium against the Romans in 135 CE.[602]

Corbo's identification of a synagogue in Upper Herodium in 1967 seems to have been influenced by Yigael Yadin's identification of what he claimed was a synagogue at Masada only two years earlier. The building Yadin identified had benches around its walls. Indeed, Corbo mentioned Yigael Yadin's synagogue identification (which was widely publicised and which has subsequently achieved iconic status).[603]

Without reference to the Yadin synagogue identification, all there is at Herodium to identify the structure as a synagogue is a converted triclinium with stepped benches around three of the walls, two blocked up doors, two blocked up windows and a nearby mikveh (not the one identified by Corbo, but another one, belonging to the period of the second rebellion, on the other side of the peristyle courtyard, beside the eastern tower). Nor was any material found inside or near the triclinium which might indicate its use.

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[600] Spijkerman (1972): 17-21.
[601] Spijkerman (1972): 23-83.
[602] Corbo (1989): 76.
[603] Corbo (1989): 75.

Corbo's identification of a synagogue has been widely accepted by scholars, although those who have written about it have ascribed it to the period of the first Jewish rebellion, even though no material was found in the triclinium or even in any of the rooms which had previously been connected to it (Loci 14 and 18). The only locus in which material was discovered in a context which could be clearly identified as belonging to the first Jewish rebellion was Locus 17, which was **not** connected to the triclinium (see Figures 37 and 38 above) in the period when it had been converted.

Since most of the material discovered in this area (and elsewhere in Upper Herodium) belongs to the period of the second rebellion, Corbo concluded that the amendments to the triclinium were contemporary with that period. Of course, it is possible that the benches were put in place earlier, but there is no evidence to support this. And even if the benches had been put in during the period of the first or second rebellion, there is nothing to link this with usage of the building as a synagogue.

The water installation/mikveh and kiln

Abutting the triclinium is what Corbo described as a mikveh. This structure itself is located beside a large second rebellion period kiln (see Figure 38 above). The water installation is a 3-pool system,[604] so that if it were a mikveh, one might have had to enter one pool, exit it, enter the next, exit that and then enter and exit the final pool, a curious arrangement which is unlikely to be connected to any sort of organised religious ritual relating to purification rites.

[604] Although this is not fully visible because sand from the desert blows into it and fills it up.

Josephus is silent on the subject of mikva'ot, although he does mention purification procedures elsewhere and in different periods (*AJ* 12.145; *AJ* 18.116-119; *BJ* 4.205; *Vita* 11-12). The starting point for all information we have about mikva'ot comes from the Mishnaic tractates *mikva'ot* of the Mishnah and the Tosefta.[605] The purpose of the mikveh was to ritually cleanse the flesh, and it may also have been used before eating or before reading the Torah or praying. Ritual bathing could be conducted in the comfort of a person's home, but there were also public mikva'ot. The mikveh was not used for bathing, which instead was done in alternative water installations located within the household, or in public bathhouses.[606] Indeed, people appear to have washed themselves (or parts of their bodies, notably the feet and hands) before entering them (*M. Mikva'ot* 9:2).[607]

In the Mishnah, at least six grades of mikva'ot are listed: (1) ponds; (2) ponds during the rainy season; (3) immersion pools containing more than forty *se'ah*[608] of water; (4) wells with natural groundwater; (5) salty water from the sea and hot springs; and (6) natural flowing *living* waters from springs and in rivers (*M. Mikva'ot* 1:1-8).[609] Stepped and plastered water installations fell in the middle of the grades of mikva'ot and we are told that "More excellent is a pool of water containing forty *se'ah*; for in them men may immerse themselves and immerse other things [i.e., vessels]" (*M. Mikva'ot* 1:7).[610]

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[605] S. Gibson, "The Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem and Jewish Purification Practices of the Second Temple Period", in *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 55 (2005) 274.
[606] Gibson (2005) 280.
[607] Gibson (2005) 276.
[608] Somewhat less than one cubic litre of water.
[609] Gibson (2005) 274; *The Mishnah*, Translated by H. Danby from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes, Oxford University Press, New York (1985).
[610] Gibson (2005) 275.

A mikveh must also be watertight because leakage invalidated it. Its depth was to be 120 cm so that a person may be completely immersed, even if they have to bend their knees to achieve this.[611] Indeed, "if the water of an immersion pool was too shallow it may be dammed [to one side] even with bundles of sticks or reeds, that the level of water may be raised, and so he may go down and immerse himself" (*M. Mikva'ot* 7:7).[612] Mikva'ot were required to be sunken into the ground, either through construction or by cutting into the rock. Into these sunken cisterns natural water from a spring or from surface rainwater would flow.[613]

It is not known when the first stepped and plastered mikveh appeared, but it is thought to have been in the late Hasmonaean period, toward the end of the second century BCE or early in the first century BCE. A large number of mikva'ot are known from the Herodian period and up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE in both public and private contexts.[614] Because mikva'ot could be found in many contexts, both public and private, it is not known whether there is a particular association between synagogues and mikva'ot. Indeed, even the relationship of synagogue and mikveh is not certain and it appears to be an occasional association only. A synagogue did not need to have a mikveh attached to it and a mikveh did not need to be attached to a synagogue to qualify as a mikveh.

In the case of the water installation outside the converted triclinium in the upper fortress of Herodium, the size of the adjoining kiln (with a diameter of 2 m) suggests it could have been used on an industrial scale, and it would seem logical that the three pools, rather than being a mikveh, relate directly to the kiln and

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[611] D. Kotlar and J. Baskin, "Mikveh", in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Second Edition, Volume 14, Macmillan Reference, USA (2008): 225.
[612] Gibson (2005) 277.
[613] Gibson (2005) 277.
[614] Gibson (2005) 279.

were used for the purpose of processing clay and firing pottery, or for some other manufacturing process.

No tests have ever been conducted on residues in either the water installation or the kiln that could have indicated the purposes for which they were used.[615] Other than this *sort* of explanation, the association of a kiln and a water installation just does not make sense. The radiating heat from the kiln would cause the water in the mikveh to evaporate, making it difficult to maintain the volume required for ritual purification purposes, and perhaps even making it uncomfortable to use. Most important, however, is that there is no reason to have a three-pooled structure for purification when all that is required is ritual immersion – not facilities for a sequence of ablutions.

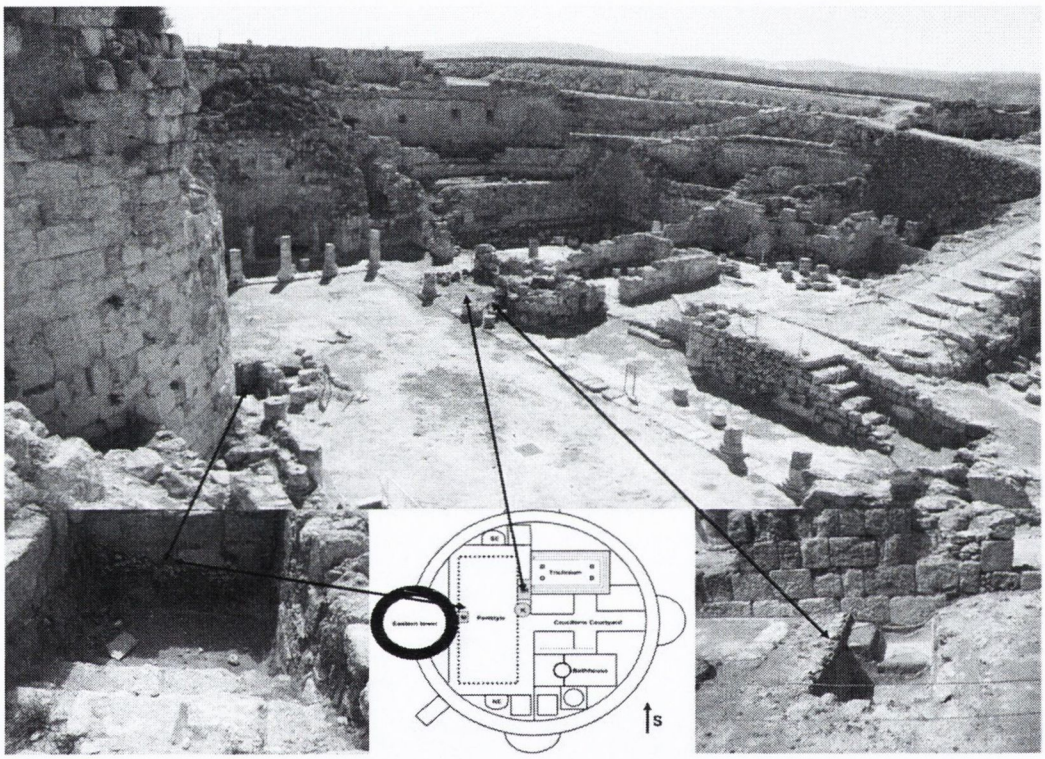
Moreover, there *is* what appears to be a simple mikveh on the other side of the peristyle courtyard, just 25 m away, and it is a simple stepped pool into which a person could step, immerse and exit quickly and easily (see Figure 39 below). If the converted triclinium *was* a synagogue, and if it *was* established that synagogues were found in association with mikva'ot, then the stepped mikveh on the far side of the peristyle courtyard would be the one related to the triclinium.

The mikveh shown on the bottom left of Figure 39 (below) is a second rebellion period structure, constructed out of the same sorts of material used to convert the triclinium.[616] This mikveh is large enough for a person to stand in and to be immersed in water to chest level. This, while not being conclusive evidence, lends some weight to Corbo's identification of the structural changes in the

[615] Corbo (1989): 75.
[616] Corbo (1989): 76.

triclinium as belonging to the second rebellion period.[617] The stepped pool outside the converted triclinium is part of a 3-pool installation and the stepped section (bottom right of Figure 39) is barely deep enough to reach to the knees of an adult, rendering it useless as a mikveh for ritual immersion.

Figure 39 – Location of mikveh, triclinium, kiln and water installation



During the period of the second rebellion, the occupants of the fortress made minor structural changes to most of the buildings to suit their needs. Evidence of their work was found in the area of the peristyle courtyard on the east and in the bathhouse and the triclinium on the west. Ovens for domestic use were also found, as well as the aforementioned large kiln and associated water installation. All of these installations contained material from the second rebellion period only.[618]

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[617] Corbo (1989): 76.
[618] Corbo (1989): 76.

The coins from the upper fortress

Over the four seasons of excavations on Herodium between 1962 and 1967, a total of 873 coins were found. The coins and where they were found during the four seasons of Corbo's excavations are as follows:

Table 1 – The coins from the period of the first rebellion

Catalogue No	Quantity	Date	Location
33-55[619]	23	FR (13 x year 2; 10 year 3)	Room XXXIII
58[620]	1	FR (1 x year 2)	Garden / Peristyle Area
70-71[621]	2	FR (2 x undated)	Garden / Peristyle Area
76[622]	1	FR (1 x year 2)	Garden Area VIII
77	1	FR (1 x year 2)	Garden Area VIII
79-80[623]	2	FR (2 x year 2)	Garden / Peristyle Area
81[624]	1	FR (1 x year 3)	Garden Area VIII
85-98[625]	14	FR; (7 x year 2; 1 x year 3; 6 x unclear)	Room XVII
99-100[626]	2	(2) FR year 2	XVII
TOTAL	**47**		

Table 2 – The coins from the period of the second rebellion

Catalogue	Number of Coins	Date	Location
Hoard[627]	770	SR	Southern Exedra
59	1	SR; year 1	Garden / Peristyle Area
60	1	SR; unclear	Garden / Peristyle Area
61	1	SR; undated	Garden / Peristyle Area
62	1	SR; year 2	Garden / Peristyle Area
63	1	SR; undated	Garden / Peristyle Area
64	1	SR; undated	Garden / Peristyle Area
65	1	SR; undated	Garden / Peristyle Area
66	1	SR; undated	Garden / Peristyle Area
67	1	SR; undated	Garden / Peristyle Area
69	1	SR; unclear	Garden / Peristyle Area
73	1	SR; year 2	Garden / Peristyle Area
74	1	SR; undated	Eastern Tower, bottom of cistern
75	1	SR; undated	Eastern Tower, bottom of cistern
82	1	SR; undated	Room XX, apse of church
84	1	SR; undated	Apse of church
102	1	SR; undated	Room XIII
TOTAL	**786**		

[619] Spijkerman (1972): 18.
[620] Spijkerman (1972): 19.
[621] Spijkerman (1972): 19.
[622] Spijkerman (1972): 20.
[623] Spijkerman (1972): 21.
[624] Spijkerman (1972): 20.
[625] Spijkerman (1972): 21.
[626] Spijkerman (1972): 21.
[627] Spijkerman (1972): 23-83.

