

THE LATE ANCIENT SYNAGOGUES OF SOUTHERN PALESTINE

Steven H. Werlin

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Approved by:

Jodi Magness

Eric M. Meyers

Bart D. Ehrman

Zlatko Plese

Monika Trümper

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## ABSTRACT

STEVEN H. WERLIN: The Late Ancient Synagogues of Southern Palestine  
(UNDER THE DIRECTION OF JODI MAGNESS)

Following the failure of the Bar-Kokhba revolt in 135/6 C.E., the majority of the Jewish population of ancient Palestine migrated northward away from Jerusalem to join communities of Jews in Galilee and the Golan Heights. Although rabbinic sources indicate that from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. onward the demographic center of Jewish Palestine was in Galilee, archaeological evidence of Jewish communities is found in the southern part of the country as well.

Ten synagogues from the period after the Bar-Kokhba revolt are known from southern Palestine. They are located at the sites of Na‘aran and Jericho in the Lower Jordan Valley, En-Gedi on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, Kh. Susiya, Eshtemoa, Ḥ. ‘Anim, and Ḥ. Ma‘on in the southern Hebron Hills, Ḥ. Rimmon in the Judean Shephelah, and Gaza-Maiumas and Ma‘on-Nirim on the southern Mediterranean coast. The present study is a detailed analysis of these ten synagogues. The primary goals are to (a) review critically the excavation projects carried out at these sites, particularly the chronological conclusions of the excavators, and (b) determine what aspects of these synagogues, if any, serve to unite them as a distinct regional group.

From the critical examination of the published finds and reports, this dissertation concludes that, despite the views of some of the excavators, none of these synagogues

can be dated conclusively to before the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. The dates of construction generally are fixed at no later than the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c. Therefore, these ten synagogues should be considered products of the Byzantine period.

As a group, these ten synagogues do not display unifying features that are distinct from the synagogues in Lower Galilee. However, there are some notable differences between the southern synagogues and those of the Golan and Upper Galilee. Some of the southern synagogues bear evidence of inter-religious contact between Jews and Christians in the art, architecture, and religious concerns expressed in the material culture. Although the evidence for such contact does not differ significantly from the synagogues in Lower Galilee and the Beth-Shean region, the conclusion to this study highlights the importance of considering Jewish-Christian relations in the interpretation of late antique Palestinian Judaism by suggesting topics for further inquiry.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Primary Sources

<i>War</i>	Josephus, <i>War of the Jews</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Onom.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Onomasticon</i>
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
<i>t.</i>	Tosefta
<i>y.</i>	Yerushalmi (Palestinian Talmud)
<i>b.</i>	Bavli (Babylonian Talmud)

### Other Terms

asl	above sea level
cm	centimeter
dm	decimeter
H.	<i>Ḥorvat</i> (Hebrew, “ruins of”)
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
IDAM	Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums
IES	Israel Exploration Society
Kh.	<i>Khirbet</i> (Arabic, “ruins of”)
km	kilometer
m	meter
<i>NEAEHL</i>	<i>New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i>
NIG	New Israeli Grid (Israeli Transverse Mercator)

## PERIODS AND DATES

All dates are “Common Era” (C.E. = A.D.) unless otherwise noted.

Iron Age	1200 – 586 B.C.E.
1 <sup>st</sup> Temple Period	ca. 950 – 586 B.C.E.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Temple Period	539 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.
Herodian Period	40 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.
Early Roman Period	63 B.C.E. – 135 C.E.
Late Roman Period	135 – 324
Byzantine Period	324 – 640
Early Islamic Period	640 – 1099
Umayyad Period	640 – 749
Abbasid Period	749 – 969
Crusader Period	1099-1244
Mamluk Period	1244-1517
Ottoman Period	1517-1917
British Mandate	1917-1948

## NOTE ON SPELLINGS AND ITALICS

Because the transliterations and spellings of place-names vary in the secondary sources, I have employed the names found in the index to *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Stern 1993-2008), vol. 5, for the sake of consistency. Please note that this index occasionally includes multiple spellings for a single site. For those sites that are not included in the *NEAEHL* index, I have used what I perceive to be the most common spelling in English-language secondary literature.

The symbols /ʾ/ and /ʿ/ have been used to denote the Hebrew letters ’*aleph* and ’*ayin*, respectively. Footnotes include additional and alternative spellings and names when relevant. The use of Kh. or H. (for “ruins of”) are also used in accordance with the *NEAEHL* spellings.

Hebrew personal names found in inscriptions are here transliterated using the spellings of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (when attested biblically). Aramaic personal names are transliterated directly unless otherwise noted.

Foreign-language words have been italicized when transliterated into English using standards of modern pronunciation. (So for example, “*miqveh*” instead of “*miqweh*”.) When foreign language words have been adopted into modern English—and appear in the unabridged *Random House Dictionary*—they are not italicized. (So for example, “Torah” instead of “*tora*” and “menorah” instead of “*menora*”.)

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Synagogue Studies: The State of the Field

Over the past sixty years, synagogue art and architecture have become an increasingly important source for the study of ancient Judaism. While previous reconstructions of Jewish culture and religion in late ancient Palestine had been based almost exclusively on rabbinic sources, unexpected archaeological discoveries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century called into question many of the old assumptions.<sup>1</sup> In light of archaeology, modern scholarship has had to reckon with previously unknown aspects of Jewish life and culture. As a result, late antique Judaism can no longer be viewed exclusively through the lens of rabbinics.

Impressive mosaics and relief sculpture uncovered at sites such as Hammath-Tiberias, Beth Alpha, and Capernaum, as well as the necropolis at Beth She‘arim,<sup>2</sup> have demonstrated that Jewish views toward figural imagery had been misunderstood.<sup>3</sup> Following the work of Erwin Goodenough, scholars became increasingly critical of the rabbinic view of post-70 C.E. Judaism, as offered for example in the works of

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<sup>1</sup> Archaeological finds for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been catalogued in the ground-breaking thirteen-volume work of Goodenough 1953-68.

<sup>2</sup> On Hammath-Tiberias, see Dothan 1983; 2000. On Beth Alpha, see Sukenik 1932. On Capernaum, see Corbo et al. 1972-2007. On Beth She‘arim, see Mazar 1973; Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974; Avigad 1976.

<sup>3</sup> There existed a general consensus among scholars prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. that Jews throughout antiquity avoided figural imagery altogether, a notion supported by numerous events recorded by Flavius Josephus and a cursory reading of rabbinic sources.



George Foot Moore, Gedaliah Alon, and Ephraim Urbach.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the monumental nature of some of these buildings forced scholars to rethink overly-simplistic and Eurocentric historical models, such as those of the 19<sup>th</sup>-c. scholar Heinrich Graetz, who posited a steady decline of Jewish culture following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., leading to oppression under a Christian empire in late antiquity, and culminating in the widespread persecution of Jews in the medieval period.<sup>5</sup>

The unprecedented discovery of such elaborate synagogue buildings led to a variety of interpretations regarding their artistic, architectural, and epigraphic features. Most notable is Goodenough's survey of Jewish art published in the 1950s and 1960s. Goodenough felt that "rabbinic" Judaism known from literary sources could not be reconciled with synagogue iconography. Indeed, most scholars of his day did not envision ancient rabbis accepting such an apparent transgression of the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 5:8), which, in its strictest interpretation, forbids the making of figural imagery. Based on the works Philo of Alexandria, Goodenough hypothesized that synagogue art provided evidence for a sort of "Hellenistic Judaism."<sup>6</sup> While few scholars today agree with Goodenough's overall thesis, his challenge to the rabbinic-centric view of ancient Judaism and his speculation about alternative forms of Judaism continue to serve as a cornerstone of scholarship—particularly among American scholars—on the subject a half-century later.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Moore 1927-30; Alon 1952-55; 1957-58; Urbach 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Graetz 1853-76. See the comments and discussions in Levine 2000a: 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Goodenough 1953-68.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion in Fine 2005: 35-58, who is critical of this trend in scholarship.

Goodenough's controversial claims provoked a series of counter arguments. Among the most important studies to challenge the thesis of "non-rabbinic" Judaism was that of Urbach.<sup>8</sup> By citing passages from rabbinic works dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, Urbach showed that the rabbis had become increasingly tolerant toward figural imagery that was not used explicitly for idolatrous purposes. Rabbinic opinions of these images in light of the Second Commandment were, according to Urbach, meant to accommodate their social reality. For Urbach, there was no "Hellenistic Judaism" distinct from rabbinic Judaism. Some researchers—including prominent archaeologists such as Nahman Avigad—understood Urbach's views to mean that "the Rabbis" considered images meaningless and nothing more than decoration.<sup>9</sup>

The views of both Goodenough and Urbach found successive proponents. The latter's work was followed by scholars of rabbinics such as Joseph Baumgarten, who envisioned synagogue decoration as a means of social prestige for the benefactors.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Yaron Eliav and Steven Fine have supported the view of rabbinic accommodation and increasing tolerance by examining how rabbis would have defined and categorized art.<sup>11</sup> Zeev Weiss' publication of the Sepphoris synagogue has

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<sup>8</sup> Urbach 1959.

<sup>9</sup> See Avigad 1976: 275-90. The notions of meaningless imagery, decorative function, or "art for the sake of art" in the pre-Renaissance periods generally have been rejected among modern art historians; see Belting 1994. On the issue of whether "the Rabbis" in antiquity can be considered a monolithic group or class, see *inter alia* Cohen 1981; Miller 1998; 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Baumgarten 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Eliav 1998; Fine 2005: 69-70.

interpreted the building's mosaic in terms of rabbinic literature, citing specific Talmudic passages that correlate with the scenes depicted.<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, Goodenough's notion of an "alternative" Judaism has influenced interpretations of the images and other features in ancient synagogues. One highly-debated topic is the motif of Helios—the Greco-Roman sun-god—and the signs of the zodiac, which decorate the mosaic floors of several Palestinian synagogues.<sup>13</sup> This motif has been cited as evidence of a possible reemergence of the Jewish priesthood in late antiquity and the reckoning of the priestly calendar.<sup>14</sup> Michael Avi-Yonah was among the first to make this connection, followed more recently by Gideon Foerster, Rachel Hachlili, and Jodi Magness.<sup>15</sup> Others have interpreted the motif in light of Jewish mysticism, supporting their hypotheses with evidence from *Heikhalot* literature, a corpus

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<sup>12</sup> Weiss 2000: 28-30; 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Zodiac mosaics have been found (in order of discovery) at Na'aran (see below, section 2.1), Beth Alpha (Sukenik 1932), Ḥusifa (Avi-Yonah 1934), Yafia (Sukenik 1951), Hammath-Tiberias (Dothan 1983), Kh. Susiya (see below, section 4.1), Sepphoris (Weiss 2005), and now perhaps Kh. Wadi el-Hammam (Leibner 2010). In addition, the synagogue at En-Gedi lists the twelve signs of the zodiac along with the twelve months of the year (see below, section 3.1). The image of Helios has alternatively been identified as Sol Invictus; see e.g., Dothan 1983-2000; and Roussin 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Debates over the reckoning of the calendar in ancient Judaism—in particular whether to use a lunar or solar calendar—have received more attention in recent years, due in large part to a more developed understanding of the beliefs evidenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls. For discussion, see esp. Eilior 2004: 82-134, though cf. Stern 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Avi-Yonah 1981 connects the priestly concerns and calendrical issues to recurring themes in Jewish poetic liturgy (*piyyutim*), which is also evidenced in the discovery of epigraphic lists of the priestly courses (*mishmarot*). Foerster 1987 relates the zodiac to the priesthood via the number twelve, which occurs frequently in Temple paraphernalia (e.g., holy vessels, loaves of the showbread, and gems on the high priest's breastplate). Hachlili 2002 follows Avi-Yonah's work closely in suggesting that the zodiac recalls a sort of "popular" calendar. Magness 2005b focuses in particular on the solar aspect of the calendar, pointing out that this was the calendar used originally in the Jerusalem Temple and promoted by the secessionist priesthood of the Dead Sea Scrolls. See also Grey 2011: 284, on the connection between Helios at Sepphoris and the priesthood.

of Jewish writings dating to the late ancient and early medieval periods.<sup>16</sup> These works include a cast of superhuman and angelic beings who reveal magico-ritual practices.<sup>17</sup> The Heikhalot texts also influenced Morton Smith's proposal that Helios represented the great angel or Prince of Countenance, while the zodiac represented the other heavenly servants.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Luceille Roussin has suggested that Helios is a "minor deity," while the zodiac signs are heavenly servants or angels.<sup>19</sup> Martin Goodman conversely interprets Helios as a depiction of God himself, based also on readings of Heikhalot works.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the iconography of ancient synagogues, various other features and finds have been understood as representative of either rabbinic or non-rabbinic Judaism. Much debate, for example, has focused on synagogue inscriptions, many of which refer explicitly to men with the title of "rabbi." This has led to various interpretations as to what this term actually means in context and whether or not these "rabbis" can be identified or associated with "the Rabbis" from rabbinic literature, i.e., the rabbinic sages (ר"ז).<sup>21</sup> Just as significant is the inscription from the Rehob synagogue, which quotes

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<sup>16</sup> Defined narrowly, these works include 3 (*Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch*, *Heikhalot Rabbati*, *Heikhalot Zutarti*, *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, and *Merkavah Rabbah*), as well as some instructional and apocalyptic works embedded within these highly redacted texts. For the texts, see Schäfer 1981. For discussion and datings, see Boustan 2007. See *ibid.*, 135-39 on the problems in defining the character and genre of Heikhalot literature.

<sup>17</sup> Boustan 2007: 141-43.

<sup>18</sup> Smith 1982.

<sup>19</sup> Roussin 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Goodman 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Cohen 1981; Miller 2004; Millar 2011.

an extended passage that is known mostly from rabbinic literature.<sup>22</sup> As such, it might provide evidence for the instruction and observance of *halakhot*, or Jewish practices based on rabbinic traditions and interpretations of biblical commandments. On the other hand, synagogue features such as the stone chair or “*Cathedra* of Moses,” as well as spatial dividers or chancel screens have been understood as examples of alternative religious concerns, such as those related to Jewish mysticism, the priesthood, or the Temple.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the ongoing debate between proponents of rabbinic and non-rabbinic trends, many scholars in recent years have focused on the complexity of ancient Judaism, blurring the somewhat artificial boundaries between the traditions. Stuart Miller, for example, has argued that rabbinic literature utilized symbols similar to synagogue iconography, suggesting that the rabbis became quite comfortable in the decorated halls of worship.<sup>24</sup> Such a notion undermines the old paradigm of either-or terminology.<sup>25</sup> Other studies have shown how the rabbis often incorporated mystical and priestly discussions into their own literature, though these were typically considered taboo subjects.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sussman 1981: 146. Most of the text is known from *y.Demai* and *y.Shevi'it*, as well as *t.Shevi'it* and *Sifre Deuteronomy*. Part of the first paragraph and the final paragraph were previously unknown.

<sup>23</sup> On the “*Cathedra* of Moses,” see Sukenik 1929; Levine 2005: 347-41, esp. 348 n. 171; and below, section 3.1.3. Regarding chancel screens, see Foerster 1989; and Branham 1995, who argues that the spatial elements negotiate the need for the synagogue to establish its own legitimacy while creating a connection to the Jerusalem Temple.

<sup>24</sup> Miller 2004.

<sup>25</sup> See also Miller 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Halperin 1988. On the permissibility of the topic, see e.g., *m.Haggigah* 2:1; and Eilior 2004: 264, *passim*. On the blurring of lines between rabbinic and priestly traditions in post-70 Judaism, cf. Grey 2011: 153-63.

Beyond interpreting the art of late ancient synagogues, scholars have taken broader, comprehensive approaches. Among the first generation of Israeli archaeologists, Eleazar Sukenik and Michael Avi-Yonah structured the field of synagogue studies by advancing a typology for the chronological development of the ancient synagogue.<sup>27</sup> According to the typology, synagogues at Galilean sites with basilical layouts, Jerusalem-oriented triportal facades, and flagstone pavements were considered the earliest of the post-70 C.E. synagogues.<sup>28</sup> This “Galilean”-type (Avi-Yonah’s “early synagogues”) were thought to date to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c., based largely on the conclusions of Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger’s survey in 1905-06.<sup>29</sup> Broadhouse synagogues (Avi-Yonah’s “transitional-type”), such as at Eshtemoa and Kh. Shema‘, were dated to the 4<sup>th</sup>- to early 5<sup>th</sup>-c. and exhibited features of both early and late types.<sup>30</sup> Byzantine-type synagogues (Avi-Yonah’s “late synagogues”), dating to the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c., had basilical layouts like the Galilean types but also included a forecourt or atrium, a narthex, and an apse on the Jerusalem-oriented wall, similar to contemporary churches.<sup>31</sup> In front of the apse was a bema, usually demarcated from the rest of the hall by a stone or wooden

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<sup>27</sup> Sukenik 1934; Avi-Yonah 1973; 1978. For a detailed discussion of the problems surrounding the traditional synagogue typology, see Magness 2001; Milson 2007: 22-28.

