Monumentality and Space : Experiencing Synagogue Buildings in Late Second Temple Palestine

Bonnie, Rick Gerard Lorenz Maria

Peeters

2022-04-22

Raimo HAKOLA
Jessi ORPANA
Paavo HUOTARI

SCRIPTURES IN THE MAKING: TEXTS AND THEIR TRANSMISSION IN LATE SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MONUMENTALITY AND SPACE: EXPERIENCING SYNAGOGUE BUILDINGS IN LATE SECOND TEMPLE PALESTINE

Rick BONNIE[1]

1. Introduction

The focus of this study is on the archaeological evidence for stand-alone synagogue buildings in late Second Temple Palestine that were built and in use from around the second half of the first century BCE up to the late first century CE. Over the last few decades, the question of how the physicality of the built environment affects and shapes the social and cultural worlds inhabiting its spaces has received increasing attention among scholars.[2] However, within the field of synagogue studies, while archaeological remains of synagogues have provided the context for spatial interactions, the interactions themselves have mostly been studied through a reading of contemporaneous textual and epigraphic sources.[3] Much still remains to be done with the fact that buildings indeed do affect the way we walk and what we see, smell, and hear—and as such our cultural ideas and societal interactions. In this article, I aim to explore to what extent the material dimension and related sensory aspects of these

[2] See, e.g., Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden: Blackwell, 1991); Thomas A. Markus, *Buildings & Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (London: Routledge, 1993); Karen Dale and Gibson Burrell, *The Spaces of Organisation and the Organisation of Space: Power, Identity and Materiality at Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[3] See, e.g., Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 314–80. Levine describes in detail all the features of synagogues, but draws primarily on rabbinic literature to explore their functioning within and meaning to the community. See also Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues – Archaeology and Art: New Discoveries and Current Research*, HdO 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 46–48.

early monumental synagogue buildings[4] shaped the practices and experiences of ordinary Jews at street level. Studying the experiential relationship between humans and their built environment helps explore the functioning and meaning of these purpose-built structures within their respective communities. From this perspective, I challenge the common understanding of late Second Temple synagogue buildings in Palestine as centers for the whole community and argue that they were more exclusive semi-public spaces for activities by local communal "elites."

2. Synagogue Buildings in Late Second Temple Palestine

The remains of most ancient synagogue buildings found in the region today date to the late Roman or Byzantine periods.[5] Over the last fifty years, according to my count, archaeological excavations have only exposed around six synagogue buildings that functioned during the first century BCE and/or first century CE, i.e., during the late Second Temple period. It is difficult to give an exact number because what constitutes a synagogue in archaeological terms remains ill-defined by most scholars.[6] As a result, this has led to strongly divergent views in terms of the number of synagogue buildings functioning in the late Second Temple period.[7]

---

[4] By "early synagogues" I mean those buildings that were erected in the first century BCE and first century CE. By "monumental" I mean those buildings "designed to be recognized, expressed by their scale or elaboration, even though their meanings may not be understood by all members of a society." See Jerry D. Moore, *Architecture and Power in the Ancient Andes: The Archaeology of Public Buildings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 92. See also Colin Richards, "Monumental Choreography: Architecture and Spatial Representation in Late Neolithic Orkney," in *Interpretative Archaeology*, ed. Christopher Tilley (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 148. For a detailed discussion on the concept "monumental," see Edmund Thomas, *Monumentality and the Roman Empire: Architecture in the Antonine Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2–11.

[5] See, with further references, Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 174–249. See now also Chaim Ben David, "On the Number of Synagogues and Their Location in the Holy Land" in *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Current Issues and Emerging Trends*, ed. Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, and Ulla Tervahauta, FRLANT 279 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 175–93.

[6] For a similar observation, see Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 50.

[7] For minimalist views, see Howard Clark Kee, "The Transformation of the Synagogue After 70 C.E.: Its Import for Early Christianity," *NTS* 36 (1990): 1–24; idem, "Defining the First-Century CE Synagogue: Problems and Progress," in *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress*, ed. Howard Clark Kee and Lynn H. Cohick (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press , 1999), 7–26; Lidia D. Matassa, *Invention of the First-Century Synagogue*, ed. Jason M. Silverman and Murray Watson, ANEM 22 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018). For a forceful critique of Kee's argumentation, see Lee I. Levine, "The

Generally, most scholars agree about the identification of early synagogues at the sites of Masada, Herodium, Qiryat Sepher (Khirbet Badd 'Isa), Khirbet Umm el-'Umdan, Magdala, and Gamla (Fig. 1).[8] Their identification is grounded on two aspects that all six sites have in common: one is that according to textual and archaeological indicators all these sites at that time had a predominantly Jewish population; the second—and more important—aspect is the architectural similarities of the buildings at these different sites.[9] All are stand-alone, rectangular columnar structures with rising tiers of seats—occasionally, with a rear landing—lined along its interior walls.[10] To be added to these archaeological

First-Century Synagogue: Critical Reassessments and Assessments of the Critical," in *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards (London: Routledge, 2004), 77–81; see also John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, "Dating Theodotos (CIJ II 1404)," *JJS* 51 (2000): 243–80. Matassa's recent book-length archaeological study of the structures found at Delos, Jericho, Masada, Herodium, and Gamla is a helpful reminder of the methodological problem of forcing text-based historical reconstructions upon the archaeological evidence. However, in her search for synagogue buildings, Matassa nowhere provides a clear working definition for a first-century synagogue nor a methodology for assessing the archaeological evidence. In the end, by simply going through the archaeological evidence, her approach seemingly remains founded upon a rigid architectural and artistic checklist approach for identifying synagogues in a manner similar to those she disagrees with (e.g., *Invention*, 1 n. 1, Matassa dismisses a building as not being a synagogue on the absence of stone benches). While Matassa's study provides much food for thought regarding some identifications (note that several buildings are not included in this book), in the end she concedes that—despite the book's title—the structure at Gamla "is likely to have been … a synagogue" (p. 210). For a maximalist view, see Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 20–78.

[8] For a general description of the evidence at these synagogues, including references to the excavation reports, see Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 26–28 (Gamla), 28 (Herodium), 30–33 (Masada), 33–34 (Magdala), 34 (Khirbet Umm el-'Umdan), and 34–36 (Qiryat Sepher).

[9] Only in two cases has other evidence been used for this identification. At Masada, evidence of scroll fragments of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel were found in pots deposited in a smaller room—for temporary storage or as a *genizah*—within this columnar structure. See Ehud Netzer, *Masada III. The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965: Final Reports – The Buildings: Stratigraphy and Architecture* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1991), 410. However, the connection between this evidence and the synagogue structure has been questioned. See Matassa, *Invention*, 109–57. At Magdala, along the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, evidence of a stone table decorated with, among other things, a menorah was found in the central area of the columnar structure. See Dina Avshalom-Gorni and Arfan Najar, "Migdal - Preliminary Report," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot-Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 125 (2013), http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=2304.

[10] In recent excavations (e.g., Tel Rekhesh, Shikhin, Diab, Tawani), structural remains have been identified as early synagogues based on architectural similarities with known ones. However, none of them have been published in much detail and thus cannot be
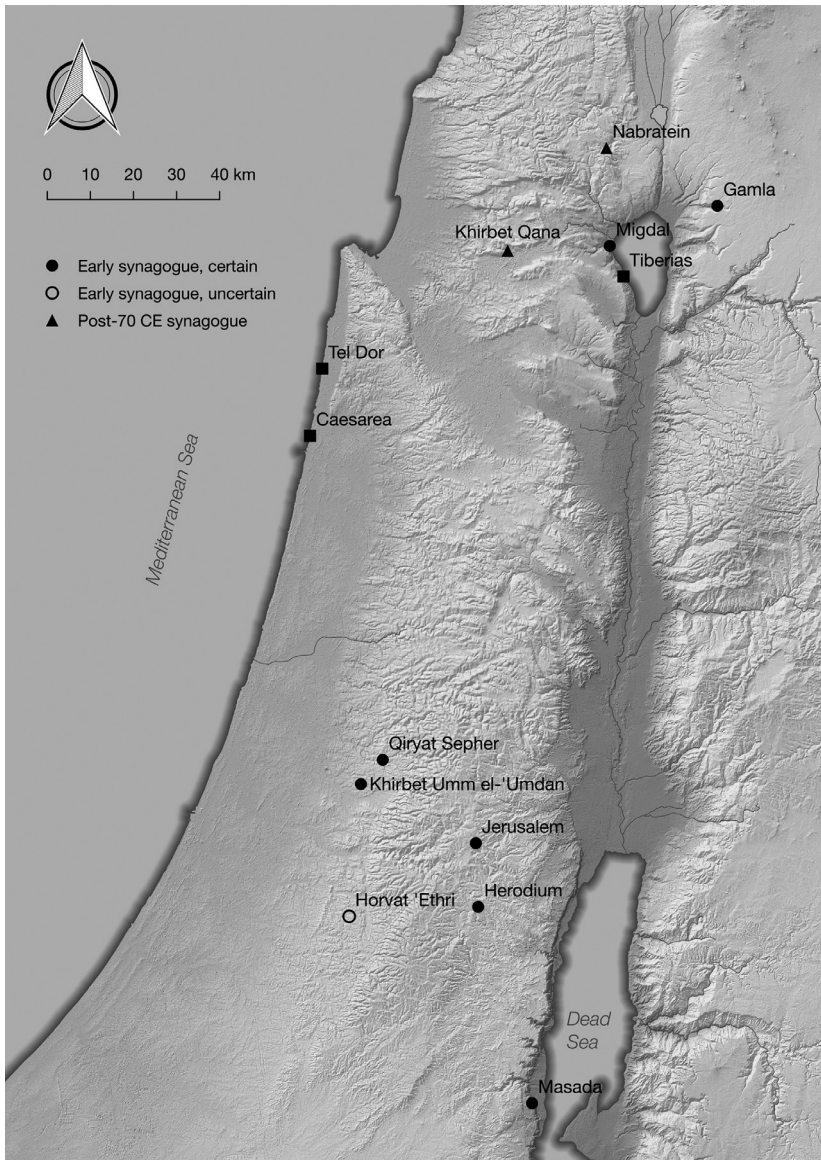
Figure 1. Map of known synagogues from late Second Temple Palestine (map by author; first published in Bonnie, "Hasmonean Memories").

structures is the Theodotos building inscription, which is paleographi-cally dated to the first century CE and testifies to the existence of a *synagogē* in Jerusalem. However, while the building inscription sug-gests a public structure of some sort, we have no indication regarding its precise architectural layout.[11] Thus it cannot be presumed that this build-ing is similar in architectural terms to those structures that have been excavated, nor can it be presumed that the excavated buildings share the features mentioned in the Theodotos inscription.