Table 3 – The coins from miscellaneous periods

Catalogue No.	Number of Coins	Date	Location
1	1	7th century CE	XXVIII (Tepidarium)
2	1	5th-6th century CE	XXX (Frigidarium)
3	1	6th century CE	XXX (Frigidarium)
4	1	6th century CE	XXXI (monastery)
5-20	16	5th century CE	XXIX (monastery)
21	1	5th century CE	XXVIII (monastery)
22-23	2	4th century CE	XXVIII (monastery)
24	1	2nd century CE	XXXII (coin of Caesarea)
25	1	1st century BCE	External wall (Herod the Great)
26	1	1st century BCE	External wall (Herod the Great)
27	1	2nd-1st BCE	?? Possibly external wall
28	1	6th century CE	XXXII
29	1	1st century CE	XXXIV (Nero)
30	1	1st century BCE	XXXIV (Herod the Great)
31	1	??	XXXIV (Imitation Jannaeus)
32	1	2nd century BCE	? very small coin
32a	1	?? unique	XXXIII Large heavy coin
56	1	??	XXXIII Completely Fragmented
57	1	2nd century CE	XXXIII
68	1	Umayyad	Eastern tower
72	1	4th century BCE	Garden / Peristyle Area
78	1	1st century BCE	Garden / Peristyle Area
83	1	1st century CE	XXXVIII (Coin of Pilate)
101	1	1st century CE	XX (Coin of Ethnarch Archelaus)
Total	**40**		

As can be seen from Table 2 above, the majority of these coins belonged to the period of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Of these, 770 were found in a single hoard buried in the space between Locus 13 and the triclinium (see Figure 37 above). A further sixteen coins were found in rooms elsewhere in the fortress, giving a total of 786 second rebellion period coins. Another forty coins of miscellaneous dates (belonging neither to the first nor second rebellions) were found. These included coins from the second century BCE though the seventh century CE.[628] Only 47 coins relating to the period of the first revolt were found, and these were found scattered in various rooms around the fortress. Of these forty-seven coins, twenty-seven were from year two of the rebellion, twelve from year three, two were undated and six were too faded and/or damaged and/or worn to be read.[629]

[628] Spijkerman (1972): 17-21.
[629] Spijkerman (1972): 17-21.

The coins can tell us a little about the period of the first rebellion. They tell us that Herodium may have been occupied from at least the second year of the rebellion (67-68 CE) and that this occupation may have lasted until at least the third year (68-69 CE). Of course, none of this is certain. It is possible that the first rebel period coins may have been in the hands of the rebels during the second rebellion. Coins of bronze, silver and gold retained the value of the metal they were made of and did not go out of use, unless they were melted down to make something else.

The inscriptions and ostraca

There was little written material found at Herodium, and certainly nothing that would indicate the system of organisation of the occupants during the first rebellion period. In fact, most of the written material found on Herodium comprised graffiti scratched on the plaster of the bathhouse walls, various ostraca and on writing on jars.[630] The ostraca and jar inscriptions were written in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew and, according to the excavation reports, belong to the main periods of settlement; that is, to the Herodian and/or to the first and second Jewish rebellions. On the basis of archaeological remains and finds, Corbo said it was impossible to differentiate between inscriptions from the time of Herod and from the two revolts.[631]

Some of the material could be safely attributed to the second century CE. An *abcedaria* was found in the kiln adjacent to the triclinium, containing two complete Hebrew alphabets on one side and an incomplete alphabet (up to the letter ס) on the other. At nearby Wadi el-Murabba'at, nine very similar *abcedaria*

[630] There were only around 100 ostraca found in all at Herodium.
[631] E. Testa, *Herodion IV. I Graffiti e gli Ostraka*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem (1972): 93.

dating to the second century CE were found.[632] The presence of an *abcedaria* does suggest that some sort of teaching or scribal activity was taking place here during the second century, which is interesting, and one could certainly imagine there being a school or *bet midrash* of some sort on the site during the second century, especially given the extent and length of the occupation in the period of the Bar-Kokhba rebellion[633].

Even so, the ostraca provide strangely mixed evidence. A small ostracon, for example, was found in the large kiln abutting the triclinium. In the excavation reports of 1972, Emmanuelle Testa translated the text of this ostracon סבי ספח גדול דגון as "Dagon my ancestor is among the nobility".[634] The verb ספח means "to grow, or to swell, or to add to", or possibly "to spontaneously regrow". *Dagon* is the name of a Philistine deity, and since the kiln and the water installation are associated together, it is difficult to understand how this might relate to a religious Jewish context.

Another ostracon was found in the adjacent water installation on which was inscribed two words in Aramaic lettering. These two words are תן גלא, which Testa tentatively translated as "instructs the exiles" or, possibly, "repeat again the exile".[635] the word גלא can also be translated as a "heap" (ie, of stones or bones), or "to be uncovered", or to "go into exile". This text could therefore be translated as "give [a] heap [of something]", or "give [into] exile". It is impossible to know now to what this refers and it may be that the text of the ostracum is incomplete.

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[632] Testa (1972): 77-78.
[633] Testa (1972): 107.
[634] Testa (1972): 80.
[635] Testa (1972): 81.

Another inscription, written on the belly of a large jar, was found in the water installation. This inscription comprised two words in Aramaic script. The words are ירסא רבא, which Testa suggested could translate as "poison the high power"[636]. The term ירסא רבא is not found in biblical texts. It is, however, cited in Jastrow's dictionary of the Mishnah, suggesting a later date[637]. Testa's translation of these words as "poison the high power" is an interesting possibility, but is it a likely one? ריס is found in Jastrow as a masculine noun, meaning "a drop", or "poison", and Testa has coupled it in this form with רבא and translated it as "poison the high power". However, Testa clearly thought the first word was a verb rather than a noun, and the second word a noun (and an accusative object). Jastrow says that the word ירסא appears in the same form in the Targum to Psalms 58:5 and is identical to *eres*, "poison". Therefore "great poison" could be the meaning. This text might have been attached to goods or merchandise that was poisonous. Ultimately, however, the meaning remains elusive.[638]

None of the ostraca from Herodium speak to the existence of, or the necessity for, a synagogue during the period of either the first or second rebellions, although the *abcedaria* certainly suggests the existence of some sort of scribal or teaching activity on the site. And, unlike at Masada (where the ostraca numbered almost a thousand and attested to the existence of an administrative system of some complexity), there were only a hundred or so ostraca found on Herodium. Against this, however, the *abcedaria* suggests that there was some form of organised administration going on at Herodium during the second century revolt and,

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[636] Testa (1972): 82.
[637] M. Jastrow. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, The Judaica Press, Inc., New York (1996 edition).
[638] In an email discussion with Prof. C. Hezser, Chair of Jewish Studies at SOAS.

perhaps, that this was taking place in the assembly space that the triclinium had been converted into.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarship on the subject of Herodium follows the same pattern as the scholarship on Delos, Jericho, Masada and Gamla. That is, an archaeologist (usually the excavator) declares that the building is a synagogue, and thereafter practically every scholar repeats the claim, sometimes with variations and often with embellishments.

It is noteworthy that, as with Masada, the excavators, including Corbo, have referred throughout their reports to the rebels on Herodium as "Zealots", although Josephus never identifies any of the occupants of Herodium specifically as Zealots. Describing the rebel occupants of Herodium (and elsewhere) as Zealots, clearly sets up a scenario where there *could* be reason to establish a synagogue, even if there is no other evidence to support that identification. If the rebels are identified as brigands, Sicarii, mercenaries, political rebels, and so forth, then the identification of religious buildings becomes far more problematic.

Gideon Foerster (1981)

Foerster performed conservation work at Upper Herodium after the Corbo excavations had ceased. He describes the physical layout of the triclinium, attributing the post-Herodian structural changes as belonging to the period of the first Jewish rebellion, particularly the benches, which were built of architectural

fragments taken from other areas of Herod's palace.[639] He goes on to compare the Herodium triclinium with the building identified as a synagogue on Masada, saying that their layout is "essentially identical". He attributes this similarity to "Zealot construction" on the site. He says that in neither Masada nor Herodium, has a fixed Torah shrine been found, although at Masada, a side room may have functioned as a repository, since scroll fragments were discovered there. He goes on to say that at Herodium, one of the smaller rooms flanking the hall may have served this purpose.[640] He also goes on to note that in the cases of both Herodium and Masada there is a nearby mikveh and that at Herodium, the mikveh actually abutted the eastern wall of the synagogue.[641]

Foerster argues that the two structures identified as synagogues on Masada and Herodium are almost identical in dimensions: Masada 12 x 15 m; Herodium 10.5 x 15 m, and that they were undoubtedly constructed along with the other structures at these sites, although significant modifications were made in both of them during the First Revolt against Rome, when these buildings fell into the hands of the insurgents.[642] Foerster does not explain his reasons for rejecting Corbo's dating, other than saying that the triclinium's structural changes "most likely" occurred in the period of the first rebellion, on the basis of a comparison with the structure at Masada which has also been identified as a belonging to the first rebellion period synagogue and that the two structures are "essentially identical: oblong halls lined with benches and with supporting columns in the space of the hall proper."[643]

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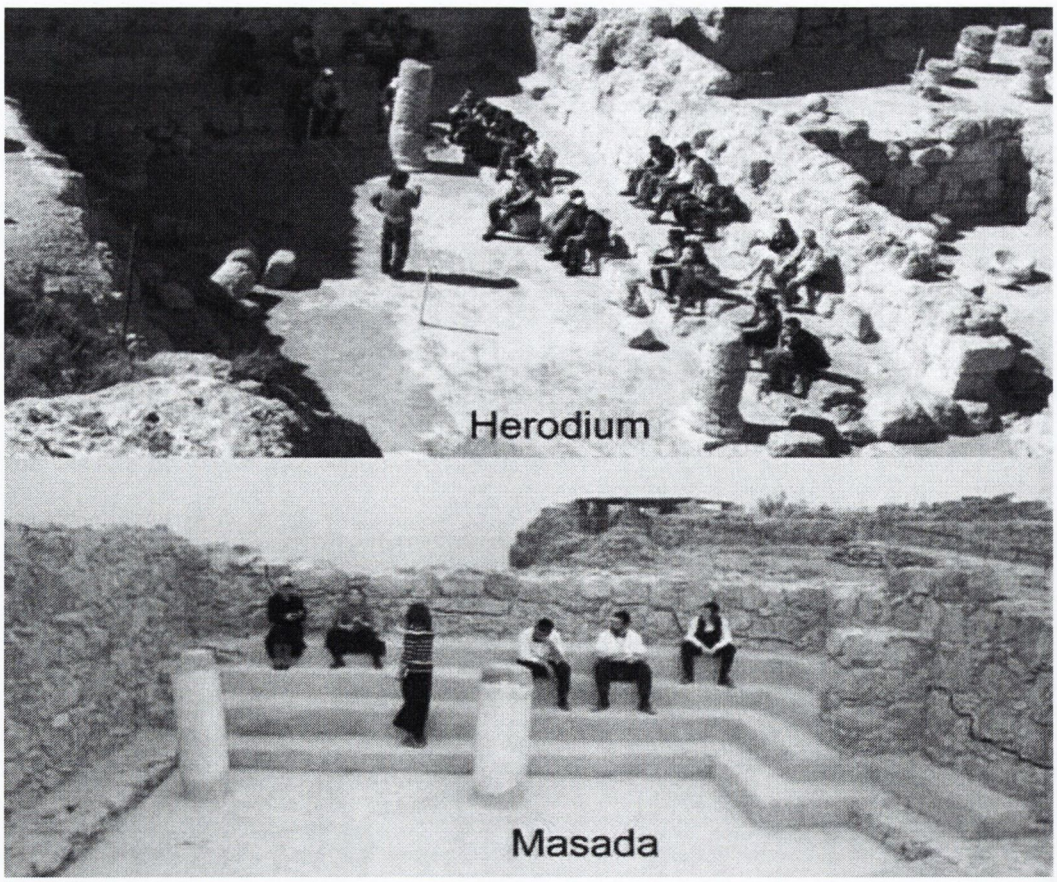
[639] G. Foerster, "The Synagogues at Masada and Herodium", in Levine, L.I. *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Israel Exploration Society (1981): 24.
[640] Foerster (1981): 26.
[641] Foerster (1981): 26.
[642] Foerster (1981): 24.
[643] Foerster (1981): 24.

However, the identification of a synagogue at Masada is debatable (as argued in chapter 4 herein) and arguments for it are themselves based only on comparisons with – in essence – itself and a structure at Gamla also identified as a first century synagogue. This does not appear to be sufficient evidence to make such an identification at Herodium. There is no question that the structures at Masada and Gamla do share some features; the benches, the rectangular shape of the room, but that is as far as the similarities go. The triclinium at Herodium is in fact easily twice the size of Locus 1042 on Masada, although this doesn't bear on its identification. I neglected to take measurements when visiting the sites in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2009, but the photographs I took *do* show the size difference between the two structures.

Figure 40 – Comparison of Locus 1042 on Masada and the Herodium triclinium



Foerster accepted the details of Corbo's excavation reports in relation to the triclinium on Herodium, but has attributed them to the period of the first rebellion on the basis of a superficial similarity with the building identified as a synagogue at Masada. His short article, published in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* in 1981, is the point at which the identification of the triclinium as a synagogue dating to the first rebellion became well established and the point from which most other scholarship has followed.