<sup>28</sup> See Avi-Yonah 1978: 1129-30.

<sup>29</sup> The German team surveyed the synagogues at Capernaum, Chorazin, Arbel, Ḥ. ‘Ammudim (Umm el-‘Amed), Meiron, Bar‘am, Nabratein, Gush Ḥalav, ed-Dikkeh, Umm el-Qanatir, and Ḥ. Sumaqa; see Kohl and Watzinger 1916. They suggested a late 2<sup>nd</sup>- or 3<sup>rd</sup>-c. date based on the occasional inclusion of a “Syrian gable” among these synagogues—a feature that appears in Antonine and Severan period temples in Syria—and historical considerations.

<sup>30</sup> Avi-Yonah 1978: 1131 suggests that the introduction of mosaic pavements in synagogues at this time coincided with a rabbinic comment from *p.* ‘Avodah Zarah 3:4, 42d: “During the days of Rabbi Abun [ca. 4<sup>th</sup> c.], they began to draw figures in mosaics, and he did not protest against them.” On Kh. Shema‘, cf. Avi-Yonah 1973: 38-42.

<sup>31</sup> Avi-Yonah 1978: 1132.

chancel screen, again similar to contemporary churches. The mosaic pavements of the Byzantine-type synagogues tended to be more lavishly decorated than their predecessors, as demonstrated in examples from Beth Alpha, Gerasa, Na‘aran, and Ma‘on-Nirim.<sup>32</sup> Avi-Yonah further suggested that the synagogues constructed in the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c. were destroyed “by enemy action,” as evidenced by conflagrations in several buildings and the conversion of the Gerasa synagogue to a church in 530.<sup>33</sup>

This synagogue typology ultimately proved inadequate. Starting with renewed excavations at Capernaum by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in the 1960s and 1970s, archaeologists began uncovering evidence suggesting later dates for some of the buildings that served as the archetypes for the Galilean-type synagogue.<sup>34</sup> In the ensuing years, refined excavation techniques allowed the debate over the datings of synagogues to center on stratigraphy and finds rather than historical and art historical considerations alone. Standards set by the publications of the Meiron Regional Project in particular prompted some synagogue archaeologists to abandon typological criteria in favor of site-

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<sup>32</sup> Avi-Yonah 1978: 1132. On Beth Alpha, see Sukenik 1932. On Gerasa, see Kraeling 1938: 234-41, 318-24. On Na‘aran and Ma‘on-Nirim, see below, sections 2.1 and 6.2, respectively.

<sup>33</sup> Avi-Yonah 1978: 1132.

<sup>34</sup> For detailed excavation reports on Capernaum, see Corbo et al. 1972-2007; and for summaries of the debated points of Capernaum, see Loffreda 1981; Foerster 1981; and Avi-Yonah 1981b. For other critiques regarding the dating of the Galilean-type synagogues, see Gal 1995; Ma‘oz 1999; 2009; Magness 2001.

specific debates.<sup>35</sup> As a result, it is no longer the standard practice in synagogue studies to date the structures on the basis of building type alone.<sup>36</sup>

Synagogues also have been addressed in regional studies. Gideon Foerster's 1982 dissertation articulates the similarities between Galilean synagogues and their Classical models.<sup>37</sup> Foerster's work maintains the traditional typology, though his observations pose important questions regarding the reemergence of Classical styles in the architecture of Galilean-type synagogues. Zvi Uri Ma'oz dealt with the synagogues of the Golan in his 1995 doctoral dissertation.<sup>38</sup> Ma'oz's work rejects the typology for the Golan synagogues, preferring to rely upon stratigraphic evidence for the purposes of dating whenever possible. For example, he redates the synagogue at ed-Dikkeh—considered to be a Galilean-type building—to the 5<sup>th</sup> c. on the basis of numismatic evidence.<sup>39</sup> In his 2003 doctoral dissertation, David Amit similarly approached his topic from the perspective of stratigraphic excavation rather than stylistic and typological considerations.<sup>40</sup> Amit's regional study of the synagogues in the southern Hebron Hills takes a narrower approach by examining only four excavated structures: Kh. Susiya,

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<sup>35</sup> On the Meiron Regional Project, see Meyers et al. 1976; 1981; 1990; and Meyers and Meyers 2009. For the site-specific debates surrounding the datings, see Magness 1997; 2001; 2010; and Meyers 2001; Meyers and Meyers 2010a.

<sup>36</sup> Despite his criticisms of the revised dating of the Capernaum synagogue (Avi-Yonah 1981b), even Avi-Yonah eventually advocated giving considerably less weight to the typology in favor of local variants. See Avi-Yonah 1973: 40-42.

<sup>37</sup> Foerster 1982.

<sup>38</sup> Ma'oz 1995.

<sup>39</sup> On the earliest attempt to date the synagogue at ed-Dikkeh, see Kohl and Watzinger 1916. On the redating, see Ma'oz 1995; 2009. Despite Ma'oz's apparent preference for stratigraphic dating, several of his conclusions are based on stylistic comparisons.

<sup>40</sup> Amit 2003.



Eshtemoa, Ma'on (in Judea), and H. 'Anim. Despite his rejection of the traditional chronological typology, Amit concludes that these four synagogues formed a *regional* type on the basis of similar characteristics.

Although these three regional studies of synagogues—Foerster (Galilee), Ma'oz (the Golan), and Amit (the southern Hebron Hills)—differ in their methodology and scope, all have informed the approach of the present study.

## 1.2 The Present Study

The vast majority of synagogue research has focused on Galilee and the Golan.<sup>41</sup> There are three reasons for this bias. First, Galilee is identified in rabbinic sources as the home of the most influential rabbis of Palestine and their schools in the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods (ca. 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c.).<sup>42</sup> Most late ancient Jewish Palestinian literature was written about, by, and in the context of the Galilean rabbis. Second, the rabbinic sources' geographic focus on Galilee suggests that the majority of Palestine's Jewish population migrated northward following the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132-35 C.E.).<sup>43</sup> The cities and villages along the coast, in the south, and across the river in Transjordan formed the periphery of Jewish Palestine. Third, and perhaps most important, the synagogues in Galilee and the Golan are far more numerous and geographically dense than those in southern Palestine, thus reinforcing the first two points above (see fig. i).

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<sup>41</sup> See *inter alia* Kohl and Watzinger 1916; Meyers 1976; Levine 1981; 2005; Foerster 1982; Ma'oz 1995; Urman and Flesher 1995.

<sup>42</sup> See Alon 1952-55; Avi-Yonah 1976; Schwartz 1986; Schiffman 1992; Cohen 1992; Levine 1992b; Amit 2003: 7.

<sup>43</sup> Avi-Yonah 1976; 2002: 215; Schwartz 1986: 42-46; Schwartz 2001: 110-119. Amit 2003: 7 points out that southern Palestine had become "a marginal, peripheral region, distant from the cities and political, economic and social centers" of Jewish Palestine.

The present study does not challenge these three points or the accepted notion that northern Palestine was the center of late ancient Palestinian Jewry. Nevertheless, Joshua Schwartz's survey of rabbinic sources demonstrates that the areas south, west, and east of Jerusalem were home to a substantial number of Jewish communities in late antiquity (see fig. ii) and that these communities had regular contact with the centers of Jewish Palestine in the north.<sup>44</sup> As noted above, the peripheral nature of the southern communities is underscored by the distribution of synagogue buildings. Northern Palestine<sup>45</sup> covers an area of over 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> and includes over fifty known synagogue sites.<sup>46</sup> Southern Palestine<sup>47</sup> covers an area of over 7,300 km<sup>2</sup> but includes only ten known synagogues sites dating to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. Although we cannot discount the possibility that synagogues in southern Palestine are less identifiable

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<sup>44</sup> Schwartz 1986.

<sup>45</sup> "Northern Palestine" here includes the area from the Beth-Shean region in the south to the foothills of Mt. Hermon in the north and from the Mediterranean in the west to Nahal Raqqad in the east. It encompasses the whole of the Roman province of Palaestina Secunda and the southern parts of the province of Phoenicia. See Avi-Yonah 2002: 125, Map 9.

<sup>46</sup> The estimation here is based on the catalog compiled by Milson 2007 and the excavations and survey carried out in the Golan and reported in Ma'oz 1995. It does not include sites of questionable identification or Samaritan synagogues. In addition to those listed in Milson's corpus and Ma'oz's study, I include the synagogues currently being excavated at Huqoq and Kh. Wadi el-Hammam in Galilee. Estimates that put the number of synagogues at or near one hundred (e.g., Miller 1998: 58; Levine 2011: 107) apparently include surface finds and architectural fragments removed from context and unassociated with a specific site. While such finds likely belonged to synagogues, it is difficult to quantify the buildings or say anything meaningful about their layout based on stray architectural fragments.

<sup>47</sup> "Southern Palestine" here includes the area from the Dead Sea in the east to the Mediterranean in the west and from the Lower Jordan Valley (the vicinity of Jericho) in the north up to the northern edge of the Negev in the south. It encompasses the southern half of the Roman province of Palaestina Prima. See Avi-Yonah 2002: 125, Map 9. The term "Darom" (Hebrew for "South") is often applied to this region in the ancient rabbinic sources. Sometimes the "Darom" is as broad as the area in Palestine outside Galilee and the Golan. Other times it is as limited as the city of Lod (Miller 1998:61). Eusebius' use of the term "Daroma" (the Aramaic equivalent, transliterated into Greek) refers specifically to the region of the southern Hebron Hills. For a full discussion, see Schwartz 1986: 33-41; see also Avi-Yonah 2002: 159-62; Sivan 2008: 248. Because of the inconsistencies and confusion surrounding this term, I have avoided its use in the present study, preferring the geographic designation of "southern Palestine."

in the material record, literary and archaeological evidence support the traditional view that Jewish communities in the north outnumbered those in the south, which were more dispersed among non-Jewish towns and villages.

The ten synagogue sites of late ancient southern Palestine which are the subject of this study are: Na‘aran, Jericho, En-Gedi, Kh. Susiya, Eshtemoa, Ma‘on (in Judea), Ḥ. ‘Anim, Ḥ. Rimmon, Gaza-Maiumas, and Ma‘on-Nirim.<sup>48</sup> As with the works of Foerster, Ma‘oz, and Amit (see above), my goal is to accomplish a regional study of the synagogues in our defined area. While Amit’s study considered all evidence for Jewish presence in the southern Hebron Hills—including inscriptions and decorated architectural fragments found out of context—this study will follow the works of Foerster and Ma‘oz more closely by examining only excavated synagogue buildings.<sup>49</sup>

### 1.2.1 Defining the Subject

The term “synagogue” has a broad definition.<sup>50</sup> The English rendering is derived from the Greek συναγωγή, which indicated both a place of meeting and an assembly of people during the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, the Greek προσευχή

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<sup>48</sup> On the spellings of sites used here, see comments under “Notes on Spellings” preceding this chapter.

<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that this is not a regional study of Jewish *communities* in southern Palestine. Such a project necessarily would include all evidence of Jewish presence, such as inscriptions and decorated architectural fragments (including surface finds), as well as evidence from Jewish burials and the literary sources. The evidence for Jewish inscriptions, including those from southern Palestine, has been collected in Naveh 1978. In addition to the decorated architectural fragments presented in Amit 2003, see Ilan 1991. For Jewish burials in southern Palestine, the two most important necropoleis are at Beth Guvrin (Eleutheropolis; see Avni et al. 2008) and Zoar (Ghor es-Safi, Byzantine Zoora; see Ben-Zvi 1944; Sukenik 1945; Naveh 1995; 2000; Stern 1999; Misgav 2006; Meyers 2010a). The literary evidence has been treated by Schwartz 1986.

<sup>50</sup> On the problems of defining the ancient synagogue, see McKay 1998: 110-12; Levine 2004b: 91-92.

<sup>51</sup> McKay 1998: 105, 110-12; Levine 2000a: 1.

could refer to an act of worship/prayer or a place of worship/prayer in Jewish context.<sup>52</sup> By the Late Roman period, συναγωγή had come to refer to the building. The Hebrew equivalent, בית כנסת, literally “house of assembly,” appears in tannaitic literature during the Late Roman period and also indicates a place instead of a group. The Aramaic term כנישה appears in both amoraic literature and inscriptions. As with Greek and Hebrew etymologies, כנישה was used to indicate an assembly or gathering but eventually came to refer to the building in Jewish contexts.<sup>53</sup>

Despite occasional references to the synagogue in early rabbinic literature, the texts are not explicit as to how such a building was defined. In fact, the building was distinguished in the literary sources only by the presence of a Torah repository (תיבה) and the actions that took place there, such as the recitation of the *Shema* and Torah reading, by a quorum of ten adult men.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the archaeological evidence indicates synagogues could be lavishly decorated, including furniture and features beyond the functional requirements, such as a raised platform (bema), chancel screens, or an apse or apsidal niche (see below). For our purposes, we shall consider any Jewish communal building with a demonstrable religious character to be a synagogue (see further below, section 1.3.3.1).

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<sup>52</sup> McKay 1998: 105, 110-12; Levine 2000a: 1.

<sup>53</sup> Sokoloff 2002: 263. See also Naveh 1978 and Miller 1999: 59.

<sup>54</sup> See *m. Berakhot* 7:3; *m. Terumot* 11:10; *m. Eruvin* 10:10; *m. Pesahim*. 4:4; *m. Sukkah*. 3:13; *m. Rosh Hashannah* 3:7; *m. Shevu'ot* 4:10. Fine 1997: 35-59 suggests that the internal layout of the synagogue was arranged in front of the Torah shrine, though this is not clear from the Mishnaic evidence.

The present work focuses on synagogues that have been identified in the archaeological record of southern Palestine in the era after the Bar-Kokhba revolt. Like their northern counterparts, these buildings are identified as Jewish communal halls based on context, size, and layout. In some cases, the Jewish context is known from literary sources, such as Eusebius or rabbinic texts. In other cases, the context is determined by ethnic markers rendered in mosaics, relief-work, or inscriptions.<sup>55</sup> The excavators of each synagogue determined the size and layout of the building on the basis of the edges of extant (or partially reconstructed) mosaic floors or the outline of the building's walls, or both.

### **1.2.2 Goals**

Chapters Two through Six examine the physical context, art and architecture, significant features, and associated material culture of these ten synagogues. The buildings are treated as meaningful sacred space, constructed by their communities as more than places of meeting and worship.<sup>56</sup> Several of these synagogues were prominent features of their villages and communities, and all were decorated, purpose-built, and communal.<sup>57</sup> These synagogues are characterized by an apparent attempt on behalf of the community to differentiate the structure, embellishing it by size, decoration, building materials, location, or internal furniture so as to mark its importance as a house of prayer

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<sup>55</sup> On ethnic markers, see Jones 1997: 119-21; Faust 2006: 15-17.

<sup>56</sup> On the interpretation of sacred architecture as meaningful symbols in a community, see Jones 2000. For a discussion of symbolic space in ancient synagogues and the Jerusalem Temple, see Branham 1995; 2006; Fine 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Miller (1998: 63) points to Talmudic literature suggesting that synagogues could be public or private. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that any of the synagogues discussed below were private. Most of the synagogues included inscriptions referencing and praising the community, members of the town, or all those who contributed to the building's upkeep (see below and Appendix B).

(בית תפילה; προσευχή) and house of meeting (בית כנסת; συναγωγή).<sup>58</sup> These edifices were endowed with purposeful symbolic meaning by those who built, employed, and in some cases destroyed them.<sup>59</sup> As religious structures, the synagogues provide us with important information regarding the religion and cultural identity of those associated with them.<sup>60</sup>

Two questions prompted this study. The first pertains to the history and chronology of these synagogues. While scholarly consensus has held that Jews migrated northward in the centuries following the failure of the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132-35), it has been suggested that some Jews remained in or returned to southern Palestine within a century or so. For example, David Amit argues that the priestly character of some of the synagogues in southern Palestine provides evidence for the presence of priestly families in the region in the Late Roman period.<sup>61</sup> The testimony of Eusebius in the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. supports the notion that Jewish priests were active in the region (see below on Eshtemoa, section 4.2). Boaz Zissu likewise argues that similarities in burial practices in the Hebron Hills and Lower Galilee suggest that some Jews migrated back to southern Palestine from

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<sup>58</sup> Levine (2000: 2-3) points out the balance between the worship and communal functions of the synagogue. See also Miller 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Here I follow Lindsay Jones' method in employing a "multivocal and superabundant" approach to interpretation, leaving room for the perspectives of all participants in the buildings' history rather than only the "original design intentions of the architects and ritual choreographers" (Jones 2000: xxviii, 31-37). Such an approach to synagogues has been advocated moderately by Levine 2003 and more radically by Fine 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Jones 2000: xxv, *passim*. On the use of semiotics to "describe how objects can signify or *index* particular features of cultural identity" and religious practice, see Stern 2008: 40.

<sup>61</sup> Amit 2003; 2004. Matthew Grey (2011: 84-151, 213-39) has suggested that some priestly circles never left southern Palestine following the Jewish revolts.

the north during the Late Roman period.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, one of the questions driving this study pertains to what these synagogues tell us about the presence of Jews in southern Palestine between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> c.