In fact, with the exception of Jerusalem, there is no textual reference to the existence of a *synagogē* or *proseuchē*, two concepts found in ancient texts usually associated with synagogues,[12] at any of the sites where archaeologists have identified structural remains of such an institu-tion. Nor do textual sources from the late Second Temple period referring to synagogues provide a detailed structural description of an actual build-ing.[13] This is important to keep in mind. It means that there is no textual corroboration for an early synagogue identification at these sites, and archaeologists need to find other ways to argue for such an identification. Usually this is done through an architectural checklist approach based on the purpose of the building and the activities that were held there. How-ever, what purpose did a synagogue have for a first-century community and what activities took place there? These questions are generally answered through a reading of relevant contemporary textual sources, which suggest a variety of functions.[14] While this may provide a general idea of the role of the synagogue in Jewish society, it remains unknown if those same functions were ever held in those buildings archaeologists now identify as "synagogues." What has been created instead is a modern

---

incorporated in this study. For more information, see The Bornblum Eretz Israel Syna-gogues Website, http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/.

[11] The inscription was found during the 1913–14 excavations in a secondary deposit (cis-tern or stepped pool) on Mount Ophel in Jerusalem. For a detailed discussion of this inscription, see Kloppenborg Verbin, "Dating Theodotos (CIJ II 1404)."

[12] For a discussion on *synagogē* and *proseuchē*, see Martin Hengel, "Proseuche und Synagoge: Jüdische Gemeinde, Gotteshaus und Gottesdienst in der Diaspora und in Palästina," *Judaica et Hellenistica: Kleine Schriften I*, ed. Martin Hengel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 171–95.

[13] Cf., e.g., Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 314–80, for a detailed description of synagogue buildings based on archaeological and textual evidence. However, Levine is almost solely concerned with late antique synagogues and does not use texts attributed to the late Second Temple period.

[14] Chad S. Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities: Methodology, Analysis and Limits*, TSAJ 149 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 31–38; Hachlili, *Ancient Syna-gogues*, 46–47.

but general notion of "the early synagogue" with its rising tiers of seats along the walls that would accommodate to a variety of activities as attested in textual sources. Such a notion gives the false impression that all such synagogue buildings functioned similarly, irrespective of their context and physical nature.[15] Or, in fact, that *only* these canonical buildings could have accommodated such activities.

Why does a building need to have rising tiers of seats and columns for it to be a synagogue? Lidia Matassa recently rightfully argued that in the archaeological identification of synagogues there is a clear circularity in reasoning, as subsequent identifications are argued for through a positive comparison with known, so-called "canonical," type synagogues, notably Masada and Gamla.[16] Hence, any building that does not conform to the canonical type, is met with much suspicion in terms of identification.[17] On the other hand, those who have taken a more lenient stance on this checklist approach for the canonical type may view any fitting building dated to the first century CE as an early synagogue.[18] While I would concede that some examples (e.g., Horvat 'Ethri) may have functioned as such, I am aware that ultimately such an approach is not beneficial, as it takes the position to either an "anything goes" or, in the case of minimalists, "nothing goes" situation that is often predicated on preconceived notions of the development of synagogues and Jewish society before and after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. To avoid such problems, scholars need to give more consideration to how buildings structured the experiences, activities, and ideas of the community they were part of.

In fact, why did certain communities decide at some point to build these stand-alone columnar structures as a place of gathering? The significance of why a particularly styled physical roofed structure was introduced around the second half of the first century BCE for the purpose of

---

[15] Synagogue studies has not been alone in applying such a methodology. Some time ago Penelope Allison already argued similarly with regard to how urban peristyle houses functioned. See, e.g., Penelope M. Allison, "Using the Material and Written Sources: Turn of the Millennium Approaches to Roman Domestic Space," *AJA* 105 (2001): 181–208. See also, on Roman public architecture, Edmund Thomas, "Architecture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, ed. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 838–58.

[16] For example, Matassa, *Invention*, 35.

[17] This is, for instance, the case with Building MI at Horvat 'Ethri. See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 74; Matassa, *Invention*, 1 n. 1.

[18] See, e.g., Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 C.E.*, 17; Ben David, "On the Number of Synagogues," 181–84.

gatherings has received remarkably little consideration. For instance, Levine understands the stylistic association of early synagogue buildings with the roofed columnar *bouleuteria* found elsewhere in the Hellenistic world as an indication that "Jews were patterning themselves after Hellenistic models."[19] He thus explains the adoption as one of cultural appropriation, but fails to see the importance of the physicality of the structure itself and how its adoption actually may have shaped the nature of the gathering for the particular Jewish community.[20]

On the other hand, when discussing the actual building remains of early synagogues, the focus of scholarship has been to describe, to date, and to identify the assemblage of materials of which the physical "canonical" synagogue consisted. However, in order to understand its role and functioning, this groundwork needs to be complemented by a deeper exploration of its interaction with other agents, including the objects that structure and shape our world. Otherwise, the archaeological picture remains essentially static and de-humanized.

3. Monumental Architecture as Lived Space

The archaeology of monumental architecture is as old as archaeology itself. For most of its time, research on monumental architecture was dominated by art historical approaches. This meant that emphasis was placed on creating a taxonomy of building types and a typology of styles based on similarities and differences in ground plans, construction techniques, and decorative features.[21] This taxonomy enabled scholars to delineate cultural traditions and, when spread over a region, shifts in and adoption of such building traditions. Emphasis was on how social, cultural, political, and religious initiatives shaped the outcome of monumental architecture across regions.[22]

---

[19] Lee I. Levine, "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered," *JBL* 115.3 (1996): 443. See also Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue. A Socio-Historical Study*, CBNTS 37 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 350–70 (362).

[20] For other suggestions on the architectural origin of the building, including references to earlier literature, see Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 45–46.

[21] For a critical discussion on the early history of Roman architectural studies in general, including references, see Thomas, "Architecture," 838–41.

[22] See, e.g., John Bryan Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); H. von Hesberg, "Bauornament als kulturelle Leitform," in *Stadtbild und Ideologie: Die Monumentalisierung hispanischer Städte zwischen Republik und Kaiserzeit*, ed. Walter Trimlich and Paul Zanker (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 341–66; Pierre Gros, *L'architecture*

Since the 1990s, the study of the built environment has focused more on the symbolic aspects and the social production of built forms and the spaces they create. Within Roman archaeology, the shift at first appears to have received more attention in studies dealing with domestic buildings and household changes.[23] Yet, in the last two decades, a focus on the experience of architecture through sight and movement has been applied to other parts of the built environment as well, from larger landscapes, to city- and townscapes, to monumental buildings.[24] The focus of study though has usually been on those sites that have been well explored archaeologically or via documentary evidence, such as Rome, Pompeii and Ephesus.

One such early study that moved away from an approach more concerned with taxonomy of monumental buildings was Moore's analysis of political architecture from the Andes region. In many ways we can ask similarly simple questions about this type of architecture as we can with

romaine du début du IIIe siècle av. J.-C. à la fin du Haut-Empire, vol. 2: maisons, palais, villas et tombeaux (Paris: Picard, 2006); *L'architecture romaine du début du IIIe siècle av. J.-C. à la fin du Haut-Empire, vol. 1: les monuments publics*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Picard, 2011). The earlier chrono-typology of synagogues by Kohl and Watzinger, Sukenik, and Avi-Yonah during the first half of the twentieth century is related to this. For a discussion and critique of this old typology, see the various articles in Allan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner, eds., *Judaism in Late Antiquity 3. Where We Stand: Issues & Debates in Ancient Judaism. Vol. 4: The Special Problem of the Synagogue*, HO, Section One 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2001) and Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 174–209.

23   See, e.g., Richard R. Wilk and William L. Rathje, "Household Archaeology," *American Behavioral Scientist* 25.6 (1982): 617–39; Susan Kent, *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Penelope M. Allison, "Introduction," in *The Archaeology of Household Activities*, ed. Penelope M. Allison (London: Routledge, 1999), 1–18; Mark Grahame, *Reading Space: Social Interaction and Identity in the Houses of Roman Pompeii*, BAR IS 886 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000); Lisa Nevett, *Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

24   See, e.g., Fikret Yegül, "The Street Experience of Ancient Ephesus," in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, ed. Z. Çelik, D. Favro, and R. Ingersoll (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 95–111; Diane G. Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); "In the Eyes of the Beholder: Virtual Reality Re-Creations and Academia," in *Imaging Ancient Rome: Documentation – Visualization – Imagination*, ed. Lothar Haselberger and John H. Humphrey, JRA Supp 61 (Portsmouth: JRA, 2006), 321–34; Ray Laurence and David John Newsome, eds., *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii: Movement and Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Hanna Stöger, *Rethinking Ostia: A Spatial Enquiry into the Urban Society of Rome's Imperial Port-Town*, Archaeological Studies Leiden University 24 (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011).

domestic buildings: "Where is a public building located? How could it be visually perceived? How many people could fit inside of it? What was its design life? Were activities associated with the building designed to be hidden or visible? Was access within the building restricted or open? Were there diachronic changes in access among similar architectural forms?"[25]

Recently, slow changes in the study of early synagogues in particular and synagogue buildings in general have started to emerge. In his seminal work on the ancient synagogue, Lee Levine already noted that the differences in shape, layout, and building material suggest differences in the social and cultural ideas of the community.[26] More recently, Chad Spigel highlighted the importance of the materiality of the physical space of ancient synagogues through a study of their seating capacity.[27] In her recent work, Karen Stern has started to highlight the importance of the material assemblage and decorative signs of individuality left behind in these structures in order to explore the everyday lives and ideas of ordinary visitors to these structures.[28] This article builds upon these new directions in synagogue studies. In particular, I will explore how the architecture of early synagogues shaped the experiences of the communities by controlling capacity, movement and sight. I argue that these early monumental synagogues, by their design and location, functioned as a rather exclusive space for activities by a communal "elite."[29]

4. Synagogues and Their Communities

Chad Spigel has recently shown that the calculated capacity of an assembly hall provides, when compared against demographic observations about the town or village community in question, some helpful insights into the functioning and significance of these buildings for local

---

[25] Moore, *Architecture and Power*, 15.