Joseph Patrich (1992)

In a review of Corbo's final excavation reports, Patrich says that "the synagogue" is better dated to the period of the first Jewish rebellion because of its resemblance to the structures at Masada and Gamla. He says that the majority of coins scattered about the site date from the First Jewish War. Then he says that of the coins found on the site, 47 relate to the period of the first rebellion, and only 16 coins to the period of the second rebellion "[...] if we disregard a hoard of approximately 1,000 bronze coins from this period found in the southern exedra."[644] Patrich says that it is hard to understand why Corbo insisted on attributing most of the installations and alterations in the Herodian palace-fortress to the Second Revolt. He says that there is no plan in the final reports illustrating the state of the construction during the period of the first rebellion and that only in room 17 could Corbo define a stratigraphic distinction between the remains from the two revolts.[645] He goes on to say that his conclusions are further supported because the Zealots at Masada went through significant efforts to build a synagogue and several mikva'ot. Thus, he claims, because a similar group

[644] J. Patrich, "Corbo's Excavations at Herodium", a review article in *Israel Exploration Journal*, Volume 42, Numbers 3-4, Jerusalem (1992): 243.
[645] Patrich (1992): 243.

inhabited Herodium during the period of the first Jewish rebellion, it seems likely that their activities would have followed the same pattern. Moreover, since the fortress was in the possession of the rebels from about 66 to 71 CE, they certainly had ample time to make renovations to the triclinium.[646]

Patrich disregards the lack of evidence relating to the period of the first rebellion, and sets out an unsupported conclusion based on a comparison and some assumptions. First, we do *not* know that Zealots occupied Herodium. Second, the reason there is no plan in Corbo's final excavation reports showing the construction phase relating to the period of the first rebellion, is that *there were no built structures that could be so identified*. Corbo was quite clear on this point.[647]

The fact that 47 coins of the period of the first rebellion were found scattered around the site (but not in the triclinium itself) must be weighed against the discovery of the hoard of 770 coins of the period of the second rebellion being found (they were found between Locus 13 and the triclinium, not in the southern exedra as Patrich states[648]). Another sixteen second rebellion period coins were found in various rooms. Patrich has simply disregarded this evidence and has treated the first rebellion period coins as though they could *only* have been in use during the first rebellion. All in all, Patrich's contentions are not supported by the evidence.

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[646] Patrich (1992): 243.
[647] Corbo (1989): 69-70: "In our excavations, given the huge build up of the second Roman destruction, it is difficult to distinguish what belonged to the first destruction of the Herodian fortress. We could only safely differentiate wooden plates which were found associated with coins of the first revolt. Coins of the first revolt were also found between the peristyle and the north exedra, in the peristyle, and in the tower." (my translation from the Italian.)
[648] Spijkerman (1972): 23-83.

Ehud Netzer (1993)

Netzer reiterates Foerster's position, describing the architectural layout of the palace-fortress. He says that many archaeological traces of settlement were found from both the first and second revolts, and that settlement is also known from the literary sources. He says that the rebels' building activities were generally limited to the addition of walls in dry construction and the reuse of stones, but that more basic changes – of a religious and cultic nature – were made in the triclinium, where rows of stone benches were added along three of the walls. Netzer says that this structure was apparently used as a synagogue by the rebels who had taken refuge here and that a mikveh "appears to have been added when the building became a synagogue."[649]

Netzer's contention that many archaeological traces of settlement changes were found relating to the period of the first rebellion is not supported by the excavation reports or any of the material evidence found on the site. Netzer links the water installation to the structural changes in the triclinium which, since they most likely belong to the period of the second rebellion, does not support his argument. While Netzer has written extensively on the subject of Herod's building programme, he does not add anything new to the identification argument, merely repeating Foerster's contention that the structural changes in the triclinium belong to the period of the first rebellion.

Paul Flesher (1995)

Flesher takes a more cautious approach, and deals with the issue of the identification in general, saying of Masada, Herodium and Gamla that their

[649] Netzer (1993a): 620.

Jewish character is evident only from their location which is within an area identified with Jews and that the architectural features that have been used to identify them as synagogues – the benches around the walls and the columns – appear also in structures not identified as synagogues, and only some of these are Jewish.[650] Flesher says that there is no way to identify what the triclinium was used for in the rebel period and that Herodium was the location of a rebel army who, like the rebels at Masada, needed a place to plan military strategy.[651] Flesher goes on to say that there is also a chronological problem with the dating "of the synagogue" at Herodium and that the main proponent of this argument was Gideon Foerster who supervised the restoration of the site after the primary excavations had been completed and who argued that the synagogue dates to rebels who used the site as a fortress during the first Jewish rebellion, but that Corbo – the site's excavator – states (in the final report) that the synagogue belongs to the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Flesher concludes that the structure at Herodium provides "no sure evidence of a synagogue in the first century; if it is a synagogue, it most likely stems from the early second century."[652]

Donald Binder (1999)

Binder repeats Foerster's assertions in some detail and acknowledges that the synagogue identification was made on the basis of similarities with the structures on Masada and Gamla, and that Foerster and Netzer defended this proposal, which has since been adopted by many other archaeologists.[653] Binder reiterates Foerster's work, adding that the structure was "hewn out of the western side of the

[650]Flesher (1995): 37.
[651] Flesher (1995): 37.
[652] Flesher (1995): 37-38.
[653] Binder (1999): 184.

Herodian peristyle court by the rebels."[654] While Binder acknowledges Corbo's attribution of the structure changes to the period of the second rebellion, he says that "nowhere in his report does Corbo defend his new position with arguments from archaeology."[655] In fact, Corbo based his conclusion on the material found in each archaeological context. Moreover, Binder can suggest no archaeological reason for Foerster's and Netzer's time line other than the superficial similarities between the structures at Masada, Herodium and Gamla.

Lee I. Levine (2005)

Levine takes a minimalist's cautious position, merely pointing out the architectural layout of the triclinium. He does not undertake any analysis of the excavation reports or add any new information or analysis.[656]

Stephen Catto (2007)

Catto reiterates the same argument as Foerster, Netzer, Binder and others, referring to the rebel occupants as "Zealots". He also attributes the structural changes to the period of the first rebellion. He say that Herodium offers little in the way of allowing a comfortable assertion that this room is a synagogue,[657] but also that it is capable of seating around 200 people, so it was clearly used for communal purposes and the mikveh next to the building suggests that it was used for some ritual purpose, and that the benches are "very similar to the ones found in other places which have been more confidently identified as synagogue buildings."[658] Catto's entire argument is based on Foerster's, Netzer's and

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[654] Binder (1999): 183.
[655] Binder (1999): 184.
[656] Levine (2000): 60.
[657] S. K. Catto, *Reconstructing the First-Century Synagogue*. T&T Clark, London (2007): 93.
[658] Catto (2007): 93.

Binder's, and he does not add anything new, nor does he attempt to analyse the excavation reports for himself.

Conclusions

Jewish rebels took control of Herodium some time after the beginning of the first rebellion against Rome.[659] It was eventually recaptured by the Romans before the fall of Masada and Machaerus. The site was then abandoned until the Bar Kokhba rebellion, when a group of rebels used it as an administrative and military base. In 135 CE, the Romans once more conquered Herodium and the site was again abandoned.

Given that the foregoing is all we know about Herodium from the period of its construction to the first rebellion, the identification of a synagogue there is perplexing, and there is no evidence to support it. Even the debate about the dating of the structure is potentially irrelevant, as whatever period the triclinium related to – there is still no evidence that it functioned as a synagogue, although, clearly, it *could* have been used as a synagogue, and may have been used for scribal and teaching activity during the Bar Kokhba period.

Discussions about the architectural reconfiguration of the triclinium are irrelevant because beyond being a rectangular room with benches, there was nothing found in or near it to indicate it was used for religious purposes.

While material relating to the period of the first rebellion is lacking, there is specific reference to the period of the second rebellion found in Dio Cassius and

[659] Actually, there is nothing in the sources or the archaeological record to indicate whether they wrest it from Roman control or whether it lay abandoned before they occupied it.

in documents found at Wadi Murabba'at near Qumran. The Wadi Murabba'at documents say that Simeon Bar-Kokhba, had a command post at Herodium.[660] Corbo cites two documents found at Wadi el-Murabba'at, both of which refer to land leases made "in Year Two of the liberation of Israel [...] by the authority of Simon bar Kokhba, Prince of Israel, who lives at Herodium."[661]

The documents found at Wadi el-Murabba'at suggest that there was a settled community at Herodium during the period of the second rebellion, and that that community required administration. There is nothing, however, to suggest that this was the case for the occupation of Herodium during the period of the first rebellion. This may be because of the extent of the destruction of the site after the second rebellion, but there is unfortunately no way to know if this is the case.

While Corbo initially struggled with the process of attributing structural changes in the buildings of the palace-fortress to either the first and/or second rebellion periods, by the time he wrote his final report he was convinced that most of the changes belonged to the period of the second rebellion. This seems somewhat safe on the basis that there is a large second rebellion period kiln and related water installation adjacent to the triclinium. We can perhaps surmise that whatever processes the kiln was used to facilitate, they required water either before or afterwards. The kiln is very large (2 m in diameter), and it would seem logical to suggest that it was used for some industrial and/or military purpose, rather than for simple cooking or bread-making.

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[660] Netzer (1993a): 618.
[661] Corbo (1989): 70.

Corbo identified the triclinium as a synagogue on the basis of its similarity to a structure at Masada, but attributed it and its structural changes (the addition of benches, the blocking up of the northern and southern doors and the two windows) to the period of the second rebellion, on the basis that these changes were contemporary with the kiln and water installation.[662]

In general, it is likely that the changes to the triclinium were made at the same time as the development of the kiln and the associated water installation (which Corbo identified as a mikveh). The mikveh identification is problematic on the basis that the installation Corbo describes is a 3-pool complex in which one would first have to enter into a small pool; exit that pool, enter and exit a larger pool, and then enter and exit a third pool, all in a chamber directly connected to the large kiln. It seems improbable that a mikveh would be constructed in this manner, when it would be so easy to excavate a single pool with steps in the same space. And, as already stated, there is a stepped mikveh just 20 m away, across the peristyle courtyard, beside the eastern tower, which dates to the period of the second rebellion. It is constructed in the same manner as the benches in the triclinium, using reused blocks of stone and architectural fragments (see Figure 39 above).

Another possible use for the triclinium would be if it had been converted for administrative use. The benches in the triclinium would have created a perfect space for a command and/or administrative centre and for a public meeting place to discuss issues in general with the population of Herodium. Thus, while the structure at Herodium seems to be an assembly space, there is nothing to indicate

[662] Corbo (1989): 75.

that it was used for religious purposes. Since we know from the Wadi Murabba'at documents that the site was used as a command post by Simon bar Kokhba, the leader of the second rebellion, the assembly hall, the single largest space in the upper fortress, would be most reasonably attached to that time period because the rebels would have needed a place to assemble for military and strategic planning purposes.[663] It also appears, because of the discovery of the *abcedaria* in the kiln, that some sort of administrative/scribal/teaching function was going on in this place during the period of the second revolt.

Taking all of this into consideration and, in particular, the placement of a kiln and associated water installation beside the triclinium, the identification of this site as a synagogue is vexing and is difficult to explain because of the lack of supporting evidence. At best, if the triclinium was used as a synagogue, it was probably during the period of the second rebellion on the basis of the finds associated with that period.

[663] Flesher (1995): 37.

CHAPTER 6
Gamla

Figure 41 – Gamla (looking west across to Galilee)



Introduction

During excavations at Gamla in the Golan in 1976, the archaeologist Shmaryah Gutman uncovered a large building. Because of its internal layout, with benches encircling the walls and three entrances, Gutman said that it was a public building, designed for the assembly of large numbers of people for some common activity.[664] The building is purpose-built and is part of a large complex of rooms, some of which have not yet been excavated. In the second season of excavations, when an adjoining mikveh/cistern was uncovered, Gutman identified the public building as a first century synagogue.

[664] Shmaryah Gutman, *A City in Rebellion*, Tel Aviv, (1994): 108.

The ancient city of Gamla is located in the southern part of the Golan, in what is now the Yehudiyah Nature Reserve, through which two rivers flow; the Nahal Gamla in the north and the Nahal Dalyot in the south. Gamla sits on the southern side of a ridge between these two rivers and is surrounded by deep gorges. There is a shallow depression on the eastern side of the Gamla ridge that creates a degree of separation between ancient Gamla and the rest of the ridge. The top of the ridge is narrow and pointed, with a steep slope in the north. In Figure 41 above, you can see Gamla on the southern side of the ridge above Nahal Dalyot, as well as the shallow depression mentioned above.

The city of Gamla occupies around 141,639 sqm (c. 35 acres), and is built entirely on the southern slope of the ridge, which is slightly less steep than the northern one. The buildings of Gamla are constructed of local black basalt, built on terraces cut into the soft chalky ground. Surveys conducted on the northern slope during the Gutmann excavations did not reveal any archaeological remains.[665]

The public building excavated by Gutman and identified as a synagogue is situated on the main road into Gamla, and everyone who entered Gamla by this road would have passed it. This gap between the public building and the building complex immediately to its south was another formal entryway into the city. The large public building Gutman discovered would have been very visible in the landscape, and it is by far the largest single space excavated in Gamla.[666]

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[665] Z. Yavor, "The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Eastern and Western Quarters", in D. Syon (ed.), *Gamla* II: *The Shmaryah Gutman Excavations, 1976-1989 - The Architecture* [IAA Reports], Jerusalem (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[666] Yavor (forthcoming 2010/2011).