The construction date of these synagogues is of paramount importance particularly because of the problems surrounding the traditional synagogue typology discussed above. Although the typology is no longer considered absolute, most of the ten synagogues were excavated at a time when this typology was axiomatic. To address this shift in the scholarly consensus, the present study takes a critical approach to the reports and interpretations of the excavators.

Just as important as the synagogues' date of construction is the date and manner in which they went out of use. Scholars of ancient Judaism have tended to consider the start of the Early Islamic period in Palestine (mid-7<sup>th</sup> c.) as the temporal limit of the field. However, developments and discoveries in the past decades attest to vibrant communities of Jews across the Early Islamic Near East. For example, the publication of the synagogue excavations at Hammath-Tiberias has shown that an Early Islamic period synagogue was constructed over the better-known "Severos" synagogue of the 4<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, ongoing research into the Cairo Geniza archive and Targumic studies have shown that Jewish literature of the Roman and Byzantine periods continued to be redacted through the Early Islamic period and later.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, we should not consider only the construction of the synagogues of southern Palestine to be of significance but

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<sup>62</sup> Zissu 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Dothan 2000. On the dates of the later synagogues at Hammath-Tiberias, see Stacey 2002: 253-60.

<sup>64</sup> See Boustán 2007: 131.

also the possibility of their continued use and destruction or abandonment after the Byzantine period.

The importance of determining each building's history is not limited to the question of how and when these Jewish communities arrived and left. Establishing the socio-historical context is essential for the proper hermeneutical treatments of the archaeological remains.<sup>65</sup> As we shall see below, the dating of several of these structures should be questioned. Therefore, one of the goals of this study is to determine the most probable absolute chronologies based on the available evidence.

The dramatic changes in Judaism during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods occurred alongside the important religious and cultural developments across the Roman Empire and especially in Palestine. Interpretations of synagogue remains can vary depending on whether a building is dated to the Late Roman period, when the majority of the country still followed the traditional Greco-Roman religions, or the Byzantine period, when Christianity was legitimized, popularized, and ultimately "victorious." Thus, the dating of these buildings is an important factor for any study that considers what these synagogues tell us about the relationship between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors.

Although the question of Jewish-Gentile interaction is not fully addressed in the present study, it has been an ongoing area of inquiry among scholars of ancient Judaism for over a century. Diaspora studies have dealt with this question at length, but southern Palestine presents a unique case.<sup>66</sup> As discussed above, the literary and archaeological

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<sup>65</sup> In general, see Jones 2000: 26-29. Regarding Jewish material culture and synagogues specifically, see Levine 1998: 26, 182-83; 2003.

<sup>66</sup> For Diaspora studies, see *inter alia* Barclay 1996; Williams 1998; Rutgers 1998; 2000; Gruen 2002; Stern 2008.



evidence demonstrates that Jewish communities were much less numerous in southern Palestine than in the north. This is not to say that southern Palestine suffered from depopulation during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. To the contrary, the population of southern Palestine increased steadily from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> c., reaching a level unattained again until the 20<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>67</sup> As a result, these Jewish communities were a minority group among a predominantly non-Jewish population.<sup>68</sup>

That said, there are differences between the situation of the minority Jews of southern Palestine and that of their counterparts in the Diaspora. The Jews of the Mediterranean Diaspora spoke Greek or Latin. They passed by temples or churches in their home-city. They were conscious daily of their community's minority status in the Diaspora.<sup>69</sup> The Jews of southern Palestine, on the other hand, resided in their ancestral homeland, the "Land of Israel."<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the critical analyses below aim to provide dated evidence to establish the proper historical context for these synagogues and their communities.

The second question that has driven this study is one of methodology. Specifically, I have sought to consider what value regional typologies have in the study

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<sup>67</sup> See Broshi 1979. On the Christian population of Palestine in the Byzantine period, see Avi-Yonah 1976: 220-21.

<sup>68</sup> In general, see Irshai 2002: 187-89. Fine (2005: 3) identifies the method of examining Jewish "art," or rather material culture in general, as a minority or ethnic art in order to "explore the ways that Jews fully participated in, transformed, and at times rejected the art of the general environment."

<sup>69</sup> On this topic generally, see Rutgers 1998: 19-24.

<sup>70</sup> As described by Hagith Sivan (2008: 247-49), the borders of the "Land of Israel" were somewhat elastic in the rabbinic mind. The rabbis based these borders mostly on biblical geography integrated into the demographic realities of their day. The halakhic requirements, specifically regarding sabbatical and tithing observances, were adjusted to accommodate Jewish communities in particularly "difficult" areas, that is, areas where Jews were a minority, whether in mixed urban settings (such as along the coast) or religiously homogenous villages among other non-Jewish villages (such as the southern Hebron Hills). In addition to Sivan 2008, see Primus 1986 and Sussman 1981.

of ancient synagogues and to what extent regional variations are represented among the ten southern examples. In their regional studies, Foerster, Ma'oz, and Amit each identified characteristics of the art, architecture, or religion that unified the synagogues in some way. In the case of Galilean-type synagogues, the plans and decoration are fairly standard. In the case of Golan synagogues, Ma'oz pointed out the tendency to employ artistic motifs that link their styles to the northern Levant and Coptic Egypt. In the case of the synagogues of the southern Hebron Hills, Amit highlighted the unusual use of eastern entrances and evidence of priestly presence. Following these works, I have considered the unifying features among the synagogues of southern Palestine that might distinguish them as a group from the synagogues of northern Palestine and the Diaspora. However, as discussed in Chapter Seven, the lack of such distinct unifying characteristics highlights the methodological difficulty in approaching synagogues from a regional perspective and defining synagogues by regional types.

### **1.3 Methodology and Approach**

#### **1.3.1 The Synagogue Analyses**

Chapters Two through Six present critical analyses of the ten synagogues that are the subject of this study. The synagogues are divided by region: the Lower Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea Region, the Southern Hebron Hills, the Judean Shephelah (or the southern foothills), and the Southern Coastal Plain. Although these groupings are primarily for the sake of clarity and organization, the sub-regional divisions will assist in the consideration of shared characteristics among the synagogues.

Each synagogue has been assigned a separate section within Chapters Two through Six. The remains of each synagogue are analyzed and discussed on their own.

The sections are divided into sub-sections, addressing the location and identification of the synagogue, its research history, a detailed description of the remains and finds, the associated settlement (when evidenced), and the structure's phases and dates. Each section ends with concluding remarks.

All available and published information relevant to the excavations discussed below has been consulted. In most cases, the research was aided by synagogue- and site-catalogs that have become increasingly standard over the years, including: Sylvester Saller's *Second Revised Catalogue of Ancient Synagogues of the Holy Land* (1972), Frowald Hüttenmeister and Gottfried Reeg's *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel* (1977), Marilyn Joyce Segal Chiat's *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture* (1982), Zvi Ilan's *Ancient Synagogues in the Land of Israel* (1991), Claudine Dauphin's *La Palestine byzantine: Peuplement et Populations* (1998), and David Milson's *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine* (2007). For synagogues that include mosaics, I have consulted Ruth and Asher Ovadiah's *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel* (1987), which is a revision of Michael Avi-Yonah's series of articles published in the 1932 issues of the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine*.<sup>71</sup>

Milson's work is the most complete and recent of these catalogs, and it is the most comprehensive in terms of bibliography, architectural plans, and metrics. Because his study is so broad—addressing all synagogues evidenced archaeologically in Palestine—Milson was not able to consider each building in as much depth as presented below. Nevertheless, Milson's corpus and those of Hüttenmeister and Reeg and Chiat provide

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<sup>71</sup> For full bibliographic details of all these resources, see the bibliography below.

critical compilations of ancient synagogues in Palestine. Ilan's corpus is geared toward a more popular audience. Although his treatments of each synagogue include much detail and occasionally photographs and drawings that are not published elsewhere, Ilan generally does not provide critical examinations of the synagogues, particularly in terms of their identifications. As a result, many of the sites discussed in Ilan's work do not appear elsewhere. The other treatments limit their catalogs to sites where a building was uncovered and identified as a Jewish religious structure. References to the relevant entries and page numbers in these studies have been noted at the beginning of each section below.

Grid references and coordinates for each synagogue have been included as well. All map grid references are based on the New Israel Grid (NIG) and listed by latitude and longitude.<sup>72</sup> The standard global coordinates, also listed by latitude and longitude, are accurate to within one second and were determined using *Google Earth*.<sup>73</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all distances were determined using the 1:50,000 maps published by Israel's Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel or *Google Earth*.

### **1.3.2 Literary Sources as Supplementary Evidence**

Although the following study focuses on archaeological remains, literary sources have been consulted when relevant.<sup>74</sup> The literary evidence is included primarily as it pertains to the characterization of each site. In this respect, the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius—an early 4<sup>th</sup> c. gazetteer of biblical place-names in Palestine—provides brief

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<sup>72</sup> See Stern 1993-2008: vol. 5.

<sup>73</sup> *Google Earth* Version 4.3.7284.3916 (2008-2011).

<sup>74</sup> For criticisms of the use of the literary sources by historians of religion and in the interpretation of art and architecture, see Jones 2000: 122 and Stern 2008: 4.

descriptions for nine of the ten synagogue sites discussed below.<sup>75</sup> There are three significant problems with Eusebius' testimonies. First, his information for each place is very superficial and typically of little use. Second, his knowledge of Jewish villages in southern Palestine seems fairly limited (see below). Third, our dating of the synagogues indicates that the buildings postdate Eusebius' lifetime. Nevertheless, he provides important testimony concerning the existence of these Jewish villages in the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. His identification of these places as "Jewish"—as well as thirteen others in southern Palestine as "Christian"—suggests a religious and ethnic homogeneity to the villages apparent also in the archaeological remains.

Jewish literary sources—including the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds and other tannaitic and amoraic *midrashim*—also have been consulted when relevant. The appendices to Joshua Schwartz's study list the various rabbinic sages with connections to southern Palestine.<sup>76</sup> As Schwartz points out, these literary sources present several problems.<sup>77</sup> First, rabbinic traditions and comments concerning southern Palestine tend to be incidental and occur within the framework of halakhic discourse. They therefore are of questionable historicity. In addition, the material presented in both Talmuds reflects a general lack of precise knowledge regarding the geography of southern Palestine.<sup>78</sup> When such knowledge is accurate, the information gleaned from the rabbinic

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<sup>75</sup> In general, see the introductions in Freeman-Grenville 2003 and Notley and Safrai 2005. On the relevance of Eusebius for southern Palestine, see Schwartz 1986: 18-19.

<sup>76</sup> See Schwartz 1986: 249-77.

<sup>77</sup> Schwartz 1986: 15-16. On the methodological problems of rabbinic literature for the interpretation of synagogue art, see Levine 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Sacha Stern has noted that the views expressed in rabbinic literature are focused inward, that is, not just on the immediate context of composition, but on the rabbis themselves in particular (Stern 1994: 200).

sources—as with Eusebius—is typically of little value. Schwartz argues that the traditions of the rabbinic sages from southern Palestine were deemphasized by the compilers and redactors of the Palestinian Talmud partly because they represented a minority of the sages. This tension, according to Schwartz, may account for the relative dearth of significant information in the rabbinic sources on the Jewish communities of southern Palestine.<sup>79</sup>

Other sources—such as Flavius Josephus, biblical texts, Late Roman and Byzantine documents, and Early Islamic records—have been consulted occasionally. However, as the descriptions below demonstrate, the use of these sources in deciphering the material history of these ten synagogues tends to be of little value.

### **1.3.3 Limitations of Archaeological Evidence in Synagogue Studies**

Schwartz remarks that the archaeological remains associated with Jews in southern Palestine “cannot always complete the gaps in our knowledge, and this should not be expected of them.”<sup>80</sup> Because this study focuses on material remains, it is important to recognize the limitations of the archaeological evidence to which Schwartz refers.

#### **1.3.3.1 The Problem of Synagogue Identification**

Because synagogues suffer from a lack of standardization in architectural form, archaeologists must rely on other factors for identification.<sup>81</sup> As noted above, the context

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Therefore we should not expect them to be a significant source of information regarding the reality of life in southern Palestine.

<sup>79</sup> Schwartz 1986: 15, 233-39.

<sup>80</sup> Schwartz 1986: 21 (my translation).

<sup>81</sup> On the lack of uniformity in synagogues, see Miller 1998 and Spigel 2008: 25-26.

and size of the building are crucial factors. For late ancient synagogues especially, Jewish ethnic markers in the form of art and epigraphy are also valuable. The Hebreo-Aramaic block script was used only by Jews in late antiquity.<sup>82</sup> Inscriptions in Greek can be identified as Jewish only by their content and subject.<sup>83</sup> Synagogue art often includes specifically Jewish images, such as the menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum), the shofar (a curved ram's horn), the lulav and etrog (a bundle of branches and an ovoid citron), or the Torah shrine.<sup>84</sup>

Other features and characteristics sometimes make it possible to identify ancient synagogues. The orientation of the building, with lateral walls pointing toward Jerusalem, is typically considered a means of differentiating synagogues from churches of the Byzantine period, although this is not universal.<sup>85</sup> Some synagogues, such as the Sepphoris synagogue, were inserted into preexisting streets and buildings.<sup>86</sup> Other synagogues, such as at Susiya and Eshtemoa, seem to have had deviant orientations for deliberate, ideological purposes (see below, sections 4.1 and 4.2).

The picture is further complicated by those features of synagogues that were shared by contemporary churches. The projecting apse or apsidal niche, for example, appears in both, though not universally.<sup>87</sup> Bemas or chancel areas, often with stone

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<sup>82</sup> See Naveh 1978.

<sup>83</sup> In general see Roth-Gerson 1987. Regarding Gaza-Maiumas, see below, section 6.2.

<sup>84</sup> See Hachlili 1988: 234-84. For examples, see below, figs. 4, 27, 38, 39, 82, etc.

<sup>85</sup> See Levine 2000a: 302-06.

<sup>86</sup> Levine 2000: 304. On Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005: 9-11.

<sup>87</sup> A "projecting apse" protrudes from the overall building plan, while an "apsidal niche" is set into the existing wall or constructed separately against the wall and may or may not be freestanding.

screens, are also shared by churches and synagogues during the Byzantine period. For this reason, these features must be considered along with other characteristics—such as building orientation—to determine the identification.

Synagogues often include some sort of water installation. In ancient churches, water installations take the form of a small, above-ground pool in a *baptisterium* adjacent to, connected to, or inside the main hall.<sup>88</sup> In synagogues, water installations are found in a various forms. This variety is attested among the ten synagogues of southern Palestine. For example, the synagogue at En-Gedi includes an above-ground, stone-constructed, plastered installation in the narthex of the building's final phase.<sup>89</sup> Adjacent to the synagogue at Ma'on-Nirim is a *miqveh*, that is, a mostly in-ground, plastered pool with steps, designed for bodily immersion.<sup>90</sup> At Susiya and Eshtemoa, there are large subterranean cisterns used for the collection of massive amounts of water, built without steps and therefore not used for immersion.<sup>91</sup> In his 1990 dissertation, Ronny Reich concluded that late antique synagogues rarely included *miqva'ot*.<sup>92</sup> More recently, David Amit and Yonatan Adler have pointed out the large number of *miqva'ot* uncovered across the country dating to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, few of these *miqva'ot* are directly associated with synagogues, and so Reich's determination that

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<sup>88</sup> Tsafir 1993b: 1, 5; Wilkinson 1993: 17-18.

<sup>89</sup> See below, section 3.1.

<sup>90</sup> See below, section 6.2.

<sup>91</sup> See below, sections 4.1 and 4.2.

<sup>92</sup> Reich 1990: 142-44; 1995: 292-95.

<sup>93</sup> Amit and Adler 2010: 126-39.



one should not expect to find a *miqveh* among the remains of a synagogue is still valid. Therefore, while we should not expect synagogues to include a *miqveh* or water installation, their occasional appearance can assist in the building's identification.

Few synagogues predating the Late Roman and Byzantine period have been identified. Earlier synagogues present a greater challenge in identification because (a) there was even less standardization in building form before the 4<sup>th</sup> c., (b) the remains of early synagogues typically are disturbed by later use of the site, and (c) there is little evidence of identifiably Jewish art between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>94</sup> This last point is made clear by the synagogues from the 1<sup>st</sup>-c. sites of Masada and Gamla, which were identified primarily on the basis of context, that is, congregational buildings in Jewish settlements.<sup>95</sup> The few examples from the Second Temple period lack the sorts of elaborate decoration and symbolic art found in synagogues of late antiquity.