[26] Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 389.

[27] For Spigel's study, see below.

[28] Karen B. Stern, *Writing on the Wall: Graffiti and the Forgotten Jews of Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); See also Karen B. Stern, "Prayer as Power: Amulets, Graffiti, and Vernacular Writing in Ancient Levantine Synagogues," in *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Current Issues and Emerging Trends*, ed. Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, and Ulla Tervahauta, FRLANT 279 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 221–45.

[29] For the purpose of this study I have chosen to include only those early synagogue buildings that were constructed for that purpose from scratch within a functioning settlement. This excludes the suggested synagogues of Masada and Herodium because both were spaces that were functionally completely modified and built in a former fortress-palace.

communities. Although his overall study focused primarily on late antique synagogues,[30] Spigel's exemplary analysis of the late first-century BCE synagogue at Gamla (*c.* 16 × 20 m) suggested that only parts of its community could be involved in assemblies in this synagogue. He arrived at this conclusion by first calculating the maximum seating capacity of the building itself. Based on a detailed review of different seating arrangements, Spigel concluded that the most realistic capacity for the building would be 407–454 people, which remains an upper limit for the building's capacity that would fill most of Gamla's assembly hall with people.[31] If only the permanent stone benches were used, there would have been seating for a maximum of 291 people. It seems reasonable to suggest that the building's maximum capacity was reached only occasionally.[32]

To better understand the community's relationship to this building, Spigel compared the building's capacity to the population size for the settlement as a whole. Based on figures provided by the excavators, it was suggested that at its heyday in the mid-first century CE Gamla's population would have reached about 3,000–4,000 people.[33] This means that Gamla's early synagogue could accommodate roughly 10–15% of Gamla's total community.[34] Based on the low relative capacity of the synagogue, Spigel ultimately concluded that "the synagogue building was not frequented on a regular basis by the majority of the population, both male and female."[35] As for why the majority of Gamla's population

---

[30] See Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 141–338. The only early synagogues he examined are Gamla and Qiryat Sepher. For the latter, see below.

[31] Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 80–82.

[32] Other capacity estimates given for this building have been either lower than or similar to Spigel's calculation. Thus, E.P. Sanders says 300 people, Stephen Catto allows for 360 people, and Ehud Netzer gives 430 people. See, respectively, Ed Parish Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 58 n. 17; Stephen K. Catto, *Reconstructing the First-Century Synagogue: A Critical Analysis of Current Research*, LNTS 363 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 175; Ehud Netzer, "A Synagogue from the Hasmonean Period Recently Exposed in the Western Plain of Jericho," *IEJ* 49 (1999): 219–20.

[33] Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 84. This estimate is based on a site size of about 18 ha, which provides a density coefficient of 170–220 p/ha. More recently, Zvi Yavor has suggested that the built-up area of Gamla was only 14 ha. See Zvi Yavor, "The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Eastern and Western Quarters," in *Gamla II: The Architecture. The Shmarya Gutmann Excavations, 1976-1988*, ed. Danny Syon and Zvi Yavor, IAA Reports 44 (Jerusalem: IAA, 2010), 13. Using the same density coefficient, this would give a population size of 2,380–3,080.

[34] In the case of a site size of 14 ha (see note above), this would be 17–19%.

[35] Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 84–88 (85).

did not frequent the synagogue, the strongest suggestion Spigel offers is because of the "economic situation" of most households, which would not have afforded long times away from their agricultural work commitments for their livelihood. In fact, one may put it differently: A household had to be relatively well off in order to leave day-to-day working activities in order to attend the synagogue—it "would have been a luxury available only to the wealthy few."[36]

An examination of the recently exposed first-century CE synagogue at Magdala, a site on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, suggests a relationship between the town's community and its synagogue rather similar to what Spigel has concluded for the Gamla synagogue. Refounded by the Hasmoneans as an administrative center in the early first century BCE, extensive excavations at the site since the 1970s have shown that already by the turn of the common era the town of Magdala (identified with Taricheae in Greek and Latin sources[37]) was of a significant size, and, judging from its planned street grid and such structures as a bathing complex, a fountain house, a large *quadriporticus* (identified as either a market place or a *palaestra*), workshops and an extensive harbor area, it appears to have been economically prosperous.[38] The recently exposed synagogue in the northwestern part of the town, featuring a square colonnaded assembly hall with a raised, continuous aisle with a stone bench along all four sides, is rather indicative of the town's prosperity (Fig. 2).[39] On the inside, not only was it embellished with decorative mosaics and painted wall plaster in the Second Pompeian style, but it also housed a rectangular stone table with floral, geometric, and architectural engravings, including one of a menorah.[40]

---

[36] Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 86, 352.

[37] On the identification and names of the site, see Stefano De Luca and Anna Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods, Volume 2: The Archaeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages*, ed. David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 280–98.

[38] See De Luca and Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," 312–26; Richard Bauckham, ed., *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018); Rick Bonnie, *Being Jewish in Galilee, 100-200 CE: An Archaeological Study*, Studies in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 43–48, 74–76.

[39] For the Magdala synagogue discovery, see Avshalom-Gorni and Najar, "Migdal – Preliminary Report"; De Luca and Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," 312–18; Mordechai Aviam, "The Synagogue," in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 127–33.

[40] For this stone table and the different interpretations of its significance, see, e.g., Avshalom-Gorni and Najar, "Migdal - Preliminary Report"; Mordechai Aviam, "The

Figure 2. Aerial photograph of the Magdala synagogue
(Photo by Abraham Graicer, CC-BY-SA 4.0).

Magdala's synagogue building, however, is considerably smaller in
size (11.2 × 11 m, with interior dimensions of *c*. 9.5 × 9.3 m)[41] than the
building at Gamla. It could roughly accommodate 95–158 persons at
a time.[42] I come to this figure using the capacity coefficient of 0.929 m²/p,
which is used as a general rule-of-thumb for modern spaces, as a base-
line.[43] Due to its more general nature, as it takes into consideration dif-
ferent seating methods, furniture, and activities in the space, this coefficient

Decorated Stone from the Synagogue at Migdal. A Holistic Interpretation and a Glimpse
into the Life of Galilean Jews at the Time of Jesus," *NovT* 55 (2013): 205–20; Hachlili,
Ancient Synagogues, 41; De Luca and Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," 317; and Steven
Fine, "From Synagogue Furnishing to Media Event: The Magdala Ashlar," *Ars Juda-
ica* 13 (2017): 27–38.

[41] I thank Anna Lena and Alessandra Ricci for providing the dimensions of the synagogue
building's main hall.

[42] Bauckham and De Luca suggest a capacity of 120 people. They claim this figure was
given by the original excavators, but the press release to which they refer does not
mention any seating capacity for the synagogue. See Richard Bauckham and Stefano
De Luca, "Magdala As We Now Know It," *Early Christianity* 6 (2015): 109. Cf. Dina
Avshalom-Gorni, "One of the Oldest Synagogues in the World Was Exposed at Migdal
(9/13)," *IAA*, http://www.antiquities.org.il/article_eng.aspx?sec_id=%2025&subj_%20
id=%20240&id=%201601&module_id=%20#as.

[43] For discussion of this figure, see Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 53–54.

usually provides a relatively low capacity figure. As an upper limit I have used a coefficient of 0.56 m^2/p, which is an estimate used by architects for the design of modern concert and praying halls.[44] This coefficient considers more precisely the activities, seating arrangement, and furniture used in the space and, hence, gives a relatively high capacity figure. Thus, the seating capacity ranges calculated using these coefficients are generally, though not necessarily always, less precise than if capacity ranges had been calculated for each synagogue individually, as done by Spigel, based on precise internal layout and activities. However, precise activities in late Second Temple synagogues remain more uncertain than for the later ones due to the fragmentary source material for this period.[45] Overall, the seating capacity ranges calculated using the above coefficients fit our purpose for general comparison.

How does a seating capacity of 95–158 people for the Magdala synagogue relate to this town's population size? Recent estimates regarding the size of this town suggest that the settlement occupied an area of about 10 ha or larger.[46] Using similar density coefficients as for Gamla, this means that Magdala had a population of, at least, 1,700 to 2,200 inhabitants. Thus, the exposed first-century CE synagogue could accommodate a mere *c*. 4–9% of the town's population at most. To be sure, while similar structures may still be buried beneath the ground elsewhere on the site, it is unlikely that even several of these buildings would be able to accommodate a majority of Magdala's community.

The percentage of the community that the structures found at the smaller village sites of Qiryat Sepher and Khirbet Umm el-'Umdan, both

---

[44] Leslie Fairweather, Atba Al-Samarraie, and David Adler, "Places of Worship," in *Metric Handbook. Planning and Design Data*, ed. David Adler (Oxford: Architectural Press, 1999), 27:4.