The area of Gamla has been occupied since at least the early Bronze Age. There are about 200 dolmens in the area of the Yehudiyah Nature Reserve.[667] While the extent of the Bronze Age settlement at Gamla has not been established, it was apparently as large as the Second Temple period settlement.[668] There was Hasmonaean (and earlier) occupation in the western section of the city of Gamla which, for some unknown reason, fell into disuse in around 10 CE. Subsequently, the entire city moved a few steps to the right.[669]

Josephus's Gamla narrative

The fortification of Gamla by Josephus and Vespasian's ultimately successful siege is related to us by Josephus (*BJ* 4.1-83) and very briefly by Suetonius, (*The Twelve Caesars*, *Titus* 4.3).[670] Josephus relates the lead-up to the siege, including Gamla's initial loyalty to Rome (under Agrippa II), its eventual rebellion, the fortification of the city, Agrippa II's part in besieging it and the later Roman attack leading to its catastrophic destruction and abandonment on or around 10 November 67 CE (*BJ* 58-61).[671]

Josephus, according to his account, was appointed a commander of Galilee during the rebellion (*BJ* 2.566-568) and, in 66 CE, as part of his commission, he fortified Gamla and other cities (*BJ* 2.574; *BJ* 4.2-10). However, by the time Gamla was besieged by the Romans, Josephus had already become a prisoner of Vespasian,

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[667] Structures built of unworked basalt stones, arranged one on top of another to form rectangles or trapezoids, with one or two short sides open. These usually served as graves.
[668] Syon & Yavor (2005): 46.
[669] D. Goren, "The Architecture and Stratigraphy of Areas D, B and B77, in D. Syon (ed.), *Gamla* II: *The Shmaryah Gutman Excavations, 1976-1989 - The Architecture* [IAA Reports], Jerusalem (forthcoming 2010/2011). Also in conversation with Motti Aviam of the University of Rochester during a visit with him to Gamla in 2005.
[670] Suetonius mentions Vespasian's triumph at Rome after his successes against the Jews in Judæa (Suetonius: *Vespasian*, 8.3).
[671] D. Syon, "Gamla. City of Refuge", in Andrea M. Berlin and J. Andrew Overman (eds.), *The First Jewish Revolt*, Routledge, London and New York (2002): 134.

having surrendered after the fall of Jotapata in July of 67 CE (*BJ* 3.340-407). In his account of the siege and fall of Gamla, Josephus gives detailed descriptions of the local topography and the layout of the city (*BJ* 4.1-83), and from his narrative it is clear that he had firsthand knowledge of the city and its fortifications.[672]

Josephus says that even after the fall of Jotapata, the inhabitants of Gamla were confident of the security of their city, relying on the hostile terrain on which their city stood for protection (*BJ* 4.4-10). This, of course, proved no real obstacle to the Romans when they made their final assault on the city. According to Josephus, after the razing of Jotapata by the Romans, and Josephus's surrender to Titus and Vespasian (*BJ* 3.392), Gamla came under a ferocious attack (*BJ* 3.393-408).

Agrippa II, against whom Gamla had initially rebelled, had besieged the city for seven months, with no success. Roman reinforcements were sent for and Vespasian arrived at Gamla at the head of units from three Roman legions. A month later, the Romans breached the wall and entered Gamla, but were beaten back by the rebels. A few days later Roman soldiers managed to creep unnoticed to the bottom of a watchtower along the city walls. They removed five stones from its base (it did not have foundations), and the whole construction collapsed, causing panic among the defenders. A few days later, on 10 November 67 CE, Gamla fell to the Romans (*BJ* 4.83).

Josephus says that on the last days of the siege, thousands of the inhabitants of Gamla were slaughtered, while others chose to jump to their deaths from the top

[672] Syon (2002): 135.

of the cliff rather than be captured by the Romans. According to Josephus, the only survivors of the siege were two women (Josephus, *BJ* 4.1-81).[673] After the razing of the city by the Romans, Gamla was abandoned. This gives us the rare comfort of the destruction of a site with an exact *terminus ad quem* and, consequently, a safe identification of the catastrophe as pertaining specifically and only to a specific event.[674]

Geographical context

The main approach road to Gamla runs along the length of the ridge to the eastern part of the city (you can see part of the road in Figure 41 above), up to the city walls which had been fortified by Josephus (*BJ* 2.572-576). The fortified city wall is as much as 6 metres thick in places, and had several square towers situated along its length, and a circular tower at the crest of the hill. In the low-lying southern part of the wall, two square towers guarded a narrow gateway into the city.[675]

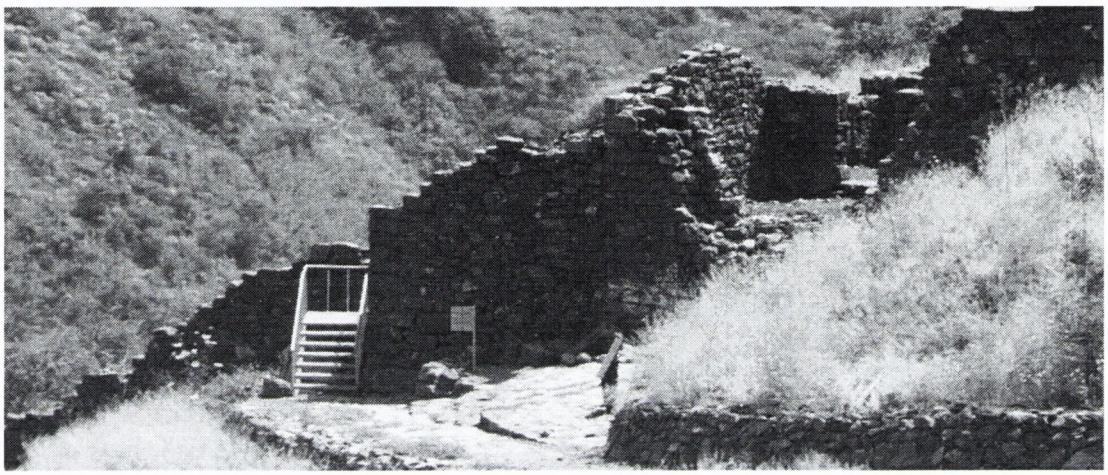
The breach in the fortifications

Along the most vulnerable areas of the fortification wall, houses were put out of use and filled with stones and rubble to add strength to the wall. This is the case with the city wall at the point where the wide breach was discovered just above the building with which this chapter is concerned (see Figure 42 below). Scattered inside and around the breach were dozens of ballista stones and arrowheads. A

[673] This is echoed in Josephus's Masada narrative, but the ridge of Gamla is not really conducive to mass suicide as, although it is steep, nowhere is it sheer enough to drop to your death.
[674] Unlike Herodium, for instance, where usage continued to the second century and beyond and the destruction layers from the first and second Jewish rebellions were muddled together beyond the point of accurate distinction.
[675] Syon (2002): 137.

siege hook was found still attached to the wall at the breach.[676] Vast amounts of weapons and ammunition were uncovered at Gamla, mostly along the city wall, and their distribution shows that most of the fighting took place within a section about 50 m wide on the eastern side of the city along the wall.[677]

Figure 42 – The breach in the fortifications



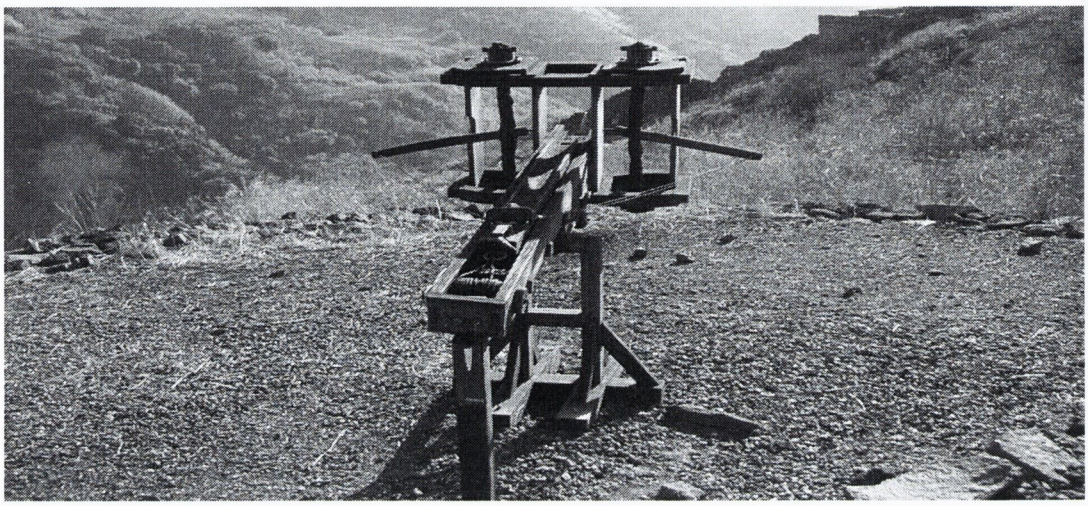
Units from three Roman legions under the command of Vespasian took part in the siege of Gamla (*Fifth Macedonica*, *Tenth Fretensis* and *Fifteenth Apollinaris*). This overwhelming weight of numbers is reflected in the enormous quantity of arrowheads, ballista balls and catapult bolts found at Gamla.[678]

The eastern end of Gamla was bombarded with ballista balls and bolts fired from catapults located further back along the ridge. The national park authorities have placed two replica Roman catapults, one for firing ballistas and one for firing

[676] Syon (2002): 145.
[677] Syon (2002): 145.
[678] Syon (2002): 141.

bolts, on the site across the ridge where it is thought the catapults and other siege weapons were located (see Figure 43 below).[679]

Figure 43 – Replica catapult (looking west to the breached wall)



Identification of the synagogue

In 1976, the archaeologist Shmaryah Gutmann began fourteen seasons of excavations at Gamla (1976-1989).[680] In the first season of digging, inside the walls of Gamla, in the building complex immediately behind the breached wall, a large public building was uncovered. According to Gutman, who had been involved with the excavations at Masada, the layout of the building was somewhat similar to the building identified as a synagogue there (in that it had benches around its walls).[681]

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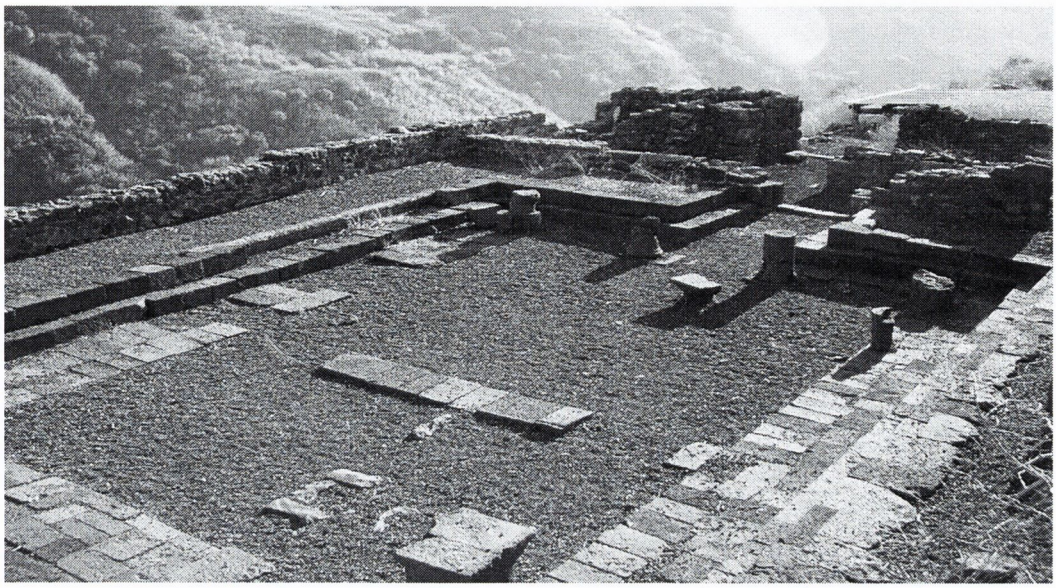
[679] The effects of catapult bombardment were cruel. At Jotapata, where Josephus was present during the final days of the siege, he had this to say: "One of the men standing on the wall beside Josephus had his head carried away by a stone, and his skull was shot, as from a sling, to a distance of three furlongs; a woman with child was struck on the belly just as she was leaving her house at daybreak, and the babe in her womb was flung half a furlong away." (*BJ* 3.245-247)

[680] Excavations and conservation work restarted in 1997, see Syon & Yavor (2005): 37.

[681] Syon (2002): 136.