The 1<sup>st</sup>-c. destruction and abandonment of Masada and Gamla allowed the synagogue remains to be preserved in the archaeological record, thus enabling their identification. At several of the sites discussed below, earlier synagogues have been identified by the excavators on the basis of the later and better-attested phases. The earlier phases of these buildings were communal halls, though not as large or elaborately decorated as the later phases. However, it should not always be assumed that an earlier phase was used as a synagogue. In the case of the Dura-Europos synagogue, for

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<sup>94</sup> The recent discovery of a building at Magdala (Migdal) identified as a synagogue and dated to the late Second Temple period might call into question this last point. No publications of this synagogue have appeared beyond press releases. The IAA press release appeared on their website (<http://www.antiquities.org.il>). Cf. Flesher 2011: n. 2.

<sup>95</sup> For overviews see Levine 2000a: 42-43, 51-52, 58-60. The identification of the synagogue at Gamla was aided in part by the presence of a *miqveh* just outside the main entrance, and the identification of the synagogue at Masada was aided in part by the discovery of biblical scroll fragments in the building.

example, the building had been adapted from a private house.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, at Sardis, the synagogue had been adapted from a unit of the city's Gymnasium Complex.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, regarding the synagogues discussed below, we shall consider carefully the context and criteria for identifying the use of earlier phases of the buildings.

### **1.3.3.2 The Difficulty of Dating Ancient Synagogues**

The difficulties inherent in stratigraphic dating have made the chronological analyses presented here a complicated task. Unlike churches of the Byzantine period, late ancient synagogues rarely bear dated dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>98</sup> Synagogues are most frequently dated on the basis of ceramic typology and coins. Numismatic evidence has the advantage of carrying its own date. However, coins could remain in circulation for centuries before being deposited.<sup>99</sup> Pottery does not carry its own date but can be assigned a date range on the basis of a typology of stylistic characteristics (primarily form, ware, and surface treatment).<sup>100</sup> Both coins and pottery rely on meticulous excavation techniques and precise record keeping. Although all archaeologists strive for such proper methodologies, various factors can limit our ability to associate the datable finds with the appropriate building event. These factors differ from site to site and shall be addressed in the discussion of phases and datings of each synagogue below.

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<sup>96</sup> Kraeling 1956: 26-27.

<sup>97</sup> Hanfmann 1963; Seager and Kraabel 1983.

<sup>98</sup> Notable exceptions include the Beth Alpha inscription (Naveh 1978: no. 43), the inscription from the Nabratein synagogue (Naveh 1978: no. 13), and Gaza-Maiumas (below, section 6.1). Also, see below, section 2.2.4.

<sup>99</sup> Bijovsky 2000; 2011: 84-85.

<sup>100</sup> Magness 1993: 14.

### 1.3.3.3 The Availability of Materials

None of the ten synagogue excavations analyzed here has been published in full. The projects carried out by Zvi Ilan and David Amit at H. 'Anim and Ma'on (in Judea) have been reported most extensively within the context of Amit's 2003 doctoral dissertation. In addition, the results of Ze'ev Yeivin's work in the Eshtemoa synagogue was published in *'Atiqot*.<sup>101</sup> Only preliminary reports have been published on the other seven synagogues. Since the excavations at Na'aran and Jericho were carried out before 1948, their records are stored at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), and additional materials from the Na'aran excavations are stored at the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem. The records and finds of the remaining sites are scattered among the participating Israeli institutions and the IAA storehouses. As a result, the finds from the sites were for the most part not available to me. The information presented below is based on the information gleaned from published reports, site visits, and, in a few cases, unpublished photographs from the excavations.

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<sup>101</sup> Yeivin 2004.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LOWER JORDAN VALLEY

#### 2.0.1 Introduction

The two synagogue sites of the Lower Jordan Valley—Na‘aran and Jericho—represent the northern limit of the present study. These are the only sites analyzed here that are north of Jerusalem. As with all the sites included in this examination, the synagogues at Na‘aran and Jericho are fairly isolated in their sub-region.

The inclusion of the Lower Jordan Valley synagogues and exclusion of the synagogues in the Middle Jordan Valley—such as those at Beth Alpha, Beth-Shean, and Rehob—is arbitrary. The latter sites, along with the synagogue at Gerasa, could rightly have been included in the present inquiry, since they are also beyond the demographic concentrations of Jews in late antique Palestine. However, the decision was made at an early stage of the research to carry out a more concentrated and focused study of fewer sites. As a result, the present chapter was limited to the “Lower Jordan Valley” as opposed to the entirety of the valley south of Galilee.

#### 2.1 Na‘aran<sup>1</sup>

##### 2.1.1 Location and Identification

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the site-specific references below, see the following catalog entries: Saller 1972: 15-17, no. 4; Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 320-34; Chiat 1982: 256-60; Ilan 1991: 249-50; Dauphin 1998: 9/79; Milson 2007: 440-41.

The site of Na‘aran is located on the edge of the Jordan Valley (NIG 240500/644500; 31°53’37”N, 35°25’29”E), just outside the modern village of Nu‘eima within the borders of the Palestinian National Authority (see map, fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> It is 5.3 km from the center of modern Jericho, 3.25 km from the synagogue northeast of Tell es-Sultan (see below, section 2.2), and 3.55 km from the Palace of Hisham at Kh. el-Mafjar. The synagogue is situated near the two springs of Nu‘eima and Duk.<sup>3</sup> Eusebius locates Na‘aran five Roman miles (7.6 km) from Jericho in his day,<sup>4</sup> which, however, would place it at a somewhat greater distance than the synagogue. Since the synagogue’s location is the most likely candidate for Eusebius’ Na‘aran, we will assume that the church father made an error and that the present site of Na‘aran was the same place known to Eusebius.<sup>5</sup>

The designation of Na‘aran derives from its biblical identification with נַעֲרָן in 1 Chr. 7:28, apparently the same place as נַעֲרָתָה (“Na‘arah” with a directional-ה suffix) in Jos. 16:7.<sup>6</sup> Eusebius apparently had the latter designation in mind when he referred to the

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of initial discovery, the site was referred to as ‘Ein Duk (alternatively transliterated ‘Ain Douq, ‘Ain Duyuk, ‘En Duq), a village that shares its name with the spring. The name is presumably derived from the nearby Hasmonean fortress on Jebel Qarantal, known as Dok in 1 Macc. 16:15 and Dagon in Jos., *War* 1.56, *Ant.* 13.230. In the archives at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, as well as at the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem, the site is listed under ‘Ain Douq.

<sup>3</sup> Magen 1983: 60; Hizmi 2002: 113-15, following Ben-Yosef 1979. The spring of Nu‘eima was estimated in the 1970s to produce about 245 mm of water per hour; the spring of Duk was estimated at 590 mm of water per hour.

<sup>4</sup> *Onom.* 136.24.

<sup>5</sup> Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 20-22; Notley and Safrai 2005: 130, n. 732.

<sup>6</sup> The name נַעֲרָן is also mentioned in *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:17. On the grammatical issues of נַעֲרָתָה, see Notley and Safrai 2005: 130, 187, no. 732.

biblical village as Νααραθα and identified it with the Late Roman Jewish village of Noοραθ.<sup>7</sup> The identification of this synagogue with Eusebius' Noοραθ was first proposed by C. Clermont-Ganneau.<sup>8</sup> Although the Byzantine-period inhabitants of the site likely used the Aramaic equivalent, No'oraṭ, as Eusebius' attestation suggests, modern scholarship has come to refer to the site by the biblical name of Na'aran.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.2 Research History

The synagogue was discovered in September 1918, when a Turkish shell detonated nearby and exposed part of the mosaic floor.<sup>10</sup> At that time, the Second Division of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzac) Light Horse Brigade was stationed nearby at 'Ein Duk.<sup>11</sup> The site was first identified by Reverend William Maitland Woods, a senior chaplain in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I

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<sup>7</sup> *Onom.* 136.24. Josephus is probably referring to the same place in *Ant.* 17.340, where he mentions Νεαρὰν as a well-irrigated village whose waters were partially diverted by the ethnarch Archelaus when he reconstructed the royal palaces at Jericho and built the village of Archelais. No finds, however, of the Early Roman period have been reported from the site (see below).

<sup>8</sup> Clermont-Ganneau 1919, though he had already identified other remains in the vicinity as Na'aran; see Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 20.

<sup>9</sup> It is possible that Eusebius mistook the directional suffix as part of the name. It is equally likely that this was the commonly used name in the Byzantine period. As such, the biblical site of Na'arah became known as Na'araṭa, and was re-vocalized as No'oraṭ by Eusebius' day. There exist modern parallels for this inclusion of the directional suffix: For example, the kibbutz of Yotvata, north of Eilat, derives its name from the biblical Yaṭḃaṭah (Deut. 10:7), i.e., "to Yaṭḃah." The modern name includes the directional suffix, although common pronunciation typically places the accent on the last syllable (as opposed to the penultimate) as though the suffix were part of the name.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent 1919: 532-35. *Ibid.*, Fig. 1 shows the extent of the area exposed by the Turkish shell and the subsequent preliminary investigation conducted in 1918. Records of this excavation are stored at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem (IAA Archives: Mandate Record Files: file No. 50, Jerusalem General). The archive includes correspondence between Vincent and J. Garstang, the Director of Antiquities for the Mandate Government of Palestine, as well as early descriptions of the site. Vincent's original glass slides are stored at the École biblique et archéologique française.

<sup>11</sup> Ariotti 2004: 11.

and an “amateur archaeologist.”<sup>12</sup> It is unclear how much of the mosaic was exposed by the exploding shell and how much was cleared by Maitland Woods and the Australian soldiers. The longest inscription in the third panel of the nave (see below) was exposed and photographed. The photographs were sent shortly thereafter to Charles Clermont-Ganneau, who, despite Maitland Woods’ identification of the building as a church, correctly identified the building as a synagogue.<sup>13</sup> Although the inscription was left in situ, the Australian soldiers and Maitland Woods removed at least two separate sections of the mosaic (see below).<sup>14</sup>

In 1919, the site was surveyed by R. Engelbach and E. J. H. MacKay of the British military administration, and in June of the same year by Louis Hugues Vincent and M. J. Lagrange on behalf of the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem.<sup>15</sup> Excavations at the site were led by Vincent in April 1921. A few short preliminary notes were published on the survey and the exposed inscription, although the

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<sup>12</sup> Ariotti 2004: 10.

<sup>13</sup> Clermont-Ganneau 1919a; 1919b: 91; see also Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 3. In a second letter sent to Clermont-Ganneau, A. M. Furber suggested that the destruction to the mosaics had been done in antiquity (see below). On Rev. Maitland Woods’s misidentification of the building, see Maitland Woods 1919.

<sup>14</sup> Sections of this mosaic, along with substantial mosaics from the Shellal church, were removed by Maitland Woods and his team of Anzac troops. The mosaics were packed and shipped to Cairo, after which time they became the subject of debate among the Australians, New Zealanders, and British regarding the location of the finds’ final deposition with all three nations claiming the mosaics as their own. None suggested that they remain in the country of origin. The ruling of the War Trophies Committee allowed the finds to be shipped to Australia later that year. One piece was donated to the Church of St. James in Sydney (see Ariotti 2004); others went to St. John’s Cathedral in Brisbane. The bulk of the mosaics, consisting primarily of the Shellal materials, ended up at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. (I thank Ms. Christine Cahill of St. John’s Cathedral for providing me with unpublished documentation of this.) In any case, it seems that, in the words of Robert Merrillees, “the *real* battle in Palestine during World War I was between the Australians and the British” over the spoils of war.

<sup>15</sup> Vincent 1919: 532-33.

fullest account of Vincent's work was published posthumously in a 1961 article, as edited by Pierre Benoit.<sup>16</sup>

No immediate preservation or conservation work was done following Vincent's excavation. In 1969, the synagogue was "rediscovered" by Israeli Defense Force soldiers, and subsequently surveyed by Pesach Bar-Adon on behalf of the Staff Officer of Archaeology for the military administration of the West Bank.<sup>17</sup> At this time previously unexposed portions of the mosaic pavement were revealed, including two inscriptions, though the manner of this exposure is unclear.<sup>18</sup> In 1970, Bar-Adon began preservation work to prevent the site from silting up and make it accessible to visitors.<sup>19</sup> More recently, minimal conservation work and documentation has been carried out by the Palestinian Mosaic Workshop with the support of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum.<sup>20</sup>

### **2.1.3 Description of the Synagogue**

The synagogue complex (fig. 2) is comprised of several rooms and courtyards, including a rectangular hall with a north-south orientation, an L-shaped narthex along the northern side, a small paved courtyard (or perhaps atrium), a larger outer courtyard, and an auxiliary room attached to the side of the southwest side of the hall.<sup>21</sup> Although the remains of the complex preserve the outline of the walls fairly well, the southern section

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<sup>16</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961. For preliminary notes, see Vincent 1919; Vincent and Carriere 1921.

<sup>17</sup> Bar-Adon 1970. See also Magen 1983: 222.

<sup>18</sup> Bar-Adon 1970: 8 mentions the discovery of these inscriptions briefly. No subsequent publication has dealt with them.

<sup>19</sup> Vidal 1970.

<sup>20</sup> Hamdan and Benelli, personal communication February 2009.

<sup>21</sup> See Chiat 1982: 256-60 for a general overview in relation to other synagogues.



has been eroded away by a small stream.<sup>22</sup> The southern extent can be approximated by a roughly 2 m stretch of the base of the main hall's southern wall.<sup>23</sup> The walls of the main hall were preserved to an average height of 80-90 cm above the mosaic pavement, and were constructed of unworked fieldstones and mortar.<sup>24</sup> The complex apparently was entered from the north through a single entrance leading to the larger, outer courtyard. Congregants walked through the smaller courtyard/atrium to enter the narthex through another single doorway. The main hall was accessed from the narthex via a triportal entryway on the northern side. The location of the synagogue's entrances on the wall opposite the Jerusalem-oriented wall is characteristic of the so-called Byzantine-type synagogues of the traditional synagogue typology, as opposed to the Jerusalem-oriented triportal facades of the Galilean-type synagogues (see above).<sup>25</sup>

The layout of the outer wall of the complex is irregular, suggesting that the architects may have been following existing structures or streets. From the northeast corner, the north wall of the complex runs about 30 m, slanting northward.<sup>26</sup> Although the southern wall of the complex does not survive, a small section allowed Vincent to include it as a proposed-line in his plan, assuming it continued directly east-west (see fig. 3). According to Vincent's reconstruction, the slightly crooked western wall of the complex ran about 38.5 m N-S. The southern outer wall, according to his reconstruction,

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<sup>22</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 164.

<sup>23</sup> This assumes that the southern wall of the main hall was also the outer wall of the entire complex.

<sup>24</sup> Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Avi-Yonah 1973, 1978, and 1993b.

<sup>26</sup> All measurements and dimensions follow those reported by Vincent and Benoit 1961, unless otherwise noted. The dimensions given by Sukenik 1934, Magen 1983, and Avi-Yonah 1993 differ only slightly.

was about 26.3 m long, while the east wall, comprised partly of the eastern walls of the main hall and narthex, extended a total of 31.8 m.

The outer courtyard was paved with small stones or cobbles in the northern section. In the northwest corner there was a sort of narrow porch or loggia, apparently laid out as a distyle in antis, and measuring 2.65 m by roughly 5.0 m.<sup>27</sup> The purpose of this structure is unclear. The smaller courtyard within the outer courtyard, to the north of the narthex, apparently was enclosed by walls on at least three sides (south, east, and west). Since no evidence of a northern wall of this smaller courtyard was found, Vincent surmised that there was some sort of less permanent partition here.<sup>28</sup> A square indentation in the center of this courtyard's floor suggested to Vincent that this was used as a pool, a supposition that led him to identify the small courtyard as an atrium.<sup>29</sup> The inclusion of an atrium combined with a narthex (see below) is unusual in synagogue architecture, although this layout appeared among the churches of Palestine from the mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. onward.<sup>30</sup>

From the smaller courtyard/atrium, a single, central doorway leads into the L-shaped narthex, which stretches the length of the main hall's southern façade, about 17.4

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<sup>27</sup> Since the southern portion was not preserved, the north-south length is unclear, though it can be conjectured.

<sup>28</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. V.

<sup>29</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 164. The excavator does not suggest how the pool would have been fed.

<sup>30</sup> Ovadiah 1970: 200. Prior to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> c., churches in Palestine that included an atrium did not typically have a narthex as well. The church at Kh. Umm el-'Amed, 10 km southwest of Hebron, includes a more standard atrium-and-narthex basilica (see *ibid.* 126-27, Pl. 53), while the church of St. George at Shivta in the northern Negev has an atrium with a less regular narthex (see *ibid.* 166, Pl. 67). The synagogue at Beth Alpha, often considered the archetypical "Byzantine" synagogue, is, ironically, an exception. See the table in Hachlili 1988: 148-49; while useful, this table does not fully emphasize the point since it characterizes this architectural feature as a "courtyard" rather than atrium.

m (interior length). The shorter, north-south arm of the narthex is about 10.2 m (interior length at its longest stretch). The L-shape does not conform to any standard layout for a narthex. Moreover, the shorter arm appears to end at the outer wall of the complex, and is therefore a peculiar sort of dead-end corridor. The width of the narthex varies between 3.58 and 3.65 m.