[45] See Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 46–49. Levine is more confident regarding precise activities in these synagogues and describes these buildings as multipurpose institutions with, among other functions, political, religious, and social gatherings, judicial proceedings, and the administration of punishment. See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 135–73. Levine's positivist approach, however, is based on cumulative evidence from a diverse set of source materials, varying much in both nature and geography, and speculating that this accumulated evidence might apply to any synagogue building attested in the archaeological record.

[46] Leibner gives 9 ha or larger, De Luca gives 9–10 ha, and De Luca and Lena suggest at least 10 ha. See Uzi Leibner, *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Galilee: An Archaeological Survey of the Eastern Galilee*, TSAJ 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 235; Stefano De Luca, "La città ellenistico-romana di Magdala/Taricheae. Gli scavi del Magdala Project 2007 e 2008, relazione preliminare e prospettive di indagine," *LASBF* 59 (2009): 441; De Luca and Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," 299.

located in the vicinity of modern Modiʿin, could accommodate is how-
ever considerably higher. According to Spigel's calculations, the syna-
gogue building exposed at Qiryat Sepher (9.6 × 9.6 m, with interior
dimensions of 8.2 × 8.2 m) could accommodate 82–101 people at most.[47]
The village itself, however, appears to have been—with a size of
1.07 ha[48]—rather small and may have had a population of no more than
107–160 people, based on a density coefficient for rural villages of 100–
150 p/ha.[49] This would mean that *c.* 51–94% of the population could fit
in this building at a time. A similar observation can be made for the
Herodian-phase synagogue building at nearby Khirbet Umm el-ʿUmdan
(8.6 × 10.5–11.5 m, with interior dimensions of *c.* 7 × 10.4 m),[50] built
during the second half of the first century BCE, which, based on the same
capacity coefficients as used above for Magdala, could have accommo-
dated 78–130 people at most. As the village is estimated to have been
only 1.2 ha in size,[51] this gives us, using density coefficients similar to
those used for Qiryat Sepher, a population of no more than 120–180
people. The exposed building thus could accommodate *c.* 43–108% of
the entire population of Khirbet Umm el-ʿUmdan.

It should be stressed, however, that the above seating capacity figures
given for the synagogues—and, hence, the population percentage that
these buildings could accommodate—are a maximum. For the synagogue
buildings dated to the late Second Temple period, considerably lower
estimates, where only the permanent stone benches were being used,
perhaps occasionally with some additional seating, is in fact more reason-
able. The reason why Spigel uses maximum numbers is that the building
types known from archaeology and the activities known from textual
sources vary greatly and, hence, only estimates using up much of the area
of the synagogue's main hall provide good comparative evidence. That

[47] Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 294.
[48] Yitzhak Magen, Yoav Tzionit, and Orna Sirkis, "Khirbet Badd ʾIsa — Qiryat Sefer,"
     in *The Land of Benjamin*, ed. Yitzhak Magen et al., Judea-Samaria Publications 3
     (Jerusalem: IAA, 2004), 179.
[49] See Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 293 n. 883. This coefficient is based
     on Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-Examination of the
     Evidence* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 2000), 82–83.
[50] For exterior dimensions, see Alexander Onn and Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, "Umm
     El-ʿUmdan, Khirbat (Modiʿin)," *NEAEHL* 5: 2062–63; Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah,
     "Khirbat Umm El-ʾUmdan," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot-Excavations and Surveys in
     Israel* 126 (2014), http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=14718.
     The interior dimensions are calculated based on the plan provided by the excavators.
[51] Alexander Onn et al., "Khirbat Umm El-ʿUmdan," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot-
     Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 114 (2002): 64*.

being said, for the late Second Temple period it is commonly agreed that the seats were placed in such a manner that the focal point of the audience was toward the center of the synagogue hall where a speaker would stand.[52] This is one of the differences from the later synagogues of Late Antiquity, when the focal point had shifted toward the Torah shrine (for other differences, see below). Indeed, for its closest architectural parallel (for discussion, see below), the Hellenistic *bouleuteria* exposed in Greece and Asia Minor, seating capacity figures are usually estimated based on the permanent stone benches.[53]

This particular seating arrangement in late Second Temple synagogue buildings (as for *bouleuteria*), roughly equal to an inward-facing circle, provided almost unobstructed views of the speaker from nearly anywhere in the audience. As Jessica Paga has noted in connection with the Old Bouleuterion of classical Athens, "[i]ntervisibility … forms a key component in accountability and deliberation."[54] Paga builds on the work of the social anthropologist Michael Suk-Young Chwe, who has shown that such inward-facing forms, as they maximized visual contact among larger groups, promoted social unity and accountability.[55] That synagogue meetings were carried out as inward-facing circles is supported by short references to such an arrangement in the New Testament gospel accounts. Thus, in one account of Jesus teaching in a synagogue (Mark 3:1–6), it is noted that "And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Get up and come to the middle'" (3:3: καὶ λέγει τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τῷ

---

[52] See, e.g., Runesson, *Origins*, 232–33; Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 80; Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 43–44.

[53] For estimates of seating capacity for some *bouleuteria*, with earlier literature, see Christopher Lyle Johnstone and Richard J. Graff, "Situating Deliberative Rhetoric in Ancient Greece: The *Bouleutêrion* as a Venue for Oratorical Performance," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 21 (2018): 2–88. Another potential reason for not using almost the complete area of the hall for seating purposes is its effect upon the speaker, as the sound-absorptive properties of a packed audience hall may have demanded an increased effort by the speaker in the hall to be heard by everyone. The hypothesis behind this argument is that such halls were designed with oratorical performances in mind. This, however, would require further study. For an example of classical and Hellenistic *bouleuteria*, see Johnstone and Graff, "Situating Deliberative Rhetoric."

[54] Jessica Paga, "Coordination Problems, Social Architecture, and Causal Efficacy: The Case of the Old Bouleuterion in the Athenian Agora," in *Theoretical Approaches to the Archaeology of Ancient Greece: Manipulating Material Culture*, ed. Lisa C. Nevett (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 201.

[55] Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 30–36. See also Josiah Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 199–205.

τὴν ξηρὰν χεῖρα ἔχοντι· ἔγειρε εἰς τὸ μέσον), suggesting that the speaker is in a central position among the audience. This statement is later followed by the phrase "he looked around at them [i.e., the synagogue audience]" (3:5: καὶ περιβλεψάμενος αὐτούς), which seems to suggest an unobstructed view for the audience in a circular forum.

Aside from the point that the arrangement of seating supports the functioning of early synagogues as political gatherings, much like the Hellenistic *bouleuteria*, an idea that will be further developed below, my point in discussing this arrangement is to caution that the suggested seating capacity of the early synagogues offered above may probably still be too high.

5. Building Privacy and Restriction into Monumental Synagogues

To explore further the question of why relatively few people of a local community seem to have frequented these buildings, a more detailed examination of the ground plan of the structure, the village context in which it was set, and the construction of the building from the perspective of a local village or town dweller is revealing.

Let us go back to the best-preserved example of a late Second Temple synagogue—the building at Gamla. The rather monumental nature of this building as it is now observed in photographs and illustrations, as well as upon accessing the archaeological site itself (Fig. 3), can be rather misleading when contemplating its original function within the community. Due to the absence of roofing and fully preserved walls, its interior and people's doings there are easy for us to observe and to imagine. However, when thinking from the perspective of the community's experiences, the visibility and accessibility of this structure to the community in its fully reconstructed form needs to be considered.

Even when using the main entrance into Gamla's synagogue, on the building's south-west side, much of the main hall's interior and the activities that were held there were lost to sight for any spectator standing outside the building. This is primarily due to the fact that the main façade of Gamla's synagogue and the entrance into it appear to have been hidden from view and are situated behind a group of auxiliary rooms that the excavators have identified as service and storage spaces (Fig. 4).[56] In order to access the synagogue through its main entrance, attendees first

---

[56] Yavor, "Architecture and Stratigraphy," 57–58. There is no archaeological indication that any of these rooms were later added to the building.

Figure 3. Gamla, view over the archaeological site, looking southwest (photo by author).

Figure 4. Synagogue of Gamla, view from outside main entrance looking inward (photo by author).
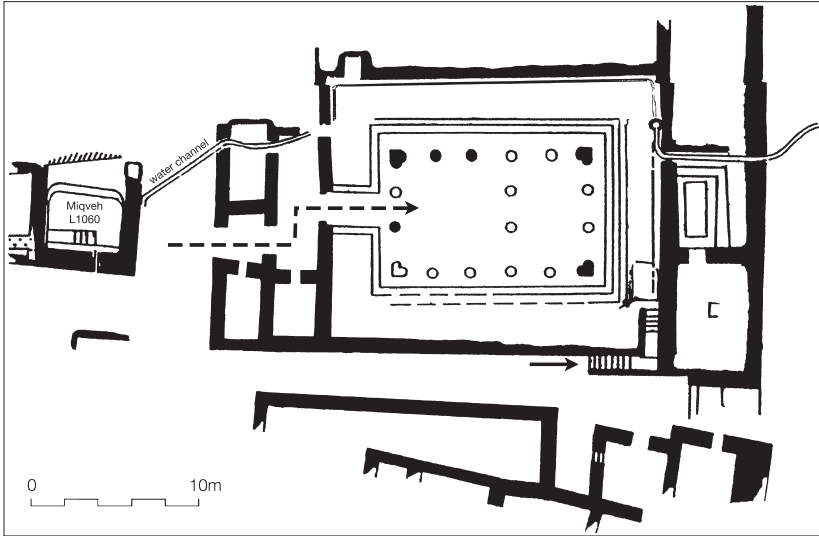
Figure 5. Synagogue of Gamla, ground plan (modified after Yavor,
"Architecture and Stratigraphy," plan 2.11; courtesy of the IAA).

had to pass these rooms by means of an L-shaped corridor and then take
a right turn in order to step into the synagogue's main hall (Fig. 5).[57] The
service and storage rooms that were placed in front of the synagogue's
main entrance essentially screened off its monumental façade. The only
other entrance into the building, located near the eastern corner of the
main hall, could only be accessed by climbing up a three-meter L-shaped
staircase. This access route obviously provided no direct view into the
synagogue's assembly hall. To summarize, for any outsider it would have
been difficult to get a good grasp of the main hall's interior and the
activities conducted there. On the other hand, the concealed interior of
the Gamla synagogue provided a sense of visual privacy for those attend-
ing activities there.