Figure 44 – The public building (looking southwest)

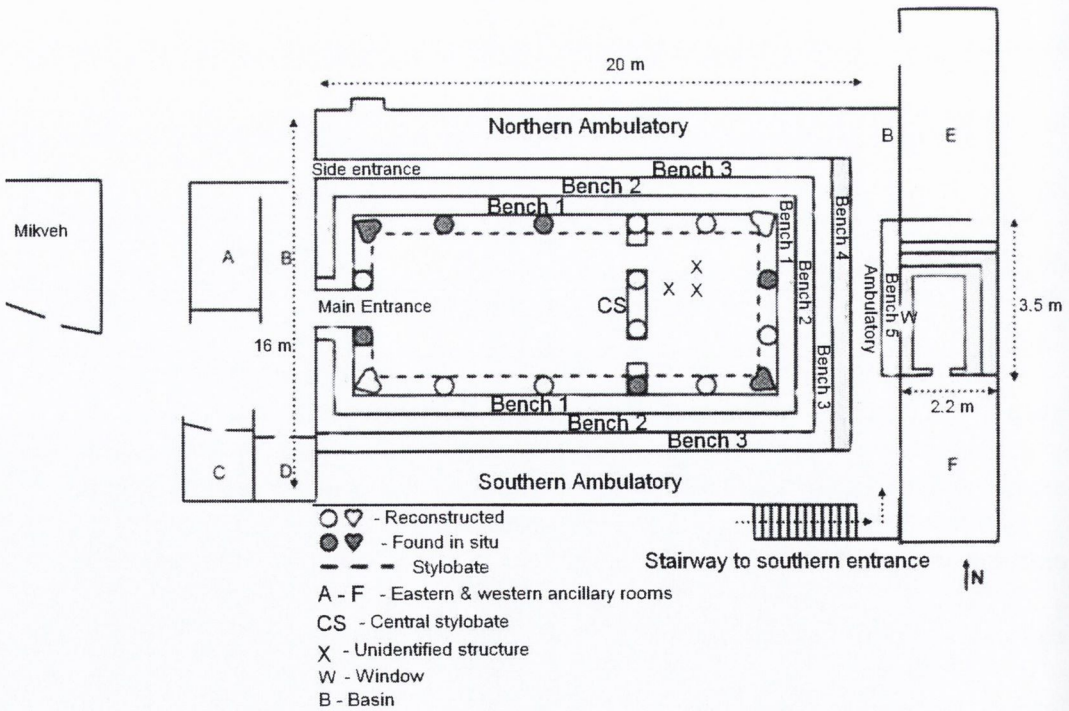


Although Gutman was not initially certain how to interpret the building he excavated at Gamla, by the second season, when the adjacent stepped mikveh/cistern was uncovered, he became confident enough to make his identification.[682] According to Gutman, the internal configuration of the public building – with benches around the walls, ancillary rooms and a mikveh just outside the western entrance of the building – was such that it could safely be described as a *bet knesset* (a house of assembly).[683] Another indication for Gutman that this was a public building, specifically an assembly hall and, indeed, even a synagogue, was the presence of three entrances: a main entrance in the centre of the western wall (visible in the photograph above), a second smaller entrance along the western wall leading to a raised ambulatory area, and a third entrance – a doorway and staircase in the southeastern section of the southern wall leading up from the street below. Gutman thought the separate entrances might also have had significance in relation to the function that this building fulfilled,

[682] In conversation variously with Motti Aviam, Danny Syon, and Shimon Gibson.
[683] S. Gutman, *A City in Rebellion*, Tel Aviv (1994): 106. This section of Gutman's book was kindly translated for me by Dr. Orit Peleg of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

perhaps even in terms of separation of people for reasons of gender, seniority, etc, as well as serving to facilitate traffic in and out of the building.[684] Gutman's excavations revealed a large building whose internal measurements were 20 x 16 m with an east-north-east/west-south-west longitudinal axis (for convenience, the excavators treated it as an east-west axis and I have followed suit).[685] The building was constructed on a wide terrace on the ridge, carved out of the soft chalk bedrock in the north and supported by a massive retaining wall in the south.[686] It is built entirely of the local black basalt. It is part of a larger complex, consisting of a main hall, ancillary rooms on the east and west, a large plastered and stepped-mikveh just outside the eastern ancillary rooms, and an unexcavated section north of the main hall (see Figure 45 below).[687]

Figure 45 – The public building (floor plan)



[684] Gutman (1994): 106.
[685] Gutman (1994): 99. This section of Gutman's book was kindly translated for me by Orit Peleg of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
[686] Gutman (1994): 99.
[687] The [modern] roof of the mikveh can be seen the centre background of the photograph (Figure 45 above) just past the western rooms (marked A and B) of the complex.

THE EXCAVATION REPORTS

The orientation of the main hall was wholly dictated by the topography of the ridge on which the complex is built.[688] The southern wall of the public building is also the retaining wall of this terrace and did not survive above the level of the remaining surface of the hall.[689]

The hall of the public building consists of a central space surrounded by rows of steps/benches leading to a raised ambulatory that runs around all the walls.[690] At the bottom of the benches is a stylobate on which the supporting columns stood. While only bits and pieces of the columns survived, most of the stylobate on which they stood remains intact. Two heart-shaped column bases survived *in situ* in the southeastern and northeastern corners of the stylobate. Some column drums were found scattered on the floor, but the majority of drums, capitals and bases are missing, many rolled down the slope, possibly during the destruction. The few capitals that remain are Doric order, but there is one Ionic capital.[691]

There is short stylobate in the centre of the floor towards the eastern end of the hall (see Figures 44 and 45 above). This carried two columns and divided the hall into two parts in a ratio of 2:3. The columns on this stylobate aligned exactly with the central columns of the north and south stylobates. Because of its layout and the columns which stood on it, it is unlikely to have been the base of a podium for reading the torah scrolls, as was suggested by one of the excavators.[692] However, there is a structure just behind the central stylobate, which might relate to this

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[688] D. Syon, "The Synagogue Complex", in D. Syon (ed.), *Gamla* II: *The Shmaryah Gutman Excavations, 1976-1989 - The Architecture* [IAA Reports], Jerusalem (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[689] Gutman (1994): 100.
[690] Visible in the photograph at Figure 3 above.
[691] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[692] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011); Z. Ma'oz, "The Synagogue of Gamla and the Typology of Second-Temple Synagogues", in Levine (1982): 38.

purpose, and which is not fully explained in the forthcoming *Gamla II* publication. An alternative and tentative explanation for this structure is offered in the section below labelled "Food for thought".

The position of the central stylobate along with the destruction in the hall, led the excavators to query whether the entire hall might originally have been paved over. To answer this question, a series of test pits were dug under the floor, including under sections of the stylobate. This revealed that beneath the floor surface there is a tightly packed layer (some 15 cm thick) of stone chips. The stone chips seem to have originated from the construction process. This layer in turn lies on a layer of small to medium sized fieldstones.[693] Beneath the stones making up the stylobate strip surrounding the perimeter of the hall was a layer of rough field stones arranged to form a foundation. The paving as it appears now (around the bottom of the benches and the central short stylobate) would therefore appear to be practically the full extent of the original paving and was meant to serve partly as a walkway and partly as a stylobate. This in turn means that the central space of the assembly room was unpaved when in use.[694]

On the northern ambulatory near the eastern wall, a circular plastered hand-basin was discovered, sitting on a foundation of earth and stones (see Figure 45 above). This basin was fed with water from one of two large cisterns discovered about 30 m east of the hall. The channel that fed this basin continues west beyond the basin, along the length of the northern wall of the hall, and emptying into the mikveh outside the western ancillary rooms. The foundation on which the basin sat was partly destroyed during the siege, during which time it was unlikely to

[693] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[694] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

have been used, because the channel supplying it (and the mikveh/cistern) originates from a cistern outside the city wall, in an area controlled by the Romans.[695]

The main entrance to the building is in the centre of the western wall and is 1.5 m wide, constructed of dressed ashlars including a threshold made of three stones, with two hinge sockets and a bolt hole. The construction and width of the doorframe suggests that it was the formal entrance to the space within. Near the entrance a fragment of a lintel with an engraved rosette was found (see Figure 49 below).[696]

There is a second entrance, 85 cm wide, also in the western wall, 3.20 m north of the main entrance. This entrance led to the northwestern corner of the ambulatory and its threshold is appropriately higher.[697] The rosette lintel fragment mentioned above belonged to this entrance.[698]

There is a third entrance, again around 85 cm wide, via a staircase leading from the street beneath the south side of the building onto the eastern end of the southern ambulatory (see Figure 47 below).

Along both the north and south walls of the assembly hall there are three rows of benches rising to the ambulatory.[699] Along the western wall there are two rows of

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[695] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[696] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[697] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[698] O. Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements", in Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[699] The benches are not all intact, but there is sufficient survival to infer the remainder of their layout.

benches, which continue into the entrance corridor.[700] Along the eastern wall there are four rows of benches. There is a fifth bench against the eastern wall.[701] The benches around the walls are 30 cm high, 40 cm wide and built of basalt ashlars.[702] At the foot of the benches and encircling the room is the stylobate on which the supporting columns sat.[703]

When excavated, there were signs of fire damage on the northern ambulatory, apparently as a consequence of cooking. Gutman thought that this may have been the remains from the last days of the siege, when residents used the building as a shelter.[704] Further evidence of conditions during the siege came in the form of the remains of cooking hearths on the northern ambulatory, which indicated that the space had been used to house refugees. Fragments of two knife-pared lamps were found in this area, as well as an intact juglet, a complete cooking pot and large quantities of broken household pottery.[705] Many ballista balls and arrowheads were also found here, and it would appear that the wooden roof of the hall collapsed at some point during the bombardment.[706]

Several column drums were found in the main hall. The corner columns were heart-shaped (see Figure 44 above). Gutman also found various capitals, mostly Doric, but including an Ionic one, and a fragment of a Doric column base decorated with a meander pattern. Several column drums were found standing on

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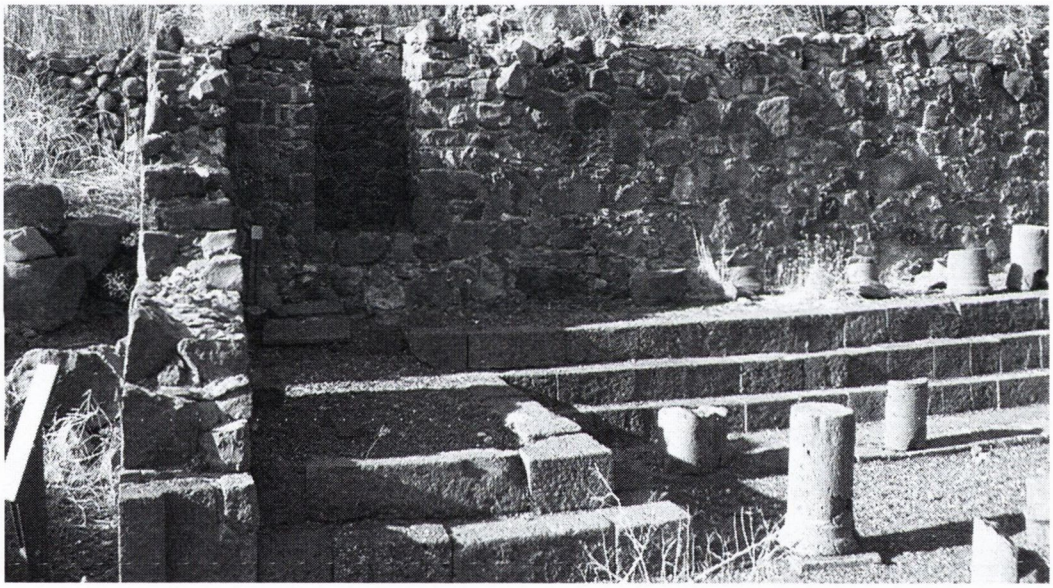
[700] Gutman (1994): 106.
[701] Gutman (1994): 107.
[702] The entire structure and most of the monumental city of Gamla is built of local basalt.
[703] Gutman (1994): 100.
[704] This is an inexplicable and peculiar choice for a shelter, since this building abuts the fortification wall and is within a few metres of the breached wall. It was under heavy bombardment (as is evidenced by the quantity of ballista balls, arrowheads and catapult bolts found in the destruction layer). 350 ballista balls were found in the hall and its immediate vicinity, more than at the breach in the fortification wall! See Syon (2002): 141.
[705] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[706] Gutman (1994): 100.

the stylobate and along the northern and southern sides of the hall stood four columns, while two more stood on the west and east. Most of the column drums have disappeared, some down the slope. Several corbel stones that supported the roof beams were retrieved from the debris layer in the hall.[707] In the western corner of the northern wall, close to the smaller entrance to the hall, there is a large cupboard, which was preserved to the height of the wall. Gutman suggested that this space may have been used to store Torah scrolls.[708]

Figure 46 – The northern wall (cupboard)



The cupboard should be imagined as being lined with wood and as having shelves. As can be seen from Figure 46 above, it is located just inside the building on the left of the smaller western doorway (light is streaming through the smaller doorway in this photograph, although you cannot see the doorway itself from the angle the photograph was taken). While Gutman thought this cupboard could have been used as a place to store Torah scrolls, this does not seem very

[707] Gutman (1994): 103.
[708] Gutman (1994): 100.

likely, for a number of reasons. The cupboard is located on the northern ambulatory, close to the side entrance, and there would be far too much movement in front of it and too much access to it by anyone in the vicinity.