The narthex is paved in a bichrome mosaic of black and white tesserae. A large stylized menorah is depicted in front of the doorway, viewed right-side-up from the north (fig. 4) and measuring about 2.4 m N-S.<sup>31</sup> The depiction consists of a central staff decorated in a guilloche pattern, and four semi-circular bands of black tesserae (like an inverted rainbow) forming the branches.<sup>32</sup> A straight line of single tesserae runs across the top of the branches, above which are eleven small ovals capped with smaller triangles (pointed down), presumably meant to depict lamps or flames.<sup>33</sup> The flames are peculiar in that their number is not standard for menorahs—seven is by far the most common<sup>34</sup>—and because they are unevenly spaced. The base, formed by three interlocking half-circles stacked as a pyramid, is also unusual. Avi-Yonah noted that this three-hills motif

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<sup>31</sup> Sukenik 1934: 28. The menorah is catalogued as Hachlili 2001: no. IS3.17. Although the menorah and inscriptions in the narthex were left in situ following the excavations in 1921, they have since been removed, leaving only an outline—similar to the instances of iconoclasm in the nave. It is unclear when this was done, and by whom. Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 6 suggest the mosaic is currently in the storerooms of the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, under the curation of the IAA, but according to Alegre Savariego, the IAA has no record of this piece.

<sup>32</sup> The guilloche pattern, while typically used to decorate borders of mosaic panels (see below), also appears in mosaic representations of crosses in Byzantine churches. See, for example, the nave mosaic of the church at Shavei Zion, north of Akko (Prausnitz et al. 1967: 48, pl. XXXVIIIb; Britt 2003: 151, fig. 27), as well as the earliest sanctuary at Mount Nebo (Piccirillo 1993: 144, fig. 175).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Avi-Yonah 1993: 1075 who miscounts twelve ovals. Hachlili 2001: 162 identifies these as glass lamps.

<sup>34</sup> Hachlili 2001: 200. Hachlili's corpus does not indicate the existence of any other eleven-branched menorahs.

is paralleled in depictions of crosses in contemporary churches, where they presumably symbolized the rock of Golgotha.<sup>35</sup> In any case, this is a common pattern in Byzantine art and apparently appears in a fragmentary relief from the ‘Anim synagogue (see below, section 4.4.3); it is otherwise unattested in Jewish contexts (to my knowledge).<sup>36</sup> Surrounding the menorah are various lozenges. Similar, though more regular, geometric designs appear in the mosaic floor of the crypt at Kh. Bureikut (Ḥ. Berakhot), southeast of Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup> As a whole, the style of the image is unusual in context of the Na‘aran synagogue and late ancient Jewish art in Palestine in general.<sup>38</sup>

Surrounding the branches of the menorah are two Aramaic inscriptions (fig. 4). Naveh’s reading of these inscriptions is as follows:<sup>39</sup>

Remembered for good, <sup>40</sup> Phinehas the priest, son of Yusta, who gave	דכיר לטב פינחס כהנה בר יוסטה דיהב	1
the funds for the mosaic	פסיפסה טימי	2

<sup>35</sup> Avi-Yonah 1993: 1075. For example, see the chancel screen from the sanctuary of the Church of St. Catherine at Sinai in Tsafirir 1993c: 330. In the mosaic of the Samaritan synagogue at Shaablim (northwest of Jerusalem), a small mound is depicted between two menorahs. This mound is stylistically different from the “three hills” motif discussed here. The excavators suggested that the mound in the Samaritan synagogue mosaic was meant to represent Mt. Gerizim. See Sukenik 1949a: 29. This motif does not seem to be directly related to the three hills motif.

<sup>36</sup> No other example appears in Hachlili 2001. The pattern appears as the backdrop field in Byzantine mosaics in churches and synagogues around Palestine. In the nave mosaic from Shavei Zion, for example, this pattern serves as the backdrop to a cross formed by the same guilloche pattern as in the menorah at Na‘aran; see Prausnitz et al. 1967: 48.

<sup>37</sup> See Tsafirir and Hirschfeld 1993: 217.

<sup>38</sup> The singularity of this menorah receives no comment in Hachlili’s 2001 corpus of menorahs.

<sup>39</sup> Naveh 1978: nos. 58-59. See also Avi-Yonah 1932: 155; Brooten 1982: no. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Avi Yonah 1932: 155 translates this phrase as “Honoured be the memory of.” Following Naveh 1978 and Sokoloff 2002: 149, I adopt a more literal translation here. On this formula in general, see Naveh 1978: 7-8.

from his own	assets (?).	ונרושת>ה	מן דידה	3
Remembered	Rebecca,	רבקה	דכירה	1
for good,	wife	אתתה	לטב	2
	of Phinehas.	<ד>פינחס		3

The inscriptions appear in square Aramaic script of black tesserae. The identification of a priest here is not unusual, nor is his role as a benefactor of the synagogue.<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that Phinehas is the son of a certain Yusta, a name of Latin derivation (Iustus or Iustinus).<sup>42</sup> The terms **טימי** and **פסיפסה** are obviously Greek loanwords (**τιμη** and **ψηφος**); their usage is well-attested in Jewish literature of late antiquity.<sup>43</sup> More significant is the use of the phrase **מן דידה**, which Naveh identified as a translation of the Greek formula **ἔκ τῶν ἰδῶν**, a phrase which appears in Greek Jewish inscriptions from Caesarea and Beth-Shean.<sup>44</sup> The inclusion of Phinehas' wife presumably is evidence of the involvement of women in the synagogue in some capacity.<sup>45</sup>

Three entrances lead from the narthex into the main hall, the central of which had a molded lintel.<sup>46</sup> The widths of the entrances are 1.40, 2.20, and 1.42 m (from east to west respectively). There is an additional doorway into the auxiliary room about halfway

<sup>41</sup> On dedicatory inscriptions in synagogues, including their formulae, see Naveh 1978: 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Naveh 1978: 94.

<sup>43</sup> Naveh 1978: 94. who points out their use in the Palestinian Talmud and Targum Onqelos.

<sup>44</sup> Naveh 1978: 94. See also Lifshitz 1967: nos. 66, 77b.

<sup>45</sup> See Broton 1982.

<sup>46</sup> This is mentioned by Vincent and Benoit 1961, although no photograph or drawing has been published.

down the west wall, which measures about 1.4 m. The layout of the main hall is a standard basilica, with two rows of six rectangular pillars dividing it into a central nave and two aisles.<sup>47</sup> The central portal is slightly off-center of the nave. The interior dimensions of the main hall are 21.94 m N-S by 14.94 m E-W, with the aisles and nave spaced at 3.2, 6.7, and 3.8 m (from east to west respectively). The spaces between the pillars are irregular, ranging between 2.34 and 3.05 m. Likewise, the rectangular pillars themselves are irregular, although most are about 50 cm<sup>2</sup> in horizontal cross section, or slightly larger.

Given these dimensions, the estimated interior floor-space of the main hall was 320 m<sup>2</sup>. This figure, however, does not include floor-space in the form of second-story galleries, which likely existed.<sup>48</sup> Based on the discovery of burnt timbers in the main hall, Vincent suggested that wooden planks were laid over the aisles to form galleries.<sup>49</sup> Because the number and fall-pattern of the timbers were not recorded, there is no way to evaluate this interpretation. The excavators do not report any additional evidence that would suggest the presence of an upper level, such as smaller columns or capitals for an upper colonnade—as have been found in the synagogues of Galilee and the Golan—or

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<sup>47</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 164. The standard basilica consists of a rectangular hall with two rows of columns or pillars dividing the area into two aisles and a wider central nave. For definitions and usage in Byzantine architecture, see Krautheimer 1965. While all six of the pillars in the western row were found, only four of the pillars on the eastern row remain.

<sup>48</sup> Evidence for stairs leading to a second story was not identified by the excavators, however, external wooden stairs could have existed without a stone base that would have survived in the archaeological record. For example of external stairs, see below, sections 3.1.3 and 4.1.3. On synagogue galleries in general, see Hachlili 1988: 194-96; Levine 2005: 341-42. On the use for galleries as the women's section, see Brooten 1982: 103-38. See also Spigel 2008: 120-123, who provides a brief overview and critical assessment of the gallery (or "balcony") and its use. On the use of galleries in Byzantine architecture in Palestine, see Krautheimer 1965: 118.

<sup>49</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 165.

stairs, as at En-Gedi and Kh. Susiya (see below, sections 3.1 and 4.1).<sup>50</sup> In any case, the inclusion of second-story galleries over the east and west aisles would allow for an additional 150 m<sup>2</sup> or so to the main hall's floor-space. Depending on the liturgical use of the floor-space and presence of portable furniture, the main hall would have had an estimated maximum occupancy between 253 and 1,059 people.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> On the presence of smaller columns and capitals, see Hachlili 1988: 194, and the bibliography of the sites mentioned there.

<sup>51</sup> These maximum occupancy figures were calculated using the methodology devised by Chad Spigel in (Spigel 2008). The wide range is a result of our lack of information regarding how the interior space of synagogues was used, a situation that Spigel addresses. The range in figures limits the usefulness of the occupancy methodology in the present study, although the figures are helpful as a tool for comparing the synagogues of southern Palestine to each other. Portable wooden benches would have created the highest maximum occupancy, allowing for 44 cm for each person's seat-width and 60 cm for the depth of each bench (including the foot space between benches; see Spigel 2008: 147-53). Conversely, floor seating would have provided the lowest maximum occupancy, at 75 cm<sup>2</sup> per person, assuming the liturgy required attendants to stand and/or prostrate occasionally (Spigel 2008: 164). Contra Levine 2005: 379, I see no reason to assume that the nave remained vacant merely so that the attendants could appreciate the floor mosaics. Had this been the case in the Sepphoris synagogue, for example, there would hardly have been *anywhere* to sit (see Weiss 2005: 12).

The maximum occupancy figures for the Na'aran synagogue were calculated as follows:

To avoid overestimating the maximum occupancy, we assume that usable seating area did not include the southern, Jerusalem-oriented end, the presumable focus of liturgy (see Spigel 2008:170-72), and so we can eliminate an area of 3.0 by 14.94 m. Moreover, we eliminate another 3.0 by 14.94 m-area at the north end to allow for walking-space in front of the triportal entryway (see Spigel 2008: 106-07). In addition, we eliminate two 2.0 m-wide sections running the north-south length of the hall along the rows of pillars to provide space to walk between benches, as well as space for the pillars. The modified dimensions of usable seating area in the main hall therefore would be 15.94 by 10.94 m. This area allows for 26 benches (at 60 cm per bench), oriented south, toward Jerusalem. Two of these benches likely would have been cut short at the west wall to allow access to the western exit leading to the auxiliary room (see below). So, we are left with 24 benches at 10.0 m in length and 2 benches at 8.0 m in length. At 44 cm per personal seat-width, this yields a total of 564 people. If there were seating space available in second-story galleries as well, we could add 11 more benches—6 on the west side, where the aisle-width is 3.8 m, and 5 on the east side where the aisle-width is 3.2 m—facing downward, toward the nave. We could then suppose a length of 20.0 m (eliminating about 2.0 m on each gallery to allow enough space for wooden stairs). At 45 people per bench, there could be an additional 495 people. Added to the 564 people below, we calculate the largest maximum occupancy to be 1,059 people. On the other hand, there may not have been galleries at all, and everyone might have sat on the floor rather than on portable benches. In this case, we employ the same dimensions for usable seating space—15.94 by 10.94 m, or an area of 174.38 m<sup>2</sup>—which calculates to 232 people. However, floor-seating might have allowed attendants to sit between the pillars as well, which would add another 21 possible places (four inter-pillar areas at about 2.7 by 2.0 m per area). The smallest maximum occupancy in this scenario would therefore be 253 people.

As one can see with just these two scenarios, there are enough unknown factors so as to make the implementation of Spigel's methodology problematic at Na'aran. It will therefore be most useful in the present study only as a tool for comparison. Information regarding the size of the community in terms of absolute figures should *not* be extrapolated from these broad estimates.

No permanent stone benches were uncovered, nor is there evidence for other liturgical furniture. Because the southern end of the synagogue was not preserved (see above), there is no evidence for the existence of a bema, postholes for a chancel screen, or a Torah shrine, which one might expect along the Jerusalem-oriented wall.<sup>52</sup> Vincent suggested that some marble fragments uncovered in the main hall were used for a chancel screen, but no photographs or drawings were published.<sup>53</sup> A chancel screen was uncovered in secondary use in a domestic context (Area T), about 100 m east of the synagogue (see below), although again, no photographs or drawings have been published.<sup>54</sup>

The state of preservation does not allow for the identification of an apse or niche either, so the architectural plan is a matter of speculation. Vincent's reconstruction (fig. 3) places a central pillar between the two southern pillars to create a U-shaped layout for the superstructure supports. Vincent's reconstruction presumably was based on the Galilean-type synagogues published by Kohl and Watzinger a few years before the excavations at Na'aran.<sup>55</sup> The subsequent discovery of synagogues with apses on the Jerusalem-oriented wall—e.g., at Jericho (see below, section 2.2.3) and Beth Alpha—led Goodenough to suggest that the Na'aran synagogue had an apse.<sup>56</sup> While this is certainly possible based on comparative evidence, there is no way to be certain. It is, however,

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<sup>52</sup> Hachlili 1988: 166-92; Meyers 1999: 202.

<sup>53</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 165.

<sup>54</sup> Hizmi and Cohen 1983: 74; Hizmi 2002 does not mention this chancel screen.

<sup>55</sup> See Kohl and Watzinger 1916.

<sup>56</sup> Goodenough 1953-65: I, 254. On Beth Alpha, see Sukenik 1932.



unlikely that the pillars formed a U-shape, as Vincent suggested, since the synagogues he used as parallels in order to draw this conclusion differ in a number of other ways from Na‘aran.

The interior of the synagogue is paved entirely in polychrome mosaics (fig. 5). Three long mosaic carpets run the length of both aisles and the nave. Eleven of the twelve intercolumnar panels remain, almost all of which are entirely geometric. (The southernmost intercolumnar panel on the east side does not survive, nor does most of the panel just to the north of it.) At the south end of the nave is a panel separated from the central design, perhaps meant to demarcate space near the Jerusalem-end of the hall.

In front of the central doorway along the north wall is a rectangular panel known as the “Gazelle Mosaic,” measuring about 2.4 by 1.04 m.<sup>57</sup> The depiction is oriented outward toward the doorway, that is to say, it is viewed upright from inside the hall as one exits into the narthex; the orientation of this panel is opposite those of the central nave and the menorah in the narthex. Vincent hypothesized that there must have been “quelque subtile considération religieuse” for this peculiar orientation that is now lost to us.<sup>58</sup> In any case, the orientation is paralleled at Beth Alpha, where the lion and bull flanking the central doorway to the hall are likewise oriented opposite the nave mosaic.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the peculiar orientation, the motif of the Gazelle Mosaic is quite common in Byzantine art. The mosaic depicts a pair of gazelles in profile facing a flowery

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<sup>57</sup> The Gazelle Mosaic was removed following the excavation and brought to Jerusalem. Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 6 suggest that it is currently in storage in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, although the curator of the storerooms has been unable to locate the piece. Today, there is a reconstruction in the find-spot.

<sup>58</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 168. It has been suggested that the orientation is related to liturgical movement, but no study has addressed this issue in detail, to my knowledge.

<sup>59</sup> Sukenik 1932: Pl. XXVII.

shrub.<sup>60</sup> Goodenough suggested an elaborate interpretation regarding the meaning and symbolism behind this motif, supposing it to be unique to Judaism.<sup>61</sup> However, the motif of animals flanking a central vegetal or floral image is common in Near Eastern art, and this specific motif has been found at a number of sites around Roman and Byzantine Palestine.<sup>62</sup> In Goodenough's defense though, it is reasonable to suspect that the motif had some specific meaning to the congregants of the synagogue (as it likely did in other religious contexts).

The Gazelle Mosaic appears to have been badly damaged and repaired at some point in the synagogue's history. Almost half of the mosaic, including all but the horns of the gazelle on the right, was destroyed. The repairs are obvious, both in style and execution. The original mosaicist, doubtless a professional, laid the tesserae so as to follow the outlines of the gazelles and plants in the *opus vermiculatum* technique, making the animals stand out against the white background. The repairs ruin this effect by employing multicolored tesserae that are closer in color to the gazelles than they are to the white background. Moreover, while the original design positioned the animals in a natural stance, the sloppy repairs depict a bag-shaped body with dangling,

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<sup>60</sup> The S-shaped horns of the animals identify them as gazelles or antelopes (*Gazella gazelle*), as opposed to the curved-horned wild goat, or ibex (*Capra ibex*), both of which are common in the Judean Desert; see Gilbert 2002: 13 and Caubet 2002: 222-23.

<sup>61</sup> Goodenough 1953-65: I, 255.