[57] This type of access route, where the main entrance into the building is offset from the
central axis of the building is equally typical of urban peristyle housing in the Roman
Levantine region (e.g., Apamea, Antioch, Berytus, Palmyra). See Jean-Charles Balty,
"La maison urbaine en Syrie," in *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie II: La Syrie de
l'époque achéménide à l'avènement de l'Islam*, ed. Jean-Marie Dentzer and Winfried
Orthmann (Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1989), 407–22; Kevin
Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 302;
Bonnie, *Being Jewish in Galilee*, 265–71.

Thus, despite being located along the major streets leading into and out of the walled settlement, and as such being a prominent marker within the townscape, for most people access and views into the Gamla synagogue were obstructed through narrow entrances and L-shaped corridors. This could suggest, thereby supporting Spigel's analysis of the synagogue's seating capacity, that entry into this building may have been only for a select few. Furthermore, the fact that the synagogue's interior showed considerable signs of decorative wealth may indicate that these select few were likely to be more well off than common townspeople.

Another indication of the prominence and socioeconomic status of the attendees is the fact that the Gamla synagogue was used as a distribution point for (some) water to be used in the rest of the town. Excavations exposed a small water channel, probably fed by a cistern outside the town's walled area, that ended in a small washing basin along the synagogue's eastern wall, from which it continued further along the northern interior wall to the outside of the synagogue (Fig. 5).[58] There, the water channel was used to feed the nearby stepped ritual purification bath, but also continued further in a westward direction where it probably provided water for other pools or cisterns. By having direct access to the channel, those inside the synagogue had a controlling function—or, at least, a symbolic control—over the availability of water to the town's community. This may not only be indicative of the socioeconomic position of the attendees, but also suggests a certain political as well as a possible religious status within the local community.

The settlement context of the other synagogue buildings has, unfortunately, not been as extensively excavated as in the case of Gamla, nor have they been published in as much detail so far. While this hampers a detailed contextual study of the evidence, the published results for Magdala and Qiryat Sepher still provide hints of a similar "exclusiveness" of the synagogue's interior. For example, the small synagogue building at Magdala is suggested to have been accessed from the west, passing through a long and narrow vestibule area, leading eventually into the main colonnaded assembly hall.[59] Upon entering the main assembly

---

[58] Yavor, "Architecture and Stratigraphy," 52–54.

[59] See Avshalom-Gorni and Najar, "Migdal - Preliminary Report"; De Luca and Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," 312; Aviam, "The Synagogue," 128. The IAA rescue excavations did not expose any physical remains of an entrance into the synagogue, but the excavators have inferred its location based on the building's layout and on the fact that no evidence of a doorway was found in any of the better-preserved walls. A recent unpublished paper by Marcela Zapata-Meza and Jordan Ryan at the ASOR Annual

hall, a person experienced a space that for the region and the period in question displayed outstanding and luxurious decoration, with geometric mosaic floors along the portico area and walls and columns with painted wall plaster in Second Pompeian style. Its luxurious decoration bears a resemblance to that found in the Herodian palaces and elite, first-century CE residences found in Jerusalem as well as in wealthier households in Gamla, Yodefat, and Tiberias.[60]

However, with respect to its location within the environs of Magdala itself, the synagogue is situated in a quarter that appears to have been located at the edge of town,[61] about 250–300 m to the northwest of the harbor area, the town's cultural and commercial center. This residential quarter consisted primarily of larger domestic structures that, based on their size and the use of such decorative elements as mosaic floors, appear to have been occupied by rather affluent families, probably representing the town's social elite.[62] Based on its location and size, Aviam has recently suggested that the building was used as a "neighbourhood" synagogue.[63] Unfortunately, Aviam does not elaborate on this term, leaving it unclear whether he means that only this neighborhood community would have accessed the synagogue and whether more synagogues are envisioned in other neighborhoods. However, as noted above, the suggestion that more synagogue buildings existed in Magdala in order to accommodate a majority of its community seems, based on the extensive excavations conducted at this site over the last fifty years, rather

---

Meeting in 2017, titled "Rethinking the Layout of the Magdala Synagogue," questioned the suggestion of a main western entrance. While not denying the possibility of a (secondary) entrance along the west, they argue for a main entrance along the south of the building, bordering the east–west street.

[60] In general, see Silvia Rozenberg, "Wall Paintings of the Herodian Period in the Land of Israel," in *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder*, ed. Ehud Netzer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 350–76. For Gamla, see Yoav Farhi, "Stucco Decorations from the Western Quarter," in *Gamla II: The Architecture. The Shmarya Gutmann Excavations, 1976-1988*, ed. Danny Syon and Zvi Yavor (Jerusalem: IAA, 2010), 176. For Yodefat, see Mordechai Aviam, "Yodefat - 1997," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot-Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 112 (2000): 19*; "Yodfat," *NEAEHL* 5: 2077. For Tiberias, see Yizhar Hirschfeld and Katharina Galor, "New Excavations in Roman, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Tiberias," in *Religion, Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Galilee. A Region in Transition*, ed. Jürgen K. Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 214.

[61] Aviam, "The Synagogue," 131.

[62] De Luca and Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," 306–8; Marcela Zapata-Meza, "Domestic and Mercantile Areas," in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 89–108.

[63] Aviam, "The Synagogue," 131.

improbable. Alternatively, the synagogue's small size, luxurious decoration, and introverted layout, as well as its location among elite families may suggest that this building was only frequented by a select few that were of some economic and political standing within Magdala's community.

On the other hand, the synagogue of Qiryat Sepher was located prominently in the northern part of the village, in a relatively open area with domestic complexes along its west and north (Fig. 6). The small synagogue building was probably accessed most of the time from a larger open plaza to its north through a double-winged entrance. An additional, narrower entrance was found on the west.[64] Evidence of red-colored plaster found on one of the column bases suggests that the synagogue's columns and perhaps its interior walls were decorated with painted wall plaster.[65] So, the synagogue appears to have had a more open and conspicuous display towards its community. This would also explain the fact that its seating capacity in relation to the size of Qiryat Sepher's community was much higher than in the case of the synagogues at Gamla and at Magdala.

However, its presence within the northern quarters of the village, with its back side oriented towards structures located c. 75–100 m further south, may have been intentional. According to its excavators, the southern building complex stood out for its "simple construction methods," thereby differing considerably from the "well-planned and impressive" construction of the living quarters and the synagogue.[66] As they wrote, "[t]he dilapidated condition of the structures and the multitude of agricultural installations suggests either that the [southern complex] was intended primarily for agricultural industry, or else that it served the lower class."[67] While only tentative suggestions can be made from the excavators' observations, if the latter was in fact the case, then it is interesting to note that the synagogue building was placed within and had its façade towards the more well-to-do part of the village.

---

[64] Magen, Tzionit, and Sirkis, "Khirbet Badd ʿIsa — Qiryat Sefer," 200. Near its main entrance, the excavators also found a rectangular stone lintel that was decorated in low relief with a rosette enclosed in a triangle (p. 203, fig. 38). Two door jambs with tabula ansata decoration in low relief were found near the synagogue's side entrance (p. 204, fig. 40).

[65] Magen, Tzionit, and Sirkis, "Khirbet Badd ʿIsa — Qiryat Sefer," 205.

[66] Magen, Tzionit, and Sirkis, "Khirbet Badd ʿIsa — Qiryat Sefer," 206, 186.

[67] Magen, Tzionit, and Sirkis, "Khirbet Badd ʿIsa — Qiryat Sefer," 206 and 217 (206).

Figure 6. Qiryat Sepher, plan of the archaeological site with the synagogue (Structure VI) (after Magen, Tzionit, and Sirkis, "Khirbet Badd 'Isa — Qiryat Sefer," fig. 2).

6. The Restricted Space of Political Architecture

The above examination of the visual and spatial structure of early syna-gogue buildings brings an apparent contrast to the fore. On the one hand, these buildings stood out in terms of their prominent monumentality within the respective towns and villages, either by their size, by their height, by their detached plan, by their use of different building materials, or by their location. They simply differed in physical makeup from the house structures that made up the largest share of these settlements. On the other hand, thanks to their particular layout, in the larger towns of Magdala and Gamla, at least, these monumental buildings appear to have ensured both a maximum level of visual privacy and a restricted level of access. The activities within these synagogues and the people partaking in them remained concealed from public view.

This contrast, inherent in the design and construction of early syna-gogue buildings, may be understood as signaling their inaccessibility to anyone within the community not initiated to enter. In an article on the material patterning of political and cultural processes within communities in pre-Hispanic southeastern Mesoamerica, Edward Schortman and his colleagues have argued that such a conveyance of aloofness is "accom-plished by displaying objects [or, in our case, buildings] that are easily seen, but can only be 'owned,' by a small population segment."[68] In the case of early synagogues, it was the community's social elite who seem to have had unrestricted access to these buildings, whereas the movement of others within the community was much more controlled. The apparent restricted nature of these buildings in terms of movement and sight, in fact, supports the observations—following Spigel's earlier conclusions—of a rather limited seating capacity in these buildings within the larger towns.

The restricted level of access and heightened visual privacy were not uncommon features in political architecture of the late Hellenistic and early Roman world.[69] For our case, a noteworthy example is the late Hel-lenistic *bouleuteria* buildings (town council meeting houses)—monu-mental columnar buildings characterized by rising tiers of seats (and, occasionally, a rear landing), either in rectilinear or curvilinear plan,

---

[68] Edward M. Schortman, Patricia A. Urban, and Marne Ausec, "Politics with Style: Identity Formation in Prehispanic Southeastern Mesoamerica," *American Anthropolo-gist* 103 (2001): 314.