Gutman was unable to determine the date of the founding of the building as a whole and relied mainly on coin finds in the building and nearby.[709] He argued that it may have been established as early as the reign of Alexander Jannaeus and was probably renovated towards the end of the first century BCE, during Herod the Great's lifetime.[710]

The finds (other than the knife-pared Herodian lamp found buried underneath the floor, suggesting a Herodian foundation) were found scattered all over the hall, along with the large quantities of ballista balls and other ammunition, which illustrated the heavy bombardment this section of Gamla faced. Only 35 arrowheads were found in the hall itself, but archers were not usually deployed in constricted spaces. Most of the arrowheads found were from the eastern ambulatory and were probably shot after the roof had collapsed.[711] Many nails were found, including a large cluster in the northeastern corner. These may have come from furniture and from ceiling rafters that collapsed. Spots of black soot were identified on the floor and ambulatories, also probably from the rafters.[712]

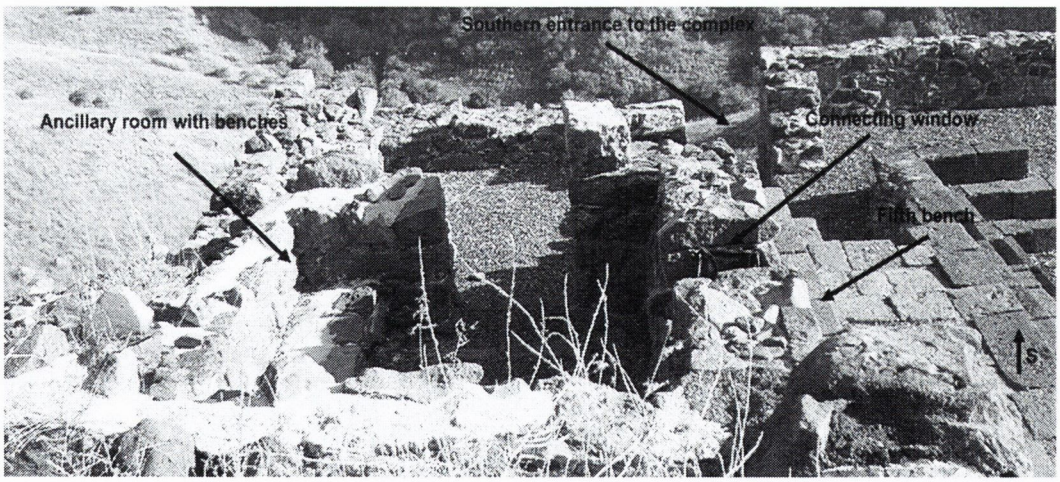
The ancillary room

In the third season of digging, a small ancillary room behind the eastern wall of the assembly hall was uncovered (see Figure 47 below). This room measures 3.5 x

[709] As at 2000, over 6,000 coins had been found, see Syon & Yavor (2005): 61.
[710] Gutman (1994): 109.
[711] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[712] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

2.2 m and is only a third of the width of the main hall. The entry to this room is via a porch or vestibule to its south and there is another room to its north. When excavated, it was found completely filled with stones and rubble and had apparently been used to buttress the fortification wall on its eastern side. Along two walls there are rows of benches; three along the northern wall and two along the eastern. There is an ambulatory along the northern wall, along which the water channel that feeds the mikveh at the western end of the complex and the water basin in the main hall runs, and these elements are contemporary with the building complex and therefore also purpose-built. In the western wall there is a window, opening onto the main hall. The short fifth bench in the main assembly space (mentioned above) is located directly beneath this window. According to the excavators, this room could seat around 25 people.[713]

Figure 47 – The ancillary room



This configuration of this room with benches and a connection to the main hall was evidently for some related function and it suggested, to Gutman, a place for study. Gutman thought the most obvious parallel was the *bet midrash* of rabbinic

[713] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011). It seems unlikely that so many people (even small and slender people) could sit together in this space.

literature. This room is certainly unique in the architecture and archaeology of this period (so far), and is perhaps best seen as a prototype for something specific to its design which is, alas, unknown.[714]

In any event, because of the benches and because it looks out onto the main hall, Gutman interpreted the small room as a study room or *bet midrash* which, he said, strengthened the case for a pre-70 CE synagogue functioning as a centre for cultural and religious activity.[715] Gutman said that the Gamla assembly hall would have been used for conducting secular assemblies, meetings and celebrations, and not just for praying.[716] There is certainly no doubt that this ancillary room is in some way related to the functioning of the main hall and that it, also, was purpose-built (it is contemporary with the rest of the building complex).

The mikveh/cistern

A stepped mikveh/cistern associated with the building is located just 4.5 m west of the assembly hall, just outside the western ancillary rooms (its modern roof is visible in Figure 44 above). The mikveh/cistern is constructed of field stones and partly dressed stones, cemented together and covered with several layers of heavy plaster. The inner dimensions of the mikveh are 4.5 x 4 m.[717] Four complete steps and some partly destroyed steps into the structure were found. The steps were also covered with several layers of thick plaster.[718]

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[714] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[715] Gutman (1994): 109.
[716] Gutman (1994): 109. This argument is highly speculative.
[717] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[718] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

Figure 48 – The mikveh/cistern



The channel that feeds this water installation comes directly along the northern wall of the assembly hall, feeding the hand-basin along its way, through the eastern ancillary room before emptying into it.[719] While the link between early synagogues and mikva'ot has not been established in the scholarship, there is no question that the assembly hall here and this water installation are contemporary and part of the same complex.

Architectural decoration

Some of the decorative architectural pieces in this public building, as well as its internal configuration, link it in form to late Roman/Byzantine synagogues.[720] Specifically, two door lintels were found at Gamla: the first of which was found outside the secondary entrance along the western wall of the assembly hall complex. This lintel is decorated with a low-relief encircled rosette.[721]

[719] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[720] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[721] Syon & Yavor (2005): 16–23; Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

Figure 49 – The rosette lintel from the second western door[722]



The six-petalled rosette is by far the most common type of rosette motif in Jewish art of the period and later, perhaps because it is so easily executed (by drawing a circle and using a compass to draw semi-circles which intersect at the centre of the primary circle).[723] A second lintel, also decorated with a low-relief encircled rosette was found in the lower city near another large public building (the basilica).[724] The second lintel was unbroken and was inscribed with a six-petalled rosette engraved into a raised circle between two simple engraved palm trees.[725] The palm trees on either side of the rosette have eleven branches each, arranged symmetrically.[726] The second lintel appears to have been carved by a more experienced artisan as, rather than having a simple incised circle around the

[722] I am very grateful to Danny Syon of the Israel Antiquities Authority for letting me use this photograph of the lintel in this dissertation. The photograph is from the original 1976 excavations of Gamla. I was unable to take a photograph of the lintel because – during conservation works undertaken in 1989 – it was accidentally bricked into a wall and is no longer visible.
[723] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[724] Syon & Yavor (2005): 16–23; Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[725] The basilica is a public building, but it contains no open spaces sufficient for general assembly, and it is therefore ruled out as being another possible synagogue.
[726] Syon & Yavor (2005): 16–23; Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

rosette, the circle is carved in very low relief (although the palms trees and the rosette are incised).[727]

Figure 50 – The rosette lintel from the basilica[728]



Although this type of decorated lintel became common in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, the only other contemporary first century examples come from En-Gedi, where lintels and doorposts were decorated with a rosette, an amphora and grape clusters.[729] The rosette also appears on the Late Roman/Byzantine period synagogues at En Neshut (on a column pedestal); an encircled rosette also appears on a capital decorated with an eagle relief at Umm-el Kanatir; and a modified encircled (it is slanted) rosette appears on a lintel fragment from the synagogue at Kokhav Hayarden.[730]

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[727] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[728] I am very grateful to Orit Peleg for letting me use a photograph of the basilica rosette lintel from her personal collection for use in this dissertation.
[729] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011); B. Mazar and I. Dunayevsky. "En-Gedi, Third Season of Excavations — Preliminary Report", *IEJ* 14(3) 1964: 128.
[730] Levine (1982): 106, 108, 95-97.

In general, the decorative elements in the assembly hall tend to attest to the prosperity of the inhabitants of Gamla before the outbreak of the rebellion and to their familiarity with current fashions – albeit the execution of those elements was a simple, and sometimes inaccurate, rendering of the decorative patterns, and reflect local workmanship.[731]

In the hall, there were originally at least sixteen columns, each comprised of several drums. Only fourteen of the column drums were found; most of the architectural elements had tumbled or been rolled down the steep southern slope.[732] Each of the corner columns in the hall is heart-shaped. Typically, heart-shaped columns were used at the junctions of colonnades of peristyle courtyards or reception halls, for example in the banqueting hall of Herod's northern palace at Masada.[733] Each of the four heart-shaped capitals at Gamla differs slightly from the others.[734] All but one of the columns found in the assembly hall were carved in a simplified Doric style (one column was Ionic) and rather than standing directly on the ground as in the classical Doric order, they stood on a stylobate.[735] The single Ionic capital in the main hall was found broken in two. Its faulty decoration suggests it was carved by an unskilled artisan, or one who was not wholly familiar with the design being executed, as both the volutes of the capital spiral clockwise, whereas the left volute should spiral anti-clockwise and the right clockwise (see Figure 51 below, the capital on the left).[736]

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[731] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[732] Gutman (1994): 103.
[733] G. Foerster & E. Netzer (1995): Fig. 33.
[734] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[735] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[736] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

Figure 51 – The badly carved capitals

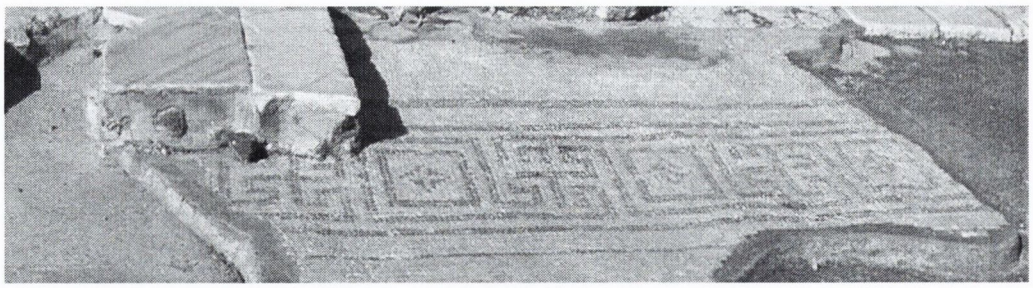


One of the Doric capitals from the synagogue is decorated with what is usually described as an incorrectly executed Greek meander pattern (see Figure 51 above, the capital on the right).[737] This description is not correct, it is instead a crude rendering of another fairly common motif in Jewish art of the period: the swastika (or double meander). Exactly the same pattern is seen in synagogues of the Late Roman/Byzantine period at Ma'oz Hayim on a mosaic floor, on the doorway of the synagogue at Kokhav-Hayarden and on a doorpost at Dabbura.[738] It is also seen in a sixth century CE building at Bet She'an (Figure 52 below).[739]

[737] Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[738] Levine (1982): 87, 95, 109.
[739] Author's photograph of meander pattern in bathhouse at Bet She'an, 2005. The swastika is another form of meander pattern, but the design of the capital at Gamla is always compared to the Greek meander, which is altogether different in composition. The classical Greek meander consists of continuous squared-off "S" shapes, with no central 'cross', thus:



Figure 52 – The swastika/double meander pattern at Bet She'an



Of course, whether the capital is decorated with a badly executed single meander pattern, or a correctly executed swastika (double meander) pattern, does not make any difference to the identification of the public building at Gamla, but it does correct an error that is repeated in the scholarship in relation to its decoration.[740] In either event, these are unquestionably patterns that occur in later Jewish art and architecture.

The public building at Gamla is a clear example of a something that was built for the function it served, the question is whether it is safe to say it functioned as a synagogue. The structure has elements one would expect (and indeed hope) to find in an early synagogue: seating, and perhaps even an adjacent study area. It stands in close proximity to a stepped mikveh or cistern just a few metres outside the western entrance, as well as a hand basin within the hall itself, both of which were fed by a single water channel whose route through the building is contemporary with its construction. There is no ambiguity about the construction or configuration of the hall, and the archaeology is well documented and reported (although not yet fully published).[741] Moreover, the hall was constructed in one

[740] See also E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press (1988): 46-47 on the use of the Swastika in Jewish art.

[741] I am very grateful to Danny Syon of the Israel Antiquities Authority in Akko for so generously giving me access to the relevant chapters from the forthcoming publication of the Gamla excavation reports, as well as for taking the time to meet with me in 2006 at his offices in Akko to

single phase, and was not adapted or changed afterwards.[742] In addition, there is an absolute *terminus ad quem* for the city as a whole, not that this is relevant to a synagogue identification.

There can be no doubt that the assembly hall was used for public business. Perhaps even as a trading floor, for the sale of the olive oil and flour (produced on an industrial scale in the city's numerous oil presses and flour mills centred in the western and lower part of the city).[743] One could easily imagine trading going on in what must have been a busy and bustling city, with clerks taking details, producing receipts and storing other documentation in the back room of the assembly hall. The town council most likely also met there and the space was probably also used as a law court. The seating in the hall is well-designed and ample and could probably accommodate well over 300 people when required.