<sup>62</sup> On the motif in Near Eastern art, see Amiran 1971: 194-201. For examples in Roman and Byzantine Palestine, see: Caesarea, Area NN19, the so-called "Ibex Mosaic" (see Patrich 2008: 8 and below, fig. 6); Nahariya, a chancel screen (Dauphin and Edelstein 1993: 51); Kissufim, a mosaic of a somewhat different style (Cohen 1993: 280); the Lower Baptistery Chapel next to the Chapel of Martyr Theodore at Madaba (Piccirillo 1993: 119); the bema of the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius at Kh. al-Mukhayyat near Mount Nebo (Piccirillo 1993: 165); and the well-known, embellished variation at Kh. el-Mafjar in the apse of the bathhouse (Hamilton 1959: 337-39, Pl. LXXXIX). For other Jewish contexts, see Hachlili 1988: 330.

disproportionate legs. In any case, because only one of the gazelles had been damaged—and even then not in its entirety—there is no reason to suspect that this is the result of careful or deliberate destruction. Other repairs to the mosaic are visible, as well (see below), but nowhere are they more obvious than in the Gazelle Mosaic.

Located just south of the Gazelle Mosaic is an Aramaic inscription in black tesserae, measuring 1.24 m in length.<sup>63</sup> The inscription is oriented in the opposite direction of the Gazelle Mosaic, that is to say, it is viewed upright from the north, allowing those entering the main hall to view it properly. Naveh’s reading of the mosaic inscription is as follows:<sup>64</sup>

Remembered for good Ḥalifu, daughter of Rabbi Safrah, who supported this holy place. Amen.	דכירה לטב חליפו ברת רבי ספרה	1
	דאתחזקת בהדין אתרה [קדי]שה אמן	2

As with the previous inscriptions, the wording is a standard dedicatory phrase.<sup>65</sup> The verb *אתחזקת* in the second line (the feminine *Itpa‘al* form of *חזק*) is translated “supported,” in the sense that she supported the synagogue through donations.<sup>66</sup> Naveh’s reconstruction of the second line—“this holy place”—is well attested as a designation for the synagogue in late ancient dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Naveh 1978: 95.

<sup>64</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 60. Cf. Avi-Yonah 1932: 155, no. 69A; Brooten 1982: 160, no. 20. This piece was recently put on display the Museum of the Good Samaritan near Ma‘ale Adummim, east of Jerusalem.

<sup>65</sup> Naveh 1978: 7-12.

<sup>66</sup> Sokoloff 2002: 195. Avi-Yonah’s translation (1932: 155) of the term as “sharing in” is unwarranted, and likely stems from assumptions regarding the roles of women in synagogues.

<sup>67</sup> In addition to Naveh 1978: *passim*, see Sokoloff 2002: 81-82 and Fine 1997.

The name Ḥalifu is not uncommon, appearing in variations in at least three other inscriptions found to date.<sup>68</sup> That Ḥalifu's husband is not mentioned perhaps indicates that she was not married and therefore better identified with her father, Rabbi Safrah, in lieu of a surname.<sup>69</sup> Given the appearance of Phinehas the priest in the narthex inscription (see above), it is significant that a rabbi—particularly one whose name ostensibly means “the scribe”<sup>70</sup>—is also associated with the Na‘aran synagogue.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps most notable, however, is the dedicator's gender; Ḥalifu is the second woman identified as a prominent members of the Na‘aran community.<sup>72</sup>

The three long mosaic carpets in the nave and two aisles emphasize the lateral demarcations created by the rows of pillars. The mosaics of the aisles and the intercolumnar panels are decorated with geometric patterns that are common in Byzantine art in Palestine.<sup>73</sup> Notable among the intercolumnar panels are two depictions of animals: a bird (dove?) is depicted in profile with wings folded in the third panel from the north in the western row. The fourth panel from the north in the eastern row appears

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<sup>68</sup> Naveh 1978: 96.

<sup>69</sup> While they share the same name, there is no reason to make any connection between this Rabbi Safrah and the Babylonian *'amora'* (contra Vincent and Benoit 1961: 71).

<sup>70</sup> See Naveh 1978: 96.

<sup>71</sup> For discussion of the issue of rabbis and priests in the synagogue, see Cohen 1981; Miller 2004; and Grey 2011.

<sup>72</sup> See Brooten 1982: 160.

<sup>73</sup> The west aisle mosaic is a variation of Avi-Yonah's H1 pattern (see Avi-Yonah 1932: 138; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 242). The east aisle pattern is paralleled in several variations, such as the south room in the Church of ed-Deir at Ma'in in Transjordan (Piccirillo 1993: 203); the north aisle of the Church of Bishop Sergius at Umm er-Rasas (Piccirillo 1993: 234); and the south aisle of the upper church at Massuh (Piccirillo 1993: 252).

to have depicted some sort of bird as well, identifiable by its feet, tail, and folded wings (see fig. 7). The neck and head of the bird have not survived; given the evidence from the other mosaics in the nave (see below), it appears to have suffered deliberate, iconoclastic destruction.

The nave mosaic consists of three panels surrounded entirely by a wide, loosely-braided guilloche, about 90 cm wide (fig. 8).<sup>74</sup> Panel one (the northernmost) measures about 6.5 by 4.0 m and consists of a geometric variation on the inhabited-scrolls motif.<sup>75</sup> A variety of floral and faunal images are contained within thirty-five medallions, fifteen of which are within the “scrolls” (scroll medallions), eight of which are between them (inter-scroll medallions), and twelve of which are along the borders (half-medallions).<sup>76</sup> Of the thirty-five images within the field of panel one, nearly all of those depicting animals have been at least partially defaced. The only exception is a bird, located in an inter-scroll medallion (in the western row, second from the south). Of the remaining depictions, all are of floral motifs, such as a fruit-basket and fruit-and-vines motif.

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<sup>74</sup> Doubled version of B12 (“Double Composite Guilloche”) combined with B7-8 in Avi-Yonah 1932: 138; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 234-35. This pattern is also found in the church at Bethlehem-in-Galilee, and at the Samaritan synagogue at Tell Qasile where it is combined with the H5 field pattern (see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: nos. 21, 203). On the width of the frame, see Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 7.

<sup>75</sup> Avi-Yonah’s H5 field pattern, (see Avi-Yonah 1932: 139; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 245). This design is also found in the monasteries at Bir el-Qutt and et-Tabgha, the church at Tell Hassan in Jericho, the West Church at Mamshit, the Samaritan synagogue at Tell Qasile, the church at Roglit, and the church at Shavei Zion (dated by an inscription to 486), the central church at the Monastery of Martyrius at Ma’ale Adummim, as well as a section of mosaic discovered at Tell el-Far’ah (see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: nos. 54, 75, 107, 174, 203, 210, 216, 236; for the Monastery of Martyrius, see Magen 1993: 27). Of all of these, only the church at Mamshit has figural images enclosed within the design as at Na’aran. On the inhabited-scroll motif, and the geometric variation of it, see Dauphin 1987: 191, who dates its appearance in Palestine to the 6<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>76</sup> The total count of thirty-five includes the half-medallions along the border of the field but *not* the quarter-medallions in the corners.

The damage inflicted upon the mosaics appears to be of two types. In some cases, the entire medallion was cut away. There are at least seven examples of this in panel one.<sup>77</sup> In other cases, only the figure was defaced, while the remainder of the medallion survives.<sup>78</sup> The degree to which the figure was defaced varies; so, for example, the first scroll medallion (from the south) in the central row depicts a caged bird whose head and parts of the body were destroyed (fig. 9), whereas the bird's feet and the majority of the cage remain intact. Indeed, in most of the medallions that preserve the outlines of animals, the legs, paws, tail, and occasionally ears were left untouched (see figs. 10 and 11). As we shall see, this was also the case with some of the figural images in the other panels of the mosaic. Today, remnants of only eleven of the thirty-five images are visible in panel one.<sup>79</sup>

To the immediate south, panel two depicts a Helios-and-zodiac motif set into a panel measuring roughly 3.5 by 3.5 m (fig. 12).<sup>80</sup> This motif is known from seven synagogues, of which Na'aran was the first to be discovered.<sup>81</sup> Although the orientation

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<sup>77</sup> Among the scroll medallions, these include (from the south): the first and second medallions in the easternmost row, and the second and third medallions in the center row. Among the inter-scroll medallions, these include (from the south) the first, second, and third medallions in the eastern row, and the first medallion in the western row. The half-medallion along the eastern border (first from the south) was also removed in its entirety, but this was doubtless the work of Maitland Woods upon its initial discovery (see below).

<sup>78</sup> These include almost all other scroll and inter-scroll medallions, with the two exceptions of the fruit basket scroll medallion, located in the westernmost aisle, second from the south, and a vase depicted in the scroll medallion located in the central aisle, fourth from the south.

<sup>79</sup> Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 7.

<sup>80</sup> Several of the photographs of this panel that did not appear in any of Vincent's publications (including the most detailed account, Vincent and Benoit 1961) appear in Sukenik 1932 as comparative finds for the Beth Alpha synagogue. The original pieces of panel two are today in situ.

<sup>81</sup> On the other examples of this motif in synagogues, see above.

and layout vary, all instances have the same general plan:<sup>82</sup> two concentric circles are set into a square, with a depiction of the solar deity (“Helios” in some form) in the center, borne by a quadriga (a chariot drawn by four horses). The zodiac signs encircle the central image, in the wide band created by the two concentric circles. Each is set into its own trapezoidal section, shaped like a truncated pie-slice. Personifications of the four seasons are depicted in the triangular corners. This motif is known also from Late Roman art.<sup>83</sup>

All of the figures in the Helios-and-zodiac panel at Na‘aran have been at least partially destroyed, mostly through purposeful defacement. Nevertheless, the remains allow us to identify the figures based on attributes, outlines, and inscriptions.

The central circle, measuring about 1.6 m in diameter, contains the image of the solar deity and quadriga (fig. 15), recognized by the six rays emanating from his head and the two large wheels.<sup>84</sup> The face and proper-left shoulder of the solar deity do not survive. The proper-right shoulder and torso of the solar deity are cloaked in a spotted robe, probably meant to depict fur. The robe is fastened with a large brooch in the center of the figure’s chest, of the sort often worn in depictions of saints and emperors in

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<sup>82</sup> Japhia is an exception, since the zodiac signs were placed in circles surrounding the central image rather than in pie-slices. Sukenik 1951 identifies the Japhia mosaic as a depiction of the signs of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. However, I believe this is an untenable conclusion in light of the known parallels at Na‘aran, Beth Alpha, Hammath-Tiberias, and Sepphoris. Naveh 1978: no. 41 discusses the problem of identifying the figures in the Japhia mosaics and offers alternative suggestions for the inscriptions that would allow for the identification of the motif as Helios and the zodiac cycle. In light of Naveh’s alternatives, it seems reasonable to reject Sukenik’s suggestion.

<sup>83</sup> See Roussin 1997 and Weiss 2005: 108-09; see also Sukenik 1932: 56-57 and Avi-Yonah 1934: 126-27, who note the continuation of zodiac imagery in medieval art (both Jewish and Christian).

<sup>84</sup> Vincent’s sketch (fig. 12) erroneously depicts eight visible rays. The photograph published later in Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XXI contradicts this. Cf. Hammath-Tiberias (seven rays), Beth Alpha (six rays), and Sepphoris (ten rays), the last of which does *not* personify the sun. See Dothan 1983: Pl. 29; Sukenik 1932: Pl. X; and Weiss 2005: 106, Fig. 47. On the diameter measurement, see Vincent and Benoit 1961: 168.

Byzantine art.<sup>85</sup> The proper-left hand of the figure sticks out from beneath the robe and grasps the end of a loop, presumably meant to be a whip for driving the quadriga.<sup>86</sup> The iconoclast destroyed the four horses (two on each side) that were depicted pulling the quadriga, but one leg and the tops of four ears to the proper-left side of the solar deity survive for positive identification of the animals.<sup>87</sup> The two wheels below the solar deity are conspicuously larger—comprising nearly half the central circle—than the two surviving parallels at Beth Alpha and Sepphoris. While the right wheel is poorly preserved, the left one clearly depicts a schematic chariot-wheel with eight spokes connecting a small central hub to a relatively narrow rim. Incurved lines connect the points of contact between the spokes and rim, creating a web-like pattern on the interior of the wheel, a feature unparalleled at Beth Alpha and Sepphoris.

The zodiac band has a total diameter of almost 4 m with a width of about 1 m. Since the individual panels of the signs are evenly spaced, the length of the outer edge of each measures about 1.05 m and the inner edge is about 0.42 m.<sup>88</sup> The figures representing the signs of the zodiac are oriented inward, that is to say, they are all viewed properly from the center of the motif.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Sebesta and Bonafante 1994: 244 call this a *fibula*, but here “brooch” is used to emphasize the large and ornate design and to distinguish it from the large pins used to clasp tunics at the shoulder. For parallels of the usage at Na‘aran, see Piccirillo 1993: 167, 279, 281. Cf. the solar deity in the Helios-and-zodiac panel at Hammath-Tiberias (Dothan 1983: Pl. 29).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. the whip in the proper-left hand of the parallel figure at Hammath-Tiberias (Dothan 1983: Pl. 29).

<sup>87</sup> The parallels at Beth Alpha (Suknik 1932: Pl. X) and Sepphoris (Weiss 2005: Fig. 47) also included horses.

<sup>88</sup> The outer edge =  $1/12 (2\pi (2.00))$ . The inner edge =  $1/12 (2\pi (0.80))$ .

<sup>89</sup> This is also the case in the mosaic at Beth Alpha (Suknik 1932: Pl. X) but different from the mosaics at Husifa (Avi-Yonah 1934: Pl. XLIV, Fig. 3), Japhia (Suknik 1951: Fig. 5, Pl. VIII), Hammath-Tiberias



The first sign of the zodiac, Aries, is located at about two-o'clock (fig. 16).<sup>90</sup> The sign is identified by the remaining Hebrew inscription, טלה, above the figure.<sup>91</sup> The iconoclast followed the depiction of the ram almost exactly, leaving behind only the end of the tail. The animal is in profile, facing to the right.

The second sign, Taurus, is just beyond three-o'clock (fig. 17). The sign is identified by the Hebrew inscription, שור, above and to the left of the figure.<sup>92</sup> Almost all the tesserae of the figure have been removed, following the outline of the bull for the most part. On the right side, the destruction went beyond the outline of the bull and into the section of the next zodiac sign. The posterior and the tail of the animal remain. The animal is in profile, also facing to the right.

The destruction of Taurus continued into the section of the third sign, located just beyond four-o'clock.<sup>93</sup> As a result, nothing of this figure remains. The character of the destruction does not permit us to determine whether the iconoclast followed the line of the figure. At the time of excavation, Vincent recorded three visible letters: מים. Naveh

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(Dothan 1983: Pl. 29), and Sepphoris (Weiss 2005: Fig. 47), where the signs are oriented outward and therefore properly viewed from *outside* the motif.

<sup>90</sup> We assume here that Aries/*Nisan* is the beginning of the calendrical cycle. See also Hachlili 1977: 62, as well as below, section 3.1 on En-Gedi.

<sup>91</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.1.

<sup>92</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.2.

<sup>93</sup> No detail of this section of the panel has been published, and it is unclear whether the original team even photographed it. Because the mosaic was never properly conserved, the current state of preservation does not allow us to contribute new information about this piece.

correctly reconstructs this as תאנימים, or “Gemini.”<sup>94</sup> The letters are no longer preserved.

The fourth sign, Cancer, is located just beyond five-o’clock (fig. 18).<sup>95</sup> The destruction here was considerably less precise. Much of the image is still visible, including the eight legs—each only a single tesserae in thickness—both eyes, and part of the crab’s upper shell. The tesserae to the right of the image appear to have been removed haphazardly without an attempt to follow the outline of the image. The crab fills only about half of its panel, leaving the bottom remainder as a blank background. The Hebrew inscription, סרטן, identifies the figure as Cancer.<sup>96</sup>

Leo, the lion, is depicted just beyond six-o’clock (fig. 19). Only the tail and two front paws remain of the defaced image. The iconoclast followed the outline of the figure fairly closely, although he crossed into the area of Cancer at the posterior of the lion and beyond the frame above its head. The outline appears to have depicted the animal standing on its hind legs, facing to the right, with the front paws in the air. Five digits are visible on one paw, four on the other. The lion’s long tail curves inward along the left edge of the section. The Hebrew inscription, אריה, “lion” is located above the back of the image.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.3.

<sup>95</sup> Sukenik 1932: Pl. 2b incorrectly identifies this sign as Scorpio. Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XXb incorrectly identifies a photograph of Scorpio as Cancer.

<sup>96</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.4.

<sup>97</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.5.

The sixth sign, Virgo, is the first human figure so far in the zodiac (fig. 20). She is identified by the Hebrew inscription, בתולה.<sup>98</sup> The unnaturally slender, female figure is facing frontward. Her elbows are bent at acute angles, with the forearms and hands raised to the height of her chin. The destruction of the image follows the outline roughly, so that substantial portions of the arms and the top of the head are still visible. A small section along the figure's proper-right leg appears to utilize slightly larger tesserae, perhaps the result of a repair done to the mosaic at some point prior to the iconoclasm (see below).