[69] For studies beyond the Hellenistic and Roman world, see Moore, *Architecture and Power*, 170–219; Michael E. Smith, "Form and Meaning in the Earliest Cities: A New Approach to Ancient Urban Planning," *Journal of Planning History* 6.1 (2007): 24–25 and n. 63, with further references.

along three sides—that have been exposed in towns and cities across Greece and Asia Minor.[70] While *bouleuteria* are often found in the vicinity of other buildings of government and administration, located centrally within a town or city, the buildings themselves have been described as "fairly unimposing" and access to the main gathering hall was often screened off from the wider public.[71] For example, on the agora of the Greek town of Thasos, the *bouleuterion* was tucked away in the northeastern corner behind the Sanctuary of Zeus Agoraios Thasios and with its entrance turned away from the main square.[72] Interestingly, of all the walls of this building, only the side facing the agora was prominently decorated with marble.[73] This may have been done to mark the sociopolitical importance of this building to the community. Moreover, many of the known *bouleuteria* have rather narrow entrances and access to the hall was further controlled by screening off these entrances, either through an added vestibule (as in the case of Priene, western Turkey[74]) or through an added courtyard (as in the case of Herakleia-under-Latmos[75] and Sagalassos, both southwest Turkey[76]). While not having yet

[70] On *bouleuteria* in general, see William A. McDonald, *The Political Meeting Places of the Greeks* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943); Doris Gneisz, *Das antike Rathaus: das griechische Bouleuterion und die frührömische Curia* (Vienna: VWGÖ, 1990); Valentin Kockel, "Bouleuteria: architektonische Form und urbanistischer Kontext," in *Stadtbild und Bürgerbild im Hellenismus: Kolloquium, München, 24. Bis 26. Juni 1993*, ed. Michael Wörlle and Paul Zanker, Vestigia: Beiträge Zur Alten Geschichte 47 (Munich: Beck, 1995), 29–40; Frederick E. Winter, *Studies in Hellenistic Architecture*, Phoenix Supplementary Volume 42 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 141–49.

[71] See Christopher P. Dickenson, *On the Agora: The Evolution of a Public Space in Hellenistic and Roman Greece (c. 323 BC–267 AD)*, Mnemosyne Supplements 398 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 88–95 (94) and 120.

[72] For a similar case with the Old Bouleuterion in classical Athens where the entrance is on the south and faces away from the open area of the agora to the east, see Paga, "Coordination Problems," 202–6 (205–6).

[73] Dickenson, *On the Agora*, 94 and 190 fig. 25. See also Kockel, "Bouleuteria," 34.

[74] Theodor Wiegand, *Priene: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1895–1898* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1904), 219–31. The building is dated to the early second century BCE with later renovations, possibly Roman in date. This building is often referred to as an *ekklesiasterion*, a meeting place for the citizen assembly, but its architectural design is more befitting the known *bouleuteria* buildings. For discussion and literature, see Johnstone and Graff, "Situating Deliberative Rhetoric," 35. For a general discussion on the ambiguity of naming such assembly houses, see Dickenson, *On the Agora*, 113–15.

[75] McDonald, *The Political Meeting Places of the Greeks*, 192–96; Gneisz, *Das antike Rathaus*, 322. The building is dated to the second century BCE.

[76] Marc Waelkens, D. Pauwels, and J. Van Den Bergh, "The 1993 Excavations on the Upper and Lower Agora," in *Sagalassos III: Report on the Fourth Excavation Campaign of 1993*, ed. Marc Waelkens and Jeroen Poblome, Acta Archaeologica

mentioned the limited seating capacity of *bouleuteria*,[77] as they were primarily intended for town council members, it is mainly the architecture itself that reduced the opportunity for visual communication with the interior for townspeople and suggests a marker of exclusivity to those able to access it.

I have focused on the example of late Hellenistic *bouleuteria* for a reason: that is, in searching for architectural parallels to early synagogues, scholars of ancient synagogues have often compared the early synagogue buildings to the Hellenistic *bouleuteria*, notably that of Priene.[78] However, that discussion has centered solely on whether these columnar structures show similarities in terms of architectural design and layout. They have not highlighted the similarities by which these buildings interacted with their viewers and shaped their experiences through their architecture.

On the other hand, the relative privacy of early synagogue buildings in general stands in contrast with the open and public character of their later institutional successors from Late Antiquity. As Levine already noted, "The synagogue's importance is persuasively conveyed by archaeological remains. Throughout late Roman Palestine, communities emphasized this fact by erecting the building in the very center of town and out of all physical proportion to the surrounding structures."[79] Thus, unlike the first century CE synagogue buildings, evidence indicates that these monumental buildings from Late Antiquity were often two stories high, with indications of a gallery on the second floor.[80] Moreover, the two-story-high façades of these buildings show evidence of rich

---

Lovaniensia Monographiae 7 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 25. The building is dated to the late second or early first century BCE.

[77] For discussions of seating capacity, with further references, see Johnstone and Graff, "Situating Deliberative Rhetoric," passim.

[78] On the association with Hellenistic *bouleuteria*, see originally Yigael Yadin, "The Excavation of Masada – 1963/64. Preliminary Report," *IEJ* 15 (1965): 78–79. See also, e.g., Runesson, *Origins*, 366; idem, "Synagogues without Rabbis or Christians? Ancient Institutions beyond Normative Discourses," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 38 (2017): 162. And see, more hesitantly, Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 75. Note especially Levine's indeterminacy on the matter on pp. 324 and 616. For other theories about architectural parallels, see Donald D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period*, SBLDS 169 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 220–23; Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 45–46.

[79] Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 193.

[80] For discussion, with further literature, see Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 151–55. See also ibid., pp. 131–33 Table IV-1, for a list of synagogues with evidence of an outside staircase.

ornamentation.[81] As Hachlili recently wrote, this "must have emphasized the synagogue building and made it stand out conspicuously from its surroundings."[82] If that was not enough, the late antique synagogues were also usually built on the highest locations within their settlement or, as in the case of Capernaum, on an elevated platform.[83]

But these buildings were not only conspicuous from the outside, they also had a relatively open and inviting character toward the community. This is suggested by the fact that these structures are in most cases marked by their axial alignment: one to three centrally placed entrances, often with a richly decorated lintel, providing direct access and a view into the heart of the synagogue hall.[84] In some late antique synagogues where the façade was less grand and ornate, mainly those of the broadhouse and basilical type, the interior assembly hall was usually adorned with a rich figurative mosaic floor and inscriptions of donors and benefactors.[85] The fact that such inscriptions also appear near the main entrances on synagogue façades suggests the relatively public character of such inscriptions.[86] Thus, the late antique successors not only bear less resemblance in architectural style and type to early synagogues, I would argue this also holds with regard to the social control these structures exerted upon society. In fact, as Levine has noted, these synagogue structures seem to have served, occasionally, a variety of functions within the late antique community, such as for sleeping, drinking, and sheltering from the rain, heat, or cold, which the rabbis seemingly wished to prohibit.[87]

7. Monumental Synagogues as Semi-Public Space

While this article has focused on how those rectangular columnar structures with rising tiers of seats along their interior walls functioned as early synagogues, I would argue that it is not this particular architectural plan or type that defines the building as a synagogue. Instead, a synagogue is more defined by how its physical space shapes the movements

---

[81] For discussion of the evidence, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 323–24; Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 125–39, 224–28.

[82] Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 611.

[83] See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 314–16, esp. 315.

[84] Entrances: Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 335–37; Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 131–36.

[85] On the location of inscriptions, see Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 534–36.

[86] For discussion, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 336.

[87] Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 193–94. See *t. Megillah* 2:18.

and interactions of the community with this building, meaning in this case the restricted level of access and the visual privacy of what happened within its walls. Together with the prominent monumentality of these early synagogues, this particular characteristic suggests that these structures functioned as a semi-public space rather than as a public one. I suggest that it is this socio-cultural character of the space—not the canonical building type—that makes something an early synagogue.

Conventionally, however, scholars have often highlighted these synagogue buildings as particularly public spaces where the buildings and the activities conducted in them are understood as being open to the wider community of the particular village or town. Thus, Levine views these synagogues as some kind of "community center."[88] On the other hand, Anders Runesson and, more recently, Jordan Ryan have argued that these stand-alone buildings functioned as public synagogues, which to them means "an assembly open to anyone." They argue that these public synagogue buildings differ from so-called semi-public "association-type" synagogues, which were more controlled spaces that were only accessible to members of a particular community.[89] For Runesson and Ryan the "fully public nature" of such synagogue buildings as Gamla, Magdala, Qiryat Sepher and Khirbet Umm el-'Umdan is due to their monumental architecture and permanent seats.[90]

To be sure, while these synagogue buildings are public in the sense that they are outside the domestic sphere, to call any such non-domestic monumental setting as unequivocally "public" is too rigid and uniform. Over the last decades, scholars have become accustomed to the idea that domestic space in the Roman world essentially functioned as a semi-public space.[91] On the other hand, for the space beyond the domestic setting the complex nature of public and private has been rather ignored. As Amy Russell has recently put it, "if public space invades even the place we would imagine as most private, then space beyond the house

---

[88] Lee I. Levine, "Synagogues," *NEAEHL* 4: 1424; idem, *Ancient Synagogue*, 164.

[89] On the supposed differences between "public" and "semi-public," see notably Runesson, *Origins*, 64, 223–32, 340; idem, "Synagogues without Rabbis or Christians?" 160–64; Jordan Ryan, "Public and Semi-Public Synagogues of the Land of Israel during the Second-Temple Period," *El Pensador* 5 (2013): 33–34; idem, *The Role of the Synagogue in the Aims of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 70.

[90] Notably Ryan, "Public and Semi-Public Synagogues," 34; cf. Runesson, "Synagogues without Rabbis or Christians?" 160–64.