Access to the hall and circulation around it was well-planned from the three entrances and from the ancillary rooms. Proceeding from the western side of the city, one would pass the mikveh/cistern on the left. Coming from the upper ridge, access could probably be had via the ancillary room marked 'E' at Figure 45 above, and from the lower city access could be had via the southern entrance. All

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discuss the excavation of Gamla and the archaeologists involved in those excavations. During our conversation, I said to Danny that the floor plan, with its 3:2 division by the extra stylobate, looked a little like that of a tripartite Greek temple, and he replied that its layout was one of the reasons Gutman was not initially convinced that it was a synagogue, and only changed his mind in the second season when the adjoining mikveh/cistern was excavated. Then in the third digging season, the discovery of the ancillary room with benches behind the eastern wall added weight to argument for that identification. Certainly, it is to be hoped that if further excavations take place to uncover the rooms to the north of the complex some of the mystery will be alleviated.

[742] Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

[743] Such as room 1703 (a complete flour mill); shop row 5018 (a row of shops entirely dedicated to flour production); building 5000, 5010 & 5011 (a large oil press in a large complex – 130 sqm – for the production of olive oil); building 5005 (a large room for the storage of oil). Z. Yavor, "The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Eastern and Western Quarters", in D. Syon (ed.), *Gamla* II: *The Shmaryah Gutman Excavations, 1976-1989 - The Architecture* [IAA Reports], Jerusalem (forthcoming 2010/2011).

of this shows that the assembly hall was a central element in the life of Gamla and, since the complex was purpose built, we must assume that the centrality and particular configuration was meaningful.

The quantity and quality of datable material found in this structure (other than relating directly to the siege) was very scant. The latest datable material under the floor was the nozzle of a knife-pared lamp, found during test probes into the floor in 1983, as well as a rim of a stew-pot found in test probes in 1997, whose first appearance is dated to the early first century CE. Gutmann suggested a possible founding date under Alexander Jannaeus, which simply does not accord with the fact that a Herodian lamp of a type manufactured only in the late first century BCE and early first century CE was found in the floor fill, especially since the floor fill is contemporary with the construction of the building) and the building is itself a single-phase development.[744] The style of the building also accords with the style of many of the buildings in the western section of the city as well as the 'basilica-style' building of the lower city, all of which are safely dated to the first century CE, on architectural, archaeological and evidential grounds.[745] For these reasons, even if we accept Gutman's identification of the assembly hall, we must reject his dating of it to the late Hasmonaean period.

Food for thought (a prototype aedicula?)

An element of the internal structural configuration which is perplexing is the central stylobate. It is not clear what function this could have served, and the

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[744] D. Barag and M. Hershkovitz, "Lamps", in J. Aviram, G. Foerster and E. Netzer (eds.) *Masada* IV, Jerusalem Exploration Society, 1995: 45; Syon, "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011). I am grateful to Orit Peleg for pointing this out as it had not occurred to me.

[745] Syon & Yavor (2005): 52-59. A second encircled rosette lintel was found by the basilica-style building in the lower part of the city. This lintel has an incised rosette beside an incised palm tree. See Peleg, "The Decorated Architectural Elements" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

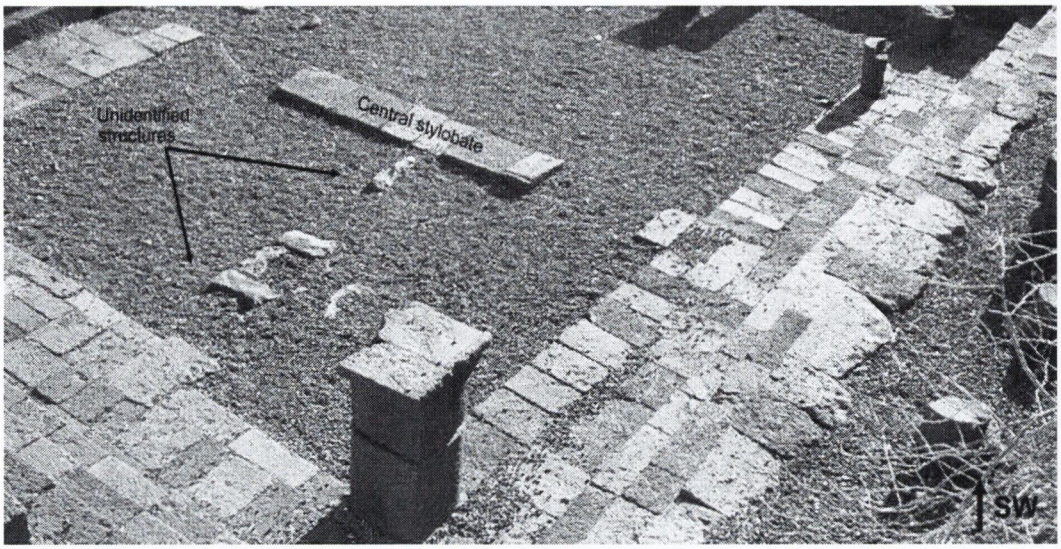
excavators do not offer any suggestions. Ma'oz suggested that it could possibly be the base of a *bema*, but this was rejected by the excavators on the basis that the layout of the extra stylobate and its relationship to the other stylobates was too symmetrical to allow for this.[746] It is also possible that the central stylobate was there to separate the larger section of the main space from sight and hearing of activity in the ancillary room (or vice versa). Perhaps it was used to separate people – men from women, or even senior members of the community from juniors, though it is not clear how this could have worked in practice, since circulation along the benches and ambulatories was not affected by the stylobate. There is no parallel for this extra stylobate in any later synagogue so far known.

However, there is another structure immediately behind the central stylobate, that is most interesting. In an email, Danny Syon of the Israel Antiquities Authority confirmed to me that the excavators consider this structure to be possibly part of the structural underpinning of the building. And, as mentioned above (in the section labelled the "Layout of the Public Building"), this structure is discussed in only one short sentence in the excavation reports, as follows:

> At some points, deep and continuous foundation walls were found, constructed of roughly dressed stones. These gave support to the colonnades and in the southern half also supported the podium and relieved part of the load from the south retaining wall. *The top of one of these walls is flush with the floor* [my emphasis].[747]

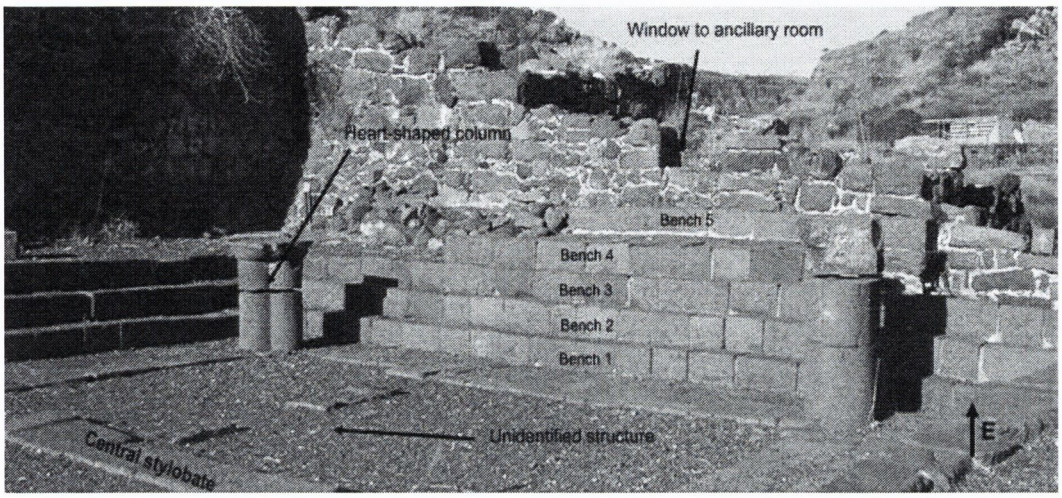
[746] Ma'oz (1981) 38; Syon "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).
[747] Syon "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

Figure 53 – The unidentified structure behind the central stylobate



The excavators' explanation (above) is somewhat unsatisfying. The structures are not located so as to support the stylobate or the benches along the eastern wall, and it is not clear how they could be load-bearing for the southern retaining wall. If these were foundation walls, as is suggested, then their height is problematic. The square structure seen in the photograph above is the same height as the central stylobate, not the floor – which suggests it may not have been a sub-surface element. If it was part of the foundations, one might expect it to run centrally along the spine of the main hall. It is also aligned with a stylobate flagstone (this can be seen in the photograph above), suggesting it is part of the stylobate structure. Indeed, not only that it was part of the stylobate structure, but that it was part of the original purpose-built public building, and not a later addition.

Figure 54 – Another view of the unidentified structure (looking northeast)



The fact that the structures are located off-centre is puzzling. If they are supporting the structural integrity of the space behind the central stylobate, then this should imply that there was paving covering this area which was shored up by these piles – but the excavators have correctly shown that the paving, as it survives, is near enough complete. If these were foundations, without paving on top, then they would not need to extend up to the surface. A foundation above the bedrock but beneath the floor would be sufficient and stable. The sub-surface foundations in other areas of the hall are constructed of variously sized field stones, roughly fitted together.[748]

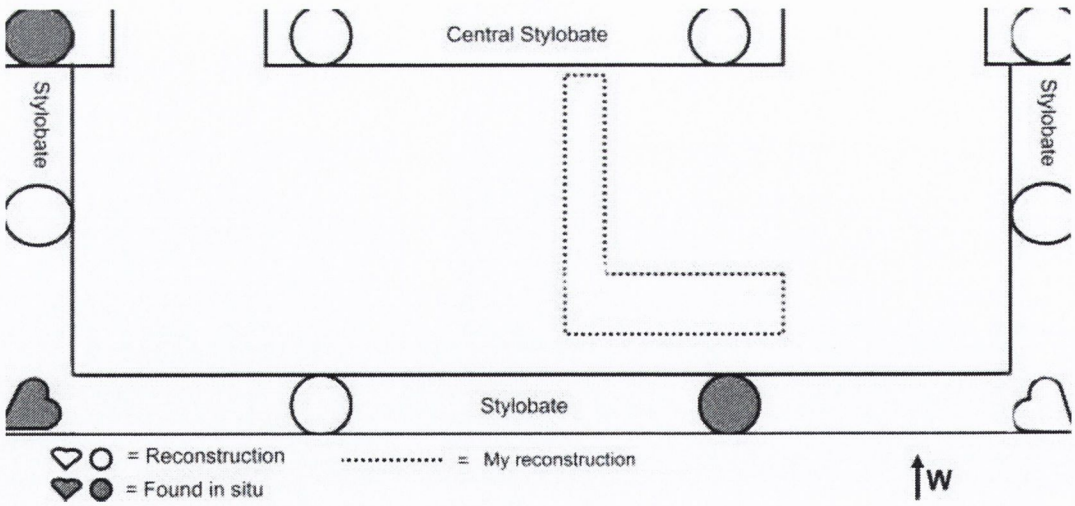
The square structure behind the stylobate is also odd in that it is constructed of cut basalt, not field stones like other elements of the foundations. Moreover, the stones are regular in size and have been shaped, although they are by no means as well dressed as the stylobate paving slabs. Still, they *could* be foundations. They could be shoring up the nearby structures, though it is not clear how this might

[748] Syon "The Synagogue Complex" (forthcoming 2010/2011).

work. There may have been some warping of the floor area in the intervening two thousand years since this building's destruction, resulting in these structures breaking the surface.

However, and while hesitant to make the claim, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that this structure is integral to the hall as a whole and that, perhaps, the central stylobate was closed off on one side by either a wall or a column, giving the area to the northern side (behind the central stylobate) the look of a sort of *prototype* aedicula (see Figure 55 below).[749] In this context, the aedicula would be a squared-off and covered structure, perhaps with the central stylobate as its front, and the east-west short wall partially closing it off behind.

Figure 55 – A prototype aedicula?



If this was such a prototype structure, then we could have in the Gamla assembly hall, a squared-off section, behind which something could have been kept, or done, or a platform (such as a *bema*) on which someone could have stood.

[749] In this context, we could imagine the aedicula as a raised and covered area

Certainly, we see in late Roman /Byzantine synagogues single aediculae which are off-centre.[750] And, according to Hachlili, "nearly every excavated synagogue yields fragments, traces of a site, or the actual site of the Torah shrine as early as the second century CE".[751]

If synagogues from the second century CE are yielding this sort of structural evidence (and later synagogues are outside the aegis of this dissertation), then I think it likely that the origins of those structures are somewhat earlier. And if they are earlier, then perhaps Gamla is the first excavated site in which we see their physical manifestation.

This re construction is pure speculation, however, and, whether this odd structure is an integral part of the Gamla assembly hall, or part of its structural underpinning as the excavators say, it remains problematic, because it leaves the 2:3 division of the hall and the benches behind the stylobate unexplained, which is in itself odd in a building designed for public assembly.