The seventh sign, Libra, was also depicted with a human figure, now nearly obliterated (fig. 21). Libra is typically depicted by a human male holding a two-pan, beam-balance scale, with three chains connecting each pan to the beam.<sup>99</sup> The destruction here follows the figure's outline only around the crown of the head; the remainder of the iconoclasm is haphazard. At the bottom of the section, the toes of two shoes are still visible. The proper-left elbow and upper-arm can be seen jutting out from the figure's body at a right angle. At the left side of the section, the edge of the scale's beam and the three chains supporting one of the pans remain. Libra is additionally identified by the Hebrew inscription in the upper-left corner of the section, which reads מוזניים, literally "scales."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.6.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Sukenik 1932: Pl. XIV.1; Dothan 1983: Pl. 16.5; Weiss 2005: Fig. 59.

<sup>100</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.7. Among the zodiac inscriptions, the spelling מוזניים is attested only at Beth Alpha; see Sukenik 1932: Pl. XIV.1. The spelling מאוזניים is attested in contemporary literature; see Sokoloff 2002: 294.

No inscriptions are preserved for the eighth through eleventh zodiac signs.<sup>101</sup> Scorpio, the eighth sign, is oriented with its tail toward the center and curved toward the right (fig. 22). The four left legs still remain, as does most of the head, including the left eye. The damage here was much less precise, since the iconoclast only appears to have followed the figure's outline along the end of the tail.

Nothing remains of the ninth sign, Sagittarius. Only the very bottom of the section was spared by the iconoclast. The area removed from Sagittarius' section continued into the tenth sign, Capricorn, as well as into the central circle of the solar deity. The destruction of the eleventh sign, Aquarius was slightly more precise, although here, too, the damaged section was continued into the central circle, where the head of the solar deity was removed. These signs are identifiable only on the basis of comparanda and the general standardization of the zodiac motif.

The twelfth sign, Pisces, located at about one-o'clock, is depicted by two fish with their tails oriented toward the center of the panel (fig. 23). The outlines of the fish were followed fairly closely by the iconoclast. The mouths of the fish are connected by a single line of tesserae bent at an obtuse angle, presumably meant to represent the hooks from which the fish hang.<sup>102</sup> Pisces is identified here by the Hebrew inscription, **דגים**, in the upper-right corner of the section.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Bar-Adon 1970: 8 reports that the inscriptions identifying Capricorn and Sagittarius were uncovered during an examination of the site in 1970. No photographs or discussion of these inscriptions have been published, and Naveh did not include these two inscriptions in his discussion of Na'aran in his 1978 catalog of inscriptions.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. the depiction of Pisces at Sepphoris (Weiss 2005: Fig. 64).

<sup>103</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.12.

The four seasons are depicted as personifications in the triangular corners of the panel.<sup>104</sup> All have been at least partially defaced so that none of the heads of the figures is visible. Autumn is located in the upper-right corner (fig. 24). The torso of the figure emerges from the zodiac circle with her head toward the corner of the panel. She is depicted frontally, with hands outstretched to either side. Her gown has red, black, white, and red vertical stripes. Her proper-right hand grasps some sort of staff and a horn; the proper-left hand is opened. Below the latter is a bird or duck oriented upside-down as compared to the personified season.<sup>105</sup>

Autumn is identified by a Hebrew inscription of two words on either side of the head. On the right side is the word תקופת, meaning “period of.” The left side is mostly destroyed, however the letters רי can still be made out. Naveh correctly reconstructs this as רי[תש] תקופת, that is, the “period of *Tishrei*,” or autumn.<sup>106</sup>

The lower-right corner once contained the season of summer (תקופת תמוז), but the figure and inscription have been almost completely obliterated.<sup>107</sup> The season is identified only by process of elimination. The remnants of the summer-corner include a

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<sup>104</sup> Although the evidence is too fragmentary to be sure, comparanda suggest that the personifications are female. See Weiss 2005: 123.

<sup>105</sup> Birds also appear along with the seasons of autumn and spring at Beth Alpha; see Sukenik 1932: Pls. XVII, XVIII.

<sup>106</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.15.

<sup>107</sup> See Naveh 1978: no. 67.14. Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 8 report that this mosaic was removed in the 1970s by the Staff Officer for Archaeology, and subsequently replaced with cement-filling. Its whereabouts are unknown.

bird—similar in form and orientation to that in the autumn corner—to the left of the figure, and a grape-bunch to the right.<sup>108</sup> The grape-bunch is not an attribute of the summer season in the corresponding representations at Beth Alpha, Hammath-Tiberias, or Sepphoris.<sup>109</sup>

The lower-left corner depicts the personification of spring (fig. 25), identified by the inscription תקו[פת ג]יט, “the period of *Nisan*.”<sup>110</sup> The two-word inscription is bisected by the now-destroyed head of the personified season. The figure is clothed in a striped gown, similar to that of autumn (see above), and holds a staff in her proper-right hand. Below this hand is a depiction of a branch of some sort, perhaps meant to be a bushel of wheat.<sup>111</sup> A bird, similar to the previously-described seasons, is found below the proper-left arm of the figure. The area of removed tesserae here covers the head and most of the figure’s arms but also extends out of the panel itself at the corner.

The upper-left corner preserves the remains of personified winter. Here the destruction is much more haphazard and widespread, leaving nothing of the figure. Half of the bird on the right side of the section has also been removed. The inscription is

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<sup>108</sup> See Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 8.

<sup>109</sup> It does, however, appear along with autumn at Hammath-Tiberias.

<sup>110</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.13.

<sup>111</sup> The other Helios-and-zodiac motifs do not include this attribute in their depictions of the spring season.

preserved intact, identifying the figure as תקופת טיבית, the “period of *Tevet*,”<sup>112</sup> that is, winter. This spelling (טיבית) is otherwise unattested.<sup>113</sup>

Although the seasons in the Na‘aran mosaic rotate counter-clockwise around the central solar image, the zodiac rotates clockwise (see fig. 13). The opposite movements, as well as the unaligned axes of the zodiac and the panel itself, result in zodiac symbols that are not aligned with their respective seasons. The *Nisan*/spring group of Aries-Taurus-Gemini overlaps *Tishrei*/autumn and *Tammuz*/summer. The *Tammuz*/summer group of Cancer-Leo-Virgo overlaps both its own season and *Nisan*/spring. The *Tishrei*/autumn group of Libra-Scorpio-Sagittarius overlaps *Nisan*/spring and *Tevet*/winter. The *Tevet*/winter group of Capricorn-Aquarius-Pisces (mostly destroyed) overlaps its own season and *Tishrei*/autumn.

To the south of the Helios-and-zodiac panel is the third and final panel in the nave mosaic, depicting the Torah shrine (*‘aron ha-qodesh*) flanked by two menorahs.<sup>114</sup> Below the Torah shrine is a human figure flanked by two lions in a master-of-beasts motif, identified as Daniel in the Lions’ Den. Panel three measures about 4.0 by 3.0 m.

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<sup>112</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 67.16.

<sup>113</sup> At Beth Alpha and Sepphoris, it is spelled with the more common form טבת; at En-Gedi, it is spelled טבית. See Naveh 1978: nos. 45.16 and 70 (line 6), as well as below on En-Gedi, section 3.1. For Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005: Fig. 75. The literary spelling is typically טבת; see Jastrow 2005: 519 and Sokoloff 2002: 220.

<sup>114</sup> The term “Torah shrine” here does not imply that the Torah scroll was the only biblical scroll deposited in such synagogue furniture; in fact, there is good reason to suspect that other biblical and liturgical scrolls were housed in the “Torah shrine.” See Meyers 1999: 208.

The Torah shrine motif is similarly found in conjunction with the Helios-and-zodiac motif at Beth Alpha, Hammath-Tiberias, and Sepphoris. At Na'aran, the damage to the panel is fairly extensive, due to the encroaching stream along the left side of the panel (fig. 5). It is clear, though, that the damage to the human figure at the bottom of the panel was deliberate. This is probably also the case with the damage to the lions, although the iconoclast was somewhat less meticulous, especially in the destruction of the lion on the right. It is unclear what caused the damage in the area extending from the right lion over the majority of the depiction of the Torah shrine (fig. 26) and two branches of the right menorah. It is unlikely to be a result of exposure to the elements, since the mosaic pavements in the aisles and narthex were so well-preserved. On the other hand, panel three was partially exposed by the Turkish shell and the subsequent preliminary investigations in 1918, so perhaps some of this section was destroyed then.<sup>115</sup>

The polychrome depiction of the Torah shrine and menorahs motif in panel three can be reconstructed with a fair degree of certainty based on the remains; Vincent's sketch (fig. 27) is probably accurate, assuming that the parts were symmetrical.<sup>116</sup> The Torah shrine in the center is depicted as a large rectangular case, divided vertically into two sides, and then subdivided horizontally into five smaller compartments on each side.<sup>117</sup> The smaller compartments may have been intended to represent the structure of actual Torah shrines in synagogues, with the sacred scrolls deposited on their sides (as

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<sup>115</sup> For the extent of the destruction by the Turkish shell, see Vincent 1919: 532-35, Fig. 1.

<sup>116</sup> This is a reasonable assumption given the parallels, such as those mentioned above (Beth Alpha, Hammath-Tiberias, and Sepphoris), as well as Kh. Susiya (see below, section 4.1.3). See generally Hachlili 1988: 272-85.

<sup>117</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 169.



opposed to the prevalent modern practice of standing the scrolls upright).<sup>118</sup> The top of the Torah shrine depiction was probably gabled as Vincent suggests. Hachlili's reconstruction sets a conch design into the gable, perhaps based on parallels in mosaic depictions and actual Torah shrine aediculae; this reconstruction is less certain, though plausible.<sup>119</sup>

The menorahs on either side are as tall as and a little broader than the Torah shrine.<sup>120</sup> Each of the stylized depictions (fig. 28) consists of a two-stepped base, a central staff decorated with eight circles, and semi-circular, U-shaped branches capped with a horizontal bar across the tops. The branches, which run behind the staff, are formed by alternating sections of white and black bands; each band is between three and six tesserae. The horizontal bar along the top is decorated with triangles and trapezoids, perhaps meant to be flames or oil cups. On either side of each menorah's staff is a lamp hanging from the outermost branch. The hanging-chain is depicted by a single line of black tesserae that splits into three at about the midpoint. The bowl of the lamp appears as an upside bell-shape decorated with triangles and amorphous, symmetrical lines. A short line of tesserae protrudes upward from the center of the cup, probably meant to depict a wick. A tassel or some sort of piece of hanging decoration is attached to the underside of the lamp.

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<sup>118</sup> E.g., see the gold glass renditions of this motif from Italy in Goodenough 1953-65: III, nos. 964-68; see also Rutgers 1996: Pls. XVIII and XX.

<sup>119</sup> For Hachlili's reconstruction, see Hachlili 1988: Pl. 105. Note that the image here is inverted and so the lines marking the edge of the reconstruction are not correct. For examples of conch designs within Torah shrine depictions, see Beth Alpha (Suknik 1932: Pl. IX), as well as Sepphoris (Weiss 2005: 66-67, Figs. 11-12; discovered after the publication of Hachlili's 1988 volume). See also below on Kh. Susiya, section 4.1. For an example of an actual Torah shrine aedicula, see Nabratein (Meyers 1993: 1078). Also see the Torah niche in the Dura-Europos synagogue (Kraeling 1956: 22).

<sup>120</sup> See catalog entry in Hachlili 2001: no. IS3.4.

Below the depiction of the Torah shrine is a now-defaced image of a human figure flanked by lions (fig. 29).<sup>121</sup> The figure is identified by the remnants of an inscription: **שְׁלוֹם / דְּנִיאַ [ל]**, “Danie[!], peace.”<sup>122</sup> The animals on either side of Daniel suggest that this is a depiction of a scene from Dan. 6, in which Daniel’s faith in God keeps him from being devoured by the lions when he is thrown into their den to be executed (see below). The image of Daniel is mostly destroyed; only parts of his arms, bent upwards, remain. The proper-right hand appears to have been deliberately removed, though the destruction does not follow the outline of the hand. The proper-left hand was also removed, but the destroyed section of mosaic is contiguous with the lion on the right. The only remnants of the lion on the right side of the panel are the hind legs, paws, and the tail, which hangs down behind the rear left leg. The lion on the left side of the panel is somewhat better-preserved (fig. 30). All four legs remain, although the front paws appear to be deliberately removed in the same manner as Daniel’s proper-right hand. The tail of this lion is curved upward. The purposeful destruction of the lions’ heads is noteworthy. It appears to be similar to the iconoclasm of several of the faunal images in panel one, where the legs and tails—and sometimes ears—were left untouched.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> The remnants of Daniel and the associated inscriptions (see below) are currently undergoing restoration at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, although they are technically on loan from the École biblique.

<sup>122</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 61. S. Klein suggested that the entirety of the inscription would have read: **דְּנִיאַל עֲלִי / הַשְׁלוֹם** /, based on parallels at Beth Alpha, Gaza, and Dura-Europos; see Naveh 1978: 97. The extant evidence does not allow for any certainty.

<sup>123</sup> This pattern of iconoclasm, where the heads and extremities are destroyed but the torsos remain, is seen in churches, as well, for example at the lower church at el-Quweisma, and in the church of St. Stephen at Umm er-Rasas. See Piccirillo 1993: 230-31, 38-39; 1994: 121-64; and for discussion of the phenomenon, see Schick 1995: 200, and see below.

Panel three preserves several Aramaic dedicatory inscriptions, all written in black tesserae. The two inscriptions to the left of Daniel (fig. 29) received much attention soon after the initial discovery in 1918.<sup>124</sup> The inscription just to the left of Daniel's arm reads:<sup>125</sup>

Remembered for good	דכיר לטב	1
Benjamin the community leader ( <i>parnas</i> )	בינימין פרנסה	2
Son of Yose	בר יוסה	3

The term *parnas* is from the same root as the quadrilateral verb, פרנס, meaning “to provide, sustain, or support.”<sup>126</sup> The full function of the position of *parnas* in the synagogue is unclear, and this inscription does little to further our understanding.<sup>127</sup>

Just below this inscription is another distinct and longer inscription, the left side of which has been partially destroyed by the iconoclastic damage to the figure of Daniel. The inscription reads:<sup>128</sup>

Remembered for good all those who	[ד]כירין לטב כל מן	1
donated and gave or	[ד]מתחזק ויהב או	2
will give for this holy place	[די]הב בהדן אתרה	3
either gold or	[ק]דישה בן דהב בן	4

<sup>124</sup> Vincent 1919: 537-44.

<sup>125</sup> Naveh 1978: no.63. See also Avi-Yonah 1932: 156.

<sup>126</sup> On the translation of the term פרנס, see Sokoloff 2002: 448. The term indicates one who is leader in the sense that he provides funds or maintenance for the synagogue.

<sup>127</sup> See Levine 2005: 421; and *b.Gitin* 60a.

<sup>128</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 64; cf. Avi-Yonah 1932: 156, who includes the variant readings of Vincent and Carrière, Dalman, Clermont-Ganneau, Torrey, Slousch, Marmonstein, and Klein. Naveh's reading is most likely correct, since he had access to a much larger corpus of parallels than those writing prior to 1932.

silver or anything	[כ]סף בן כל מקמה	5
there is. Amen. Their portion	[ד]היא [א]מן חוֹלֵל־קֶהוֹן	6
is in this holy place.	בהדן אתרה קדישה	7
Amen.	אמן	8

This is much more general than the previous dedicatory inscriptions, as it does not recognize an individual but instead highlights the contributions of the community as a whole to the synagogue. Its central location in the nave’s mosaic is perhaps fitting, given the explicit role of the building as a communal “holy place.”

On the other side of Daniel, below his proper-left arm and the inscription identifying him, is a simpler dedicatory inscription, which reads:<sup>129</sup>

Remembered for good,	דכיר לט[ב]	1
Samuel.	שמואל	2

Samuel is not accorded any specific title or position—such as priest, rabbi, or *parnas*—as in the above inscriptions. The location of the inscription and lack of title suggest that he was simply a donor.

Just above the two menorahs in panel three is an inscription. The inscription above the right menorah reads:<sup>130</sup>

		דכי	1
Remembered for good Marutha [ (and?) ]tinah and Jacob	[טינה ויעק[ב]]	דיר לטב מרות	2
His son, that they donated for the repair of the place.		ברה דהנון מתחזקין בת[קון]	3

<sup>129</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 62; Avi-Yonah 1932: 156.

<sup>130</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 65; c.f. Avi-Yonah 1932: no. 69.D(a). This inscription, along with the following, was removed during the excavation and brought to the École biblique; they were later sent to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem for restoration, where they are now under curation.

	אתרה	
Their portion is in their holy place. Amen.	[חול]קהון אתר[ה קדיש]ה אמ[ן]	4

As Naveh points out, the meaning of the beginning of the inscription is unclear.<sup>131</sup> There is no doubt that these are the letters as they appear (see fig. 31), so it seems there is a spelling error. The דכי is not in line with the rest of the inscription, suggesting that it was added later, although the surrounding tesserae fit together well. Avi-Yonah suggested reading דכי/דיר as דכי/רין, an obvious error of two letters in this common formulaic phrase.<sup>132</sup> In addition to this mistake, there appear to be a few letters missing from the first word in the last line, [חול]קהון.<sup>133</sup> The name “Marutha” in the second line is evidenced in Jewish usage in its Greek form, Μαρουθα, at Caesarea.<sup>134</sup>

Above the menorah on the left is another inscription, which reads:<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Naveh 1978: 100.