[91] Notably Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society*. See also, recently, Kaius Tuori and Laura Nissin, eds., *Public and Private in the Roman House and Society*, JRA Supp 102 (Portsmouth: JRA, 2015).

must be uniformly hyper-public."[92] It seems that this fixed notion of public space still underpins our ideas of the monumental synagogue in late Second Temple Palestine. However, in her recent study, *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome*, Russell has convincingly shown that even in what may perhaps be considered the most public space of the empire, the Forum Romanum, considerable gradations of public (in the sense of uncontrolled and accessible) and private (in the sense of controlled and hidden from view) existed. In this article, I have argued that the monumental synagogue buildings through their controlled accessibility and visual privacy functioned as a space that perhaps was more private than hitherto acknowledged.[93]

Viewing these synagogue buildings as essentially semi-public spaces to which access was controlled and rather exclusive also sheds some light on the space surrounding these buildings. The scholarly literature often refers to early synagogues as meeting or gathering places for the town or village community. However, what if not all the community, or only a small fraction of it, had regular access to the activities held in these buildings? While still being places of gathering for some, actual meetings between different social groups within a community may often have taken place in the streets or plazas surrounding the building.

The uncontrolled streets and plazas provided a space where conversations and meetings between different people—attendees and non-attendees—could occur. By doing so, these open areas surrounding the synagogue functioned as a sort of liminal space between different ranks in a community, and may have led to experiences of "inclusion" for some while "exclusion" for others. It is this space, beyond the semi-public domestic sphere and semi-private synagogue area, that was fully public in the sense of uncontrolled, informal, and inclusive. It is also here where interested bystanders, who were unable to access the synagogue space themselves, may have listened in on and debated what was discussed

[92] Amy Russell, *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12.

[93] Based on the available textual evidence, Richard Last has recently suggested that access to first-century Galilean synagogues seems to have been restricted "on the basis of residency" and that there were "limitations to synagogue access for travellers and non-residents." See Richard Last, "The Historical Jesus and Access in First-Century Galilean Synagogues," Paper presented in the Historical Jesus Section at the 2018 SBL Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, 17 November 2018. This text-focused analysis appears to support my claim based on study of the archaeological evidence. I thank Richard Last for providing me a copy of his unpublished paper and allowing me to refer to it.

inside.[94] In fact, as Johnstone and Graff have recently speculated for *bouleuteria* performances, "a rhetor, in an effort to build public support …, might have sought to address both exterior and indoor audiences—an early instance of 'playing to the gallery,' perhaps."[95] In light of such a suggestion, it is worth noting the emphasis in Matthew (6:5) on "street corners" (γωνίαις τῶν πλατειῶν; aside from synagogues) as an important location for performance.[96] Moreover, a tentative reading of the available passages in the New Testament gospels on Jesus's teaching in synagogues suggests an emphasis on "hearing" him, thus his oratory skills, and little focus on visual observations of the performance itself. For instance, Mark (6:2) notes: "On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded" (καὶ γενομένου σαββάτου ἤρξατο διδάσκειν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀκούοντες ἐξεπλήσσοντο).[97] Equally, a Mishnaic passage, while later in date, makes reference to the fact that it was possible for bystanders outside the synagogue to overhear the sound of a shofar and the reading of the Torah inside a synagogue.[98] This space that surrounded the synagogue was truly public. As Alex Gottesman recently argued in his work *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens*, this "more inclusive and amorphous" space is where "we would … hear more and different kinds of voices than we would in the institutional sphere," in our case the semi-public synagogue building itself.[99]

8. Conclusions

Although the number of early synagogues is few, and well-published examples are even fewer, this article has attempted to show that the structural remains, when explored from the perspective of human-material

---

[94] For a discussion of such instances in the case of classical and Hellenistic *bouleuteria*, see Paga, "Coordination Problems," 202–3 and n. 39; Johnstone and Graff, "Situating Deliberative Rhetoric," 13, 23–24, 40.

[95] Johnstone and Graff, "Situating Deliberative Rhetoric," 24.

[96] See Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 C.E.*, 84; Last, "Historical Jesus and Access."

[97] For another instance, see John 6:59–60. Richard Last has suggested, presumably because the disciples overheard Jesus's teaching in the synagogue, that John 6:59–60 may allude to the disciples having had access to the synagogue setting. This, however, is not necessarily the case and a setting outside the synagogue explains the passage equally well. See Last, "Historical Jesus and Access."

[98] *M. Rosh Hashanah* 3:7.

[99] Alex Gottesman, *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 20, 211.

interaction, can provide useful insights when it comes to the functioning, role, and people's experiences of synagogues within a community. In particular, this article explored how the architecture of early synagogues shaped the experiences of the related communities by controlling capacity, movement, and sight. I have argued that these early monumental synagogues, by their design and location, functioned as a rather exclusive space for activities by a communal "elite." The imposing size of these buildings, as observed from the outside, was contrasted by their more concealed and exclusive interior. It is this experience of the architecture—not necessarily the stylistic similarity—that highlights the closeness of early synagogues with the late Hellenistic *bouleuteria*. This observation also has implications for how we should label and understand the synagogue buildings in late Second Temple Palestine. While scholars have often labeled these monumental buildings as public and open to anyone (and as such set them apart from association-type synagogues, which they viewed as semi-public), I argue that the role of these stand-alone buildings was of a semi-public nature. This argument builds upon recent observations on the blended relationship between public and private in Roman society. Not only could parts of the domestic setting function in the public domain, public space outside the home was not necessarily accessible to one and all.

References

Allison, Penelope M. "Introduction." Pages 1–18 in *The Archaeology of Household Activities*. Edited by Penelope M. Allison. London: Routledge, 1999.

—. "Using the Material and Written Sources: Turn of the Millennium Approaches to Roman Domestic Space." *AJA* 105 (2001): 181–208.

Avery-Peck, Allan J., and Jacob Neusner, eds. *Judaism in Late Antiquity 3. Where We Stand: Issues & Debates in Ancient Judaism. Vol. 4: The Special Problem of the Synagogue*. HO, Section One 55. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Aviam, Mordechai. "The Decorated Stone from the Synagogue at Migdal. A Holistic Interpretation and a Glimpse into the Life of Galilean Jews at the Time of Jesus." *NovT* 55 (2013): 205–20.

—. "The Synagogue." Pages 127–33 in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*. Edited by Richard Bauckham. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018.

—. "Yodefat – 1997." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot-Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 112 (2000): 18* – 19* (English) – 23–24 (Hebrew).

—. "Yodfat." *NEAEHL* 5: 2076–78.

Avshalom-Gorni, Dina. "One of the Oldest Synagogues in the World Was Exposed at Migdal (9/13)." *IAA*, http://www.antiquities.org.il/article_eng.

aspx?sec_id=%2025&subj_%20id=%20240&id=%201601&module_
    id=%20#as.

Avshalom-Gorni, Dina, and Arfan Najar. "Migdal - Preliminary Report." *Hada-
    shot Arkheologiyot-Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 125 (2013). http://
    www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=2304.

Balty, Jean-Charles. "La maison urbaine en Syrie." Pages 407–22 in *Archéologie
    et histoire de la Syrie II: La Syrie de l'époque Achéménide à l'avènement
    de l'Islam*. Edited by Jean-Marie Dentzer and Winfried Orthmann. Saar-
    brücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1989.

Bauckham, Richard, ed. *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic
    and Roman Period*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018.

Bauckham, Richard, and Stefano De Luca. "Magdala As We Now Know It."
    Early Christianity 6 (2015): 91–118.

Ben David, Chaim. "On the Number of Synagogues and Their Location in the
    Holy Land." Pages 175–93 in *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Current
    Issues and Emerging Trends*. Edited by Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, and
    Ulla Tervahauta. FRLANT 279. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,
    2021.

Binder, Donald D. *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the
    Second Temple Period*. SBLDS 169. Atlanta: Scholars, 1999.

Bonnie, Rick. "Hasmonean Memories and Hellenistic Building Traditions: The
    Appearance and Disappearance of Synagogue Buildings in the Late Second
    Temple Period." Pages 59–80 in *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Cur-
    rent Issues and Emerging Trends*. Edited by Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola,
    and Ulla Tervahauta. FRLANT 279. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,
    2021.

—. *Being Jewish in Galilee, 100-200 CE: An Archaeological Study*. Studies in
    Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology 11. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019.

Butcher, Kevin. *Roman Syria and the Near East*. Los Angeles: Getty Publica-
    tions, 2003.

Catto, Stephen K. *Reconstructing the First-Century Synagogue: A Critical Anal-
    ysis of Current Research*. LNTS 363. London: T&T Clark, 2007.

Chwe, Michael Suk-Young. *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Com-
    mon Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Dale, Karen, and Gibson Burrell. *The Spaces of Organisation and the Organisa-
    tion of Space: Power, Identity and Materiality at Work*. Basingstoke: Pal-
    grave Macmillan, 2005.

De Luca, Stefano. "La città ellenistico-romana di Magdala/Taricheae. Gli scavi
    del Magdala Project 2007 e 2008: relazione preliminare e prospettive di
    indagine." *LASBF* 59 (2009): 343–562.

De Luca, Stefano, and Anna Lena. "Magdala/Taricheae." Pages 280–342 in
    *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods, Volume 2: The
    Archaeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages*. Edited by David
    A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.

Dickenson, Christopher P. *On the Agora: The Evolution of a Public Space in
    Hellenistic and Roman Greece (c. 323 BC–267 AD)*. Mnemosyne Supple-
    ments 398. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Fairweather, Leslie, Atba Al-Samarraie, and David Adler. "Places of Worship." Pages 27:1–22 in *Metric Handbook. Planning and Design Data*. Edited by David Adler. Oxford: Architectural Press, 1999.

Farhi, Yoav. "Stucco Decorations from the Western Quarter." Pages 175–88 in *Gamla II: The Architecture. The Shmarya Gutmann Excavations, 1976–1988*. Edited by Danny Syon and Zvi Yavor. Jerusalem: IAA, 2010.