Conclusions

While there were no documents found within the building which might support a synagogue identification, or which might refer to a synagogue, and no references in Josephus or Suetonius to a synagogue, the combination of the architectural elements leave no doubt that this building was designed for public assembly and was most likely a multi-purpose building, used for council meetings, as a trade floor, as a law court, etc. Since it is located in a flourishing Jewish city, it has to be likely that one of the uses to which it was put was as a place to read the Torah

[750] Hachlili (2000): 147.
[751] Hachlili (2000): 147.

and to study. It is well laid out for this purpose. The ancillary benched room with its window into the main hall, which Gutman thought might be a study room, is also persuasive in this regard. Moreover, this is the only building of the five case studies herein to have had any recognisable decorative architectural features that *could* be Jewish in character, in particular, the rosette motif on the door lintel (which becomes a common motif in later Jewish art and architecture) lends some support to this identification. The meander pattern capital (be it a single meander or a swastika/double meander), is another motif which – as I have shown, occurs in later synagogues and other Jewish buildings (although both the rosette and meander also occur in non-Jewish buildings).

Consequently, the public building at Gamla is likely to have been, *among other things*, a synagogue – in the very broadest sense of the word – in that it could have been used for reading the law and studying the Torah in this Jewish town. In some ways, it is difficult to argue that it could not have been a synagogue, because of how it is designed, where it is, and access to it. If it was a synagogue, it is probably the earliest one so far excavated in the land of Israel, since it must date to at least the late Herodian period.

CHAPTER 7
Conclusions

This dissertation was intended to examine the identification of so-called early synagogues on the basis of the available archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence. A close examination of the first case study of this dissertation, Delos, quickly revealed a pattern of dubious connections and identifications which simply could not be relied upon. Exploring that issue revealed that the identification problem extended to the other four case studies, and the evidential trail for each site was followed with no presumptions of where it might lead.

In the case of Delos, the first case study in this dissertation, the difficulty with the identification of a synagogue was not immediately apparent. An extended visit to the site allowed for a proper analysis of the material, and it was possible to put together a cohesive account of the contrast between the scholarship and the physical reality of the site, and to piece together the body of evidence that both supports the claims made in this dissertation and shows that those claims are objective and fully reasoned. From assumptions relying on the tangential source material in Maccabees and Josephus, to the interpretations of six inscriptions found within and without the building, to the claims made about specific features in the building, such as a mikveh (with no room for human ingress) and a Torah shrine (into which it would be difficult to fit an adult hand), examination of the putative synagogue on Delos led to the realisation that there was no relationship between the physical structure, its furniture and fittings, and its identification as a synagogue. Indeed, on Delos, there were other buildings, such as Sarapeion A in the theatre district, which could have functioned as a synagogue if the basis on

which the building identified as a synagogue on Delos was correct and, thus, the certainty of the identification of the synagogue on Delos crumbled.

The second case study in this dissertation, Hasmonaean/Herodian Jericho, was identified as a synagogue only in 1998 (although the site was excavated some years earlier), and so it was possible to discuss it with a number of the people involved with its excavation, including Ehud Netzer of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who made the synagogue identification. While the identification of this particular site is not unanimously accepted in the scholarship, it is commonly referred to as a *possible* synagogue and thus, consequently, *possibly* the earliest synagogue in the land of Israel. At Jericho, with the benefit of the process developed with the Delos site, it was possible to make some quite specific *dis*identifications of the various architectural and archaeological elements its excavator had interpreted as belonging to a synagogue.

While there is no textual, epigraphic or other material relating to the existence of a synagogue on this site, it was relatively easy to correct much of the information surrounding the site's context, architecture and archaeology. This process involved, among other things, a close and detailed analysis of the water systems feeding the entire site which, in turn, allowed for the identification of the structure the excavator claimed was a Torah niche, but which was actually a sluice-gate on the main Na'aran aqueduct.[752] Moreover, the excavator had described benches around the main assembly space (actually a simple peristyle courtyard) for which

[752] Netzer (2004a): 168.

there is simply no physical evidence.[753] As was made clear in the Jericho case study herein, the matter of the benches and the Torah niche, as well as other evidence presented in terms of the identification of a synagogue in the final excavation reports, is seriously flawed and is, again, unsafe to use as a comparison to support a synagogue identification on any other site.

The third case study, the most complex and enigmatic of the sites, is the one on Masada. There is a veritable mountain of epigraphical and archaeological evidence relating to Masada, and Josephus was generous enough to give a long and detailed account of events on Masada during the first Jewish rebellion, as well as some fairly accurate descriptions of the physical layout and architecture of the palatial site as a whole. There were many hundreds of biblical and extra-biblical scrolls and scroll fragments found on Masada, as well as coins, ostraca, ceramics and textiles. And, as is shown in the case study, there is much tangential material in the case of Masada which has been used to make and/or support the case for a synagogue identification and to construct the Masada synagogue myth which is, in no way, borne out by the archaeological, epigraphical or source material.

Despite the vast quantity of material relating to Masada, the material pertaining to the identification of a synagogue is minute. The identification was made on the basis of the benches around the walls and two scroll fragments found in pits in the connected ancillary room. As is clear from the case study, the mixture of material found in the pits in the so-called genizah, as well as the construction of the main area of the structure identified as a synagogue and its location in the overall

[753] Netzer (2004a): 165-166.

context of first rebellion period Masada, is insufficient to support a synagogue identification.

Arguments about the so-called genizah are themselves quite telling: that sacred documents could be intentionally interred in a dung-filled room, that someone could live in the same space and use a domestic oven in it seem quite extraordinary. Add to this the fact that the putative synagogue is located in the area of the Masada acropolis that was most under attack during the siege and is beside the Roman siege ramp, and the peculiarity of the accepted position of mainstream scholarship on the Masada synagogue identification becomes truly baffling.

The fourth case study in this dissertation, the identification of the triclinium in the upper fortress of Herodium as a synagogue presented an entirely new set of problems. The first was that its destruction at the end of both the first *and* second Jewish rebellions is such that it is not certain which parts of which destruction belong to what period. This difficulty was fully rehearsed by the site's excavator, Virgilio Corbo, in his series of excavation reports. Corbo argued that if the structure was a synagogue then, because of the material found in and close by it, it belonged to the period of the second rebellion in the second century CE.[754]

Some specifics can be added to this: the structure adjacent to the triclinium identified as a mikveh is associated with an industrial-size kiln,[755] an ostracon found in the kiln relates to the Philistine deity *Dagon*,[756] an *abcedaria* found in

[754] Corbo (1967): 103
[755] Corbo (1989): 75.
[756] Testa (1972): 80.

the kiln is datable to the second century;[757] moreover, there was nothing in or around the triclinium to suggest a first century date or usage, there is no connection between the triclinium and the rooms surrounding it (they were blocked off during its final phase), the vast majority of coins found throughout the entire upper fortress site belong to the period of the second revolt (including coins minted by the Bar Kokhba rebels), and none of the graffiti or ostraca from the site can be identified as belonging to the first century. Corbo's argument for a later date was subsequently rejected by Foerster, Netzer and others. However, as is illustrated in the case study, it is clear that their rejection of Corbo's argument is fraught with difficulties and inconsistencies and is not based on any physical evidence. Moreover, as with the Jericho identification, there is no textual, epigraphic or other material relating to a synagogue on the site, whereas there is sufficient textual, epigraphic and archaeological material relating to the later date to suggest that Corbo's analysis is, on balance, probably correct. In any event, even without resolution of the chronology issues, there is no evidence to suggest that the triclinium was used as a synagogue in any of its phases.

And then we come to the fifth case study, Gamla, where the building identified as a synagogue is a purpose-built assembly space, central both to the town and to entry into the town. In this site, and *only* in this site, there are a few architectural, archaeological and decorative features that might be linked in character to later Galilaean synagogues. The evidence is sparse and very open to debate, but it may nonetheless point to a link between first century and later Galilaean synagogues. There is, as with the other sites, no textual or epigraphic material relating to the presence of a synagogue at Gamla in the first century or earlier. As with Masada,

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[757] Testa (1972): 77-78.

Josephus gives a full account of events leading to the rebellion of the city against Agrippa II and the Romans, to its being besieged and, finally, to its destruction by the Romans, after which it was abandoned forever. There is, again, no reference anywhere in the historical texts or in epigraphy, to the existence of a synagogue at Gamla.

Thus the evidence that may point to a synagogue identification at Gamla is purely contextual. Specifically, there is a decorated door lintel with a low-relief rosette carved into it, and an ancillary room connected with the main assembly space (the main space and the adjacent room both have benches around their walls, though benches, in and of themselves, cannot indicate synagogue usage).

Of all the physical elements in the assembly hall at Gamla, the most exciting is the unidentified structural feature, just off-centre of the north-east axis of the main assembly space, which might represent the base of an aedicula. Of course, the conclusions in the case of Gamla are tentative and open to interpretation. The authors of the excavation reports have suggested in an email that the unidentified subsurface structure referred to above may be pilings to support the building complex as a whole, or even the remains of an earlier structure. As outlined in the Gamla chapter, aediculae were typically constructed close to existing columns, near walls, and their most common feature is a base consisting of a platform of stones.[758] Moreover, aediculae in later synagogues are found in the same position as the unidentified structure in the Gamla assembly hall. In the case of Gamla, this structure may have been a simple raised platform on which a person could have stood to read, or it may have been covered by a canopy. In later synagogues,

[758] Hachlili (2000): 147-148.

such an aedicula would have had a façade of columns and a lintel, and would have been built against or close to an existing wall, possibly the Jerusalem-facing wall, and access to it would have been from the front or with steps leading up to it from the side.[759] This is consistent with the position of the unidentified structure at Gamla.

However, even with limited archaeological evidence in this case, and only relying on the decorated door lintel and other decorative carved elements linking it to later Galilaean synagogues, as well as its location on the main road into the city, it may be that the Herodian-period assembly hall complex at Gamla functioned, amongst other things, as a synagogue.

The methodological approach taken in this dissertation has had the benefits of allowing the illustration of many of the lacunae between modern theory and the *actual* material record. And, because each case was approached from the same point (local history, ancient texts, epigraphy and archaeology), it has been possible to highlight specific errors in relation to each of the sites. This method has not been used before (in this context), but it should be used as a component of synagogue identification, as it makes inconsistencies, errors, misidentifications and archaeological red herrings more easily identifiable. In the search for an accurate historical record, it may be just as important to define what is not supported by the evidence and based on mere conjecture as it is to record what is or could be correct.

[759] Hachlili (2000): 147.

To establish a truly reliable identification system, it is vital to deal with the gap between theory and the material record. Attempts to match theory and material evidence by assuming and presuming links has already produced results (in the cases of Delos, Jericho, Herodium, Masada and perhaps Gamla) that are untenable and should never have been used to shore up what remains an unproven theory of development in relation to other sites. For example, while the undated and decontextualised Theodotos inscription is important and fills in some of the gaps for the function of the early synagogue, it does not support the identification of, say, a particular first century synagogue at Masada, or any other location. Nor is it possible then to use the structure at Masada, in conjunction with the Theodotos inscription, to make a case for all first century synagogues being laid out with ancillary buildings and a water supply.[760]

There is, unfortunately, little material to suggest a clear identification method, and the gap between modern theory and the material record remains the central problem in the field of synagogue studies, especially in relation to pre-70 CE structures. While it is neither possible nor desirable to disprove synagogue identifications, it is fair to say that there has to be *some* evidence present, be it textual, epigraphical, architectural or archaeological, before a positive identification can be made and before a synagogue so identified should be accepted into the body of scholarship on the subject and used as a basis on which to identify other structures.

If we view the synagogue as the successor to the Jerusalem temple, and as the vehicle that enabled Judaism to survive the destruction of the temple, we must

[760] Flesher (1995): 33, n. 21.

acknowledge that there remains the problem of identifying how that institution came into being. This issue is difficult, and possibly impossible to resolve, because there is no source that describes the process of development or the physical structures that are referred to in the New Testament, and there is as yet no clear way to reconcile the distance between the first century CE and the safely established and identified synagogues of the late Roman/Byzantine period.

There is little evidence in the sources to help us to make specific identifications. Even though it is widely accepted that the *proseuchai* of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt evolved into the institution we know as the synagogue there is nothing in the material record to support this claim. By the time we see the emergence of the synagogue in the late first century CE texts of the New Testament, the use of the word *proseuche* has once again come to refer to prayer and praying, not place (as it is used in the Delos inscription). And while there are numerous references to Jesus and his disciples preaching in synagogues in Israel and the Diaspora, there is still not a single physical structure that can be identified as a synagogue before the late Roman/Byzantine period.

There can be little doubt that the synagogue began to take on its more sacral functions after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, and that this happened far from Jerusalem. There can be little doubt that it was in this period, also, that the physical structure of the synagogue began to take shape (leading to the more canonical structures we see from the late Roman/Byzantine period). However, since we cannot yet ascertain precisely how and where this happened, we must take care to make it clear that speculation is not presented as fact so that, as more data emerges to fill in the gaps in the historical and archaeological record,

what we come to is an accurate representation of an ancient reality rather than a mythological one.

While there must be, of necessity, a certain nebulous quality to making specific synagogue identifications when there is no supporting physical or textual signal, what has emerged through this research project is evidence of a series of identifications having been made – in the main – without sound archaeological, architectural or historiographic bases. As has been made clear from the case studies presented in this dissertation, the processes by which early synagogues have been identified up to this point are seriously flawed and serially inconsistent. There has to be a better way of making identifications, even in the absence of corroborating material, and it is far better to leave the way open for future scholarship to make identifications by posing questions than by forcing unsubstantiated conclusions which can only serve to skew the historical and chronological record.



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