<sup>132</sup> Avi-Yonah 1932: 156.

<sup>133</sup> The word was translated based on similar formulaic phrases, e.g., see above, as well as the following inscription below (Naveh 1978: 101).

<sup>134</sup> Lifshitz 1967: no. 64. Naveh 1978: 100-01 suggests that מרות may be a feminine form of the title מר, “master” or “lord,” but this is an unattested form. Although this is difficult suggestion, it may be strengthened by the following inscription below.

<sup>135</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 66; Avi-Yonah 1932: no. 69.D(b).

Remembered for good Maru[ ]	[ דכיר לטב מרו ]	1
Son of Cris[ and his son]	[ בר כריס ] ו [ברה]	2
Their portion is in th[is holy place. Amen.]	חולקהון בה[דן אתרה קדישה [אמן]	3

The name here is probably Marutha, as in the previous inscription, and so perhaps the same person.<sup>136</sup> Avi-Yonah suggested that the father's name, which begins with -כריס, was "Crispa," a name otherwise unattested in Jewish inscriptions.<sup>137</sup> The name "Crispus," which appears in a Greek dedicatory inscription in the synagogue at Tiberias, and "Crispinus" are perhaps just as likely.<sup>138</sup> In any case, we apparently have a Latin name here, as in the case of "Yusta" (see above).

The third panel of the nave marks the extent of the section of the mosaic carpet that is bordered by the wide guilloche pattern (see fig. 5). These panels comprise the majority of figural imagery in the extensive floor mosaic and are the principle sections that were subject to iconoclasm. To the south of the bordered section, but still within the nave is another, less elaborate geometric mosaic, measuring about 2.0 by 6.0 m. While this area likely served as the focal point of prayer, and perhaps even the location of the Torah shrine, there is no extant evidence of this at Na'aran. Vincent does not mention any evidence for postholes that would have supported a chancel screen, nor does he mention any sort of platform that may have served as a bema or base for a Torah

<sup>136</sup> Naveh 1978: 101.

<sup>137</sup> Avi-Yonah 1932: 156.

<sup>138</sup> See Hirschfeld 1993: 1469-70, who dates the laying of the Tiberias mosaic to the earliest phase of the synagogue in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. based on stylistic criteria. Berman 1988 suggests a late 7<sup>th</sup> c. date.

shrine.<sup>139</sup> If there was a Torah shrine at the south end of the hall, either the structure was made entirely of wood, or the damage caused by the encroachment of the stream eliminated all remains.

Located along the west wall of the main hall, about 12.0 m from the north wall, is an entrance into the smaller auxiliary room of unknown function.<sup>140</sup> The threshold of the entrance is carved of a single, molded stone and measures about 1.5 m long on the interior of the hall. The dimensions of the auxiliary room are unclear since little of the room's walls remain. If we assume that the room did not extend beyond the south wall of the main hall or the western wall of the entire complex, the dimensions would be about 15.1 m N-S by 9.4 m E-W. Vincent mentions that the room was paved in mosaics but does not provide further information regarding the design.<sup>141</sup>

#### **2.1.4 Phases and Dates**

At present, the precise dates and phases of the synagogue are unclear. No excavations were reportedly carried out below the floor of the main hall, so there is no direct evidence of any phases prior to that associated with the mosaic.<sup>142</sup> The lack of information regarding the excavations of the courtyard and auxiliary room makes it impossible to determine the dates and phases of the compound.<sup>143</sup> Historical references

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<sup>139</sup> On the postholes, cf. En-Gedi and Kh. Susiya below, sections 3.1 and 4.1. On evidence for a bema or base of a Torah shrine, cf. Meyers et al. 1976: 49-42, 71-72; Meyers et al. 1990: 78-80, as well as Kh. Susiya below, section 4.1.

<sup>140</sup> On auxiliary rooms, see Smith 1990.

<sup>141</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. IV.

<sup>142</sup> This includes the original excavations done by Vincent's team as well as the later work carried out at the site.

<sup>143</sup> Avi-Yonah 1993 includes a reconstructed plan of the synagogue in which the enclosure walls of the courtyard are designated "Stratum II." Unfortunately, Avi-Yonah did not comment on this phasing, and

to a settlement at Na‘aran as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> c. C.E. do not indicate whether a previous synagogue existed on the site, though this is possible.<sup>144</sup> The lack of any archaeological evidence for the date of the Na‘aran synagogue has led some scholars to propose 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c. dates for the construction based on architectural and art historical comparisons, as well as historical considerations.<sup>145</sup> Dauphin dates the style of the geometric inhabited scrolls in panel one of the nave to the 6<sup>th</sup> c., which is likely the closest dating that the present state of scholarship will allow for the initial laying of the mosaic carpet.<sup>146</sup>

In any case, it appears that at some point in the history of the synagogue, the mosaic was damaged—perhaps simply due to longevity of use—and subsequently repaired.<sup>147</sup> Evidence of the repair is clearly visible in the Gazelle Mosaic (fig. 32), the inscription just to the south of the entrance, and one of the inhabited scrolls of panel one in the nave (fig. 33).<sup>148</sup> According to Vincent’s interpretation, the majority of the figural images in the nave’s mosaic were subject to deliberate destruction, at which time iconoclasts inadvertently destroyed parts of the mosaic that they had intended to spare.

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Vincent and Benoit 1961 do not mention multiple strata. Although it is unclear who produced this plan, it was probably not Avi-Yonah, since the plan reconstructs the southern wall as straight (i.e., according to Vincent’s reconstruction), whereas Avi-Yonah suggests that the synagogue had an apse. The first plan produced showing an apse appeared in Sukenik 1949b: Fig. 1, which is based on Vincent’s plan. Sukenik shades the walls surrounding the courtyard to the north and west, similar to the plan in Avi-Yonah 1993 but does not identify these as different strata or building phases.

<sup>144</sup> See Jos., *Ant.* 17.340; and also Hizmi 2002.

<sup>145</sup> E.g., Sukenik 1934: 31; Avi-Yonah 1976: 53-54; 1993a: 1076. Magen 1983: 63 mentions finds from the synagogue that suggest a 6<sup>th</sup> c. date of construction and continued occupation into the 8<sup>th</sup> c. There is no publication of these finds.

<sup>146</sup> On the dating of the inhabited scrolls motif, see Dauphin 1987: 191.

<sup>147</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 170 comment on the longevity of the synagogue’s use but do not consider this a factor in the repairs to the mosaic.

<sup>148</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XV. Vincent identified the animal as a jerboa.



As a result, repairs were carried out to fix those areas where the iconoclasts had been overzealous.<sup>149</sup>

If some mosaics were inadvertently damaged by overzealous iconoclasts, as Vincent suggests, the repairs do not provide good evidence for it. Let us first consider the Gazelle Mosaic (fig. 32). The mosaicist reconstructed almost the entirety of the animal on the right, albeit less skillfully. That is to say, they performed the *opposite* task of iconoclasm. Moreover, the line of damage crosses haphazardly through the head of the right gazelle and the forelegs of the left one. The damage to this mosaic contrasts with the defacement of the other figural and faunal images in the building, in which the iconoclast tended to follow the outline at least partially (see above). In cases where the outline was not followed as carefully, at least the head was removed.<sup>150</sup> If iconoclasts had defaced the Gazelle Mosaic, they were probably not the same individuals as those who performed the iconoclasm on the other images in the building. The nature of the damage to the Gazelle Mosaic suggests that this piece was not subject to deliberate defacement at all. At the very least, it seems unlikely that the Gazelle Mosaic was destroyed by the same iconoclastic event in which the other images were removed.<sup>151</sup>

The inscription to the south of the Gazelle Mosaic exhibits similar haphazard damage.<sup>152</sup> Spotty sections of tesserae in no discernable pattern had apparently been

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<sup>149</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 170.

<sup>150</sup> For example, see the description of the lions in panel three above.

<sup>151</sup> Hamdan and Benelli 2008 suggest that the Gazelle Mosaic had been repaired and subsequently covered by a woven carpet prior to the iconoclastic event that destroyed the other figural images. While this is certainly possible, there is no direct evidence to support it. Moreover, while it would explain why the gazelles were spared, it would *not* explain why the birds next to the seasons in panel two (see above) were spared.

<sup>152</sup> Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 4.

lost at some point and subsequently replaced with darker pieces. There is no reason to assume that the damage here was accomplished in the same iconoclastic event that defaced the figural images, or that the damage to this inscription was at all intentional.

Now let us consider the patch to the inhabited scroll medallion in panel one (fig. 33). At first glance, it provides the strongest support for Vincent's sequence of events. The photograph, taken during the excavations in 1921, shows the defaced depiction of an animal, standing on its hind legs, facing to the right, with its tail curved upward. The tail—consisting of a single line of tesserae—and the feet survived the iconoclasm, but the rest of the figure was destroyed, including a circular section at the tip of the tail. Above the figure is an area of mosaic that was patched with white tesserae. The patch extends over the border of the medallion and up to the now-removed figure of the animal. The patch-tesserae were laid in straight lines, resulting in an orientation distinct from the *opus vermiculatum* of the original tesserae around the patch. The border-line of the patch appears to curve into the vacant section of the iconoclasm, while the line of the destruction appears to curve underneath the patch. The curvature of the patch apparently suggested to Vincent that it succeeded the destruction.

Upon further consideration though, it is not necessarily the case that iconoclasm occurred prior to the laying of the patch.<sup>153</sup> First, it should be noted that the patch does *not* repair the iconoclastic damage but instead repairs damage to the geometric design above the figure in the inhabited scroll. Second, it appears that the iconoclast might have removed the colored tesserae of the figure, leaving the patch in place. The jagged edge of the patch suggests that some of the white tesserae *were* removed along with the colored

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<sup>153</sup> The conclusions reached regarding this section of the mosaic are based entirely on this photograph because the current state of preservation no longer permits first-hand study of the mosaic.

ones of the figure. Had the patch been made after the destruction of the figure in the medallion, we might expect a straight and neat border, or at least a continuation of the patch-tesserae into the upper-right corner of the figure where a small, triangular section of the tesserae is missing. Instead, what we see is a patch that was probably already in place when the iconoclasm occurred. The area of the patch appears to have been damaged and repaired in the same events that affected the Gazelle Mosaic. When the figure in the medallion was purposefully defaced at a later time, the edge of the patch was also slightly damaged.

Whether or not this scenario is correct, there is no unequivocal evidence that the mosaic was repaired following the iconoclasm.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, it would be rather difficult to explain why the synagogue's community laid the patch after having committed the iconoclasm themselves, especially since no other sections of the mosaic were repaired following the iconoclasm. In fact (contra Vincent), there are several areas where the iconoclasts were similarly overzealous, such as most of panels two and three. Vincent's explanation does not account for the other areas of imprecise iconoclasm. Additionally, the removal of these tesserae would not have rendered the mosaic any more difficult to walk upon than the other areas that were removed. Indeed, the whole floor of the nave would have been difficult to walk upon after the iconoclasm.<sup>155</sup> There is no evidence that the community attempted to fill in the removed sections with jumbled tesserae that

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<sup>154</sup> On the problematic nature of Jewish iconoclasm in general, and Na'aran specifically, see Schick 1995: 202-04; see also see below.

<sup>155</sup> Robert Schick has noted that a "gap in the [mosaic] pavement can quickly enlarge as people walk on it and knock out additional tesserae around the gap's edges, and the exposed bedding layers under the missing tesserae will also rapidly wear out. Thus, even if no one was concerned with the aesthetics of unrepaired damage, anyone who wanted to preserve the remaining portions of the pavements after the images were eliminated somehow had to patch the gaps" (1995: 193-94).

blotted out the figural images, as was the case in most of the churches in Transjordan which experienced iconoclasm.<sup>156</sup>

Vincent's sequence of events—iconoclasm followed by sporadic repair—has been cited by Sukenik, Goodenough, Avi-Yonah, Amit, and Fine, among others.<sup>157</sup> As further evidence that the iconoclasts were themselves part of the synagogue's community, Avi-Yonah suggested that the inscriptions were carefully left untouched, therefore demonstrating a particular reverence for the Hebrew/Aramaic letters.<sup>158</sup> As the description of the synagogue above makes clear, this is not the case. The inscription identifying *Tammuz*/summer in the lower-right corner of panel two was entirely removed. There are numerous other instances in which the inscriptions were partially damaged, including several of the inscriptions in panel two, and nearly all of the inscriptions in panel three of the nave. Avi-Yonah's suggestion is an argument from silence; that is to say, if inscriptions *were* removed entirely, there would be no evidence of it. For all we know, there was an inscription identifying the solar deity at the center of panel two of the nave that the iconoclasts removed (though to be fair, the solar deity is not labeled in the mostly-intact examples at Beth Alpha, Sepphoris, and Hammath-Tiberias). It seems that the inscriptions were disregarded and not shown any particular reverence or disdain, most likely because (a) those responsible were *icono*-clasts, concerned only with the

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<sup>156</sup> See, for example, the churches at Umm al-Rasas, Massuh, Rihab, and Zay al-Gharby (Piccirillo 1993: 232-46, 252-53, 312-13, 324-25). Conversely, the defaced images in the mosaic of the Church of al-Khadir at Madaba were filled in with lime mortar to allow for the continued use of the floor (Piccirillo 1993: 129).

<sup>157</sup> Sukenik 1932: 54-55; Goodenough 1953-65: I, 256-57; Avi-Yonah 1961: 42; 1993a: 1076; Amit 1994; Fine 2005: 189-90.

<sup>158</sup> Avi-Yonah 1961: 42; 1978: 1132; 1993: 1076.

destruction of figural imagery, or (b) they could not read the letters and so disregarded them.

The sequence of events—particularly regarding the iconoclasm—is further problematized by the events surrounding the initial discoveries of the synagogue. As mentioned above, the Anzac forces who discovered the building in 1918 helped themselves to several pieces of the mosaic. At least two pieces were exported to Australia by Maitland Woods. One of these (fig. 34) was donated to St. James' Church of Sydney by Maitland Woods himself.<sup>159</sup> Apparently, the original location of this half-medallion was along the eastern border in panel one of the nave (see fig. 5). A second piece of the mosaic was brought to St. John's Cathedral in Brisbane (fig. 35).<sup>160</sup> Osama Hamdan suggests that this half-medallion also came from panel one of the nave and was originally located on the west side (second half-medallion from the north).<sup>161</sup> Indeed, the design of this piece appears to be the same as the one included in the drawing of the floor attributed to Vincent (fig. 5). However, if this piece was removed by the Anzac forces in 1918, how did it come to be included in Vincent's 1921 drawing? Perhaps Vincent knew about this piece and recorded it in his plan. The sketch provided by Vincent in his 1919 article shows that the area exposed by the Turkish shell and the Anzac troops did not extend as far as the western border of the panel one mosaic, although it is possible that Maitland Woods sank numerous shallow trenches to find more pieces. In any event, how

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<sup>159</sup> See Ariotti 2004.

<sup>160</sup> My thanks to Ms. Christine Cahill, Ms. Lisa Clarke, and the Very Rev'd Dr. Peter Catt of St. John's Cathedral for sending me information on this mosaic piece, as well as Carla Benelli and Osama Hamdan for including me in their correspondence with the latter two of the above-mentioned at St. John's Cathedral in 2008-09.

<sup>161</sup> Hamdan, personal communication, February 2009.

and when this piece was removed from the synagogue likely will remain a mystery. A third piece of mosaic, measuring about 75 cm by 75 cm and depicting grape-bunches was apparently taken by Major A. M. Furber of the British Army. Furber sent photographs of this mosaic to Clermont-Ganneau in 1919, and later that year posted the piece for sale in the November 14 issue of the *Times* of London.<sup>162</sup> The current whereabouts of this last piece are unknown.<sup>163</sup>

Vincent's descriptions suggest that all of the missing pieces of the mosaic were lost to iconoclasm. It now seems that at least three pieces—of which Vincent may or may not have been aware—were taken as spoils of war. Although most of the missing figures throughout the mosaic were carved out along their outlines (at least partially), seven of the inhabited scrolls of the central and southern sections of panel one—areas that were exposed by the Anzac troops in 1918—were removed without respect to their outlines.<sup>164</sup> It therefore follows that not only are we unable to verify the precise date of the mosaic's destruction, but we cannot even determine if some parts were removed in antiquity or the 20<sup>th</sup> c.

In addition, the evidence fails to confirm that the synagogue remained in use following the iconoclasm (contra Vincent). That is to say, the iconoclasm could have taken place at any point in the building's history, even after the original community had

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<sup>162</sup> On the photographs sent to Clermont-Ganneau, see Clermont-Ganneau 1919a. For the *Times* posting, see Anonymous 1919. Furber describes this piece in a letter he wrote to Clermont