Favro, Diane G. "In the Eyes of the Beholder: Virtual Reality Re-Creations and Academia." Pages 321–34 in *Imaging Ancient Rome. Documentation – Visualization – Imagination*. Edited by Lothar Haselberger and John H. Humphrey. JRA Supp 61. Portsmouth: JRA, 2006.

—. *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Fine, Steven. "From Synagogue Furnishing to Media Event: The Magdala Ashlar." *Ars Judaica* 13 (2017): 27–38.

Gneisz, Doris. *Das antike Rathaus: das griechische Bouleuterion und die früh-römische Curia*. Vienna: VWGÖ, 1990.

Gottesman, Alex. *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Grahame, Mark. *Reading Space: Social Interaction and Identity in the Houses of Roman Pompeii*. BAR IS 886. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000.

Gros, Pierre. *L'architecture romaine du début du IIIe siècle av. J.-C. à la fin du Haut-Empire. Vol. 1. Les monuments publics*. 3rd ed. Paris: Picard, 2011.

—. *L'architecture romaine du début du IIIe siècle av. J.-C. à la fin du Haut-Empire, Vol. 2. Maisons, palais, villas et tombeaux*. Paris: Picard, 2006.

Hachlili, Rachel. *Ancient Synagogues – Archaeology and Art: New Discoveries and Current Research*. HdO 105. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Hengel, Martin. "Proseuche und Synagoge: Jüdische Gemeinde, Gotteshaus und Gottesdienst in der Diaspora und in Palästina." Pages 171–95 in *Judaica et Hellenistica. Kleine Schriften I*. Edited by Martin Hengel. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996.

Hesberg, H. von. "Bauornament als kulturelle Leitform." Pages 341–66 in *Stadtbild und Ideologie: Die Monumentalisierung hispanischer Städte zwischen Republik und Kaiserzeit*. Edited by Walter Trimlich and Paul Zanker. Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990.

Hirschfeld, Yizhar, and Katharina Galor. "New Excavations in Roman, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Tiberias." Pages 207–29 in *Religion, Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Galilee. A Region in Transition*. Edited by Jürgen K. Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007.

Johnstone, Christopher Lyle, and Richard J. Graff. "Situating Deliberative Rhetoric in Ancient Greece: The Bouleutêrion as a Venue for Oratorical Performance." *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 21 (2018): 2–88.

Kee, Howard Clark. "Defining the First-Century CE Synagogue: Problems and Progress." Pages 7–26 in *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress*. Edited by Howard Clark Kee and Lynn H. Cohick. Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999.

—. "The Transformation of the Synagogue After 70 C.E.: Its Import for Early Christianity." *NTS* 36 (1990): 1–24.

Kent, Susan. *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Kloppenborg Verbin, John S. "Dating Theodotos (CIJ II 1404)." *JJS* 51 (2000): 243–80.

Kockel, Valentin. "Bouleuteria. Architektonische Form und urbanistischer Kontext." Pages 29–40 in *Stadtbild und Bürgerbild im Hellenismus: Kolloquium, München, 24. Bis 26. Juni 1993*. Edited by Michael Wörlle and Paul Zanker. Vestigia: Beiträge Zur Alten Geschichte 47. Munich: Beck, 1995.

Last, Richard. "The Historical Jesus and Access in First-Century Galilean Synagogues." Paper presented in the Historical Jesus Section at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the SBL. Denver, CO, 17 November 2018.

Laurence, Ray, and David John Newsome, eds. *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii: Movement and Space*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Malden: Blackwell, 1991.

Leibner, Uzi. *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Galilee: An Archaeological Survey of the Eastern Galilee*. TSAJ 127. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

Levine, Lee I. "Synagogues." *NEAEHL* 4: 1421–24.

—. *The Ancient Synagogue. The First Thousand Years*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

—. "The First-Century Synagogue: Critical Reassessments and Assessments of the Critical." Pages 70–102 in *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine. Old Questions, New Approaches*. Edited by Douglas R. Edwards. London: Routledge, 2004.

—. "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered." *JBL* 115 (1996): 425–48.

Magen, Yitzhak, Yoav Tzionit, and Orna Sirkis. "Khirbet Badd ʿIsa — Qiryat Sefer." Pages 179–241 in *The Land of Benjamin*. Edited by Yitzhak Magen, Donald T. Ariel, Gabriel G. Bijovsky, Yoav Tzionit, and Orna Sirkis. Judea-Samaria Publications 3. Jerusalem: IAA, 2004.

Markus, Thomas A. *Buildings & Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Matassa, Lidia D. *Invention of the First-Century Synagogue*. Edited by Jason M. Silverman and Murray Watson. ANEM 22. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018.

McDonald, William A. *The Political Meeting Places of the Greeks*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943.

Moore, Jerry D. *Architecture and Power in the Ancient Andes: The Archaeology of Public Buildings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Netzer, Ehud. "A Synagogue from the Hasmonean Period Recently Exposed in the Western Plain of Jericho." *IEJ* 49 (1999): 203–21.

—. *Masada III. The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965: Final Reports – The Buildings: Stratigraphy and Architecture*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1991.

Nevett, Lisa. *Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity*. Key Themes in Ancient History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Ober, Josiah. *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens*. Princenton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Onn, Alexander, and Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah. "Umm El-ʿUmdan, Khirbat (Modiʿin)." *NEAEHL* 5: 2061–63.

Onn, Alexander, Shlomit Wexler-Bdolah, Yehuda Rapuano, and Tzah Kanias. "Khirbat Umm El-ʿUmdan." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot-Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 114 (2002): 64* – 68* (English), 74–78 (Hebrew).

Paga, Jessica. "Coordination Problems, Social Architecture, and Causal Efficacy: The Case of the Old Bouleuterion in the Athenian Agora." Pages 189–211 in *Theoretical Approaches to the Archaeology of Ancient Greece: Manipulating Material Culture*. Edited by Lisa C. Nevett. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.

Reed, Jonathan L. *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-Examination of the Evidence*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 2000.

Richards, Colin. "Monumental Choreography: Architecture and Spatial Representation in Late Neolithic Orkney." Pages 143–78 in *Interpretative Archaeology*. Edited by Christopher Tilley. Oxford: Berg, 1993.

Rozenberg, Silvia. "Wall Paintings of the Herodian Period in the Land of Israel." Pages 350–76 in *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder*. Edited by Ehud Netzer. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Runesson, Anders. "Synagogues without Rabbis or Christians? Ancient Institutions beyond Normative Discourses." *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 38 (2017): 159–72.

—. *The Origins of the Synagogue. A Socio-Historical Study*. CBNTS 37. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001.

Runesson, Anders, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson. *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*. Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 72. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Russell, Amy. *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Ryan, Jordan J. "Public and Semi-Public Synagogues of the Land of Israel during the Second-Temple Period." *El Pensador* 5 (2013): 32–39.

—. *The Role of the Synagogue in the Aims of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017.

Sanders, Ed Parish. *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E.* London: SCM Press, 1992.

Schortman, Edward M., Patricia A. Urban, and Marne Ausec. "Politics with Style: Identity Formation in Prehispanic Southeastern Mesoamerica." *American Anthropologist* 103 (2001): 312–30.

Smith, Michael E. "Form and Meaning in the Earliest Cities: A New Approach to Ancient Urban Planning." *Journal of Planning History* 6 (2007): 3–47.

Spigel, Chad S. *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities: Methodology, Analysis and Limits*. TSAJ 149. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012.

Stern, Karen B. "Prayer as Power: Amulets, Graffiti, and Vernacular Writing in Ancient Levantine Synagogues." Pages 221–45 in *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Current Issues and Emerging Trends*. Edited by Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, and Ulla Tervahauta. FRLANT 279. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021.

—. *Writing on the Wall: Graffiti and the Forgotten Jews of Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Stöger, Hanna. *Rethinking Ostia: A Spatial Enquiry into the Urban Society of Rome's Imperial Port-Town*. Archaeological Studies Leiden University 24. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011.

Thomas, Edmund. "Architecture." Pages 838–58 in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*. Edited by Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

—. *Monumentality and the Roman Empire: Architecture in the Antonine Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Tuori, Kaius, and Laura Nissin, eds. *Public and Private in the Roman House and Society*. JRA Sup. 102. Portsmouth: JRA, 2015.

Waelkens, Marc, D. Pauwels, and J. Van Den Bergh. "The 1993 Excavations on the Upper and Lower Agora." Pages 23–46 in *Sagalassos III: Report on the Fourth Excavation Campaign of 1993*. Edited by Marc Waelkens and Jeroen Poblome. Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia Monographiae 7. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995.

Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew. *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Ward-Perkins, John Bryan. *Roman Imperial Architecture*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Weksler-Bdolah, Shlomit. "Khirbat Umm El-'Umdan." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot-Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 126 (2014). http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=14718.

Wiegand, Theodor. *Priene: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1895–1898*. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1904.

Wilk, Richard R., and William L. Rathje. "Household Archaeology." *American Behavioral Scientist* 25 (1982): 617–39.

Winter, Frederick E. *Studies in Hellenistic Architecture*. Phoenix Supplementary Volume 42. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Yadin, Yigael. "The Excavation of Masada – 1963/64. Preliminary Report." *IEJ* 15 (1965): 1–120.

Yavor, Zvi. "The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Eastern and Western Quarters." Pages 13–112 in *Gamla II: The Architecture. The Shmarya Gutmann Excavations, 1976–1988*. Edited by Danny Syon and Zvi Yavor. IAA Reports 44. Jerusalem: IAA, 2010.

Yegül, Fikret. "The Street Experience of Ancient Ephesus." Pages 95–111 in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*. Edited by Z. Çelik, D. Favro, and R. Ingersoll. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Zapata-Meza, Marcela. "Domestic and Mercantile Areas." Pages 89–108 in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*. Edited by Richard Bauckham. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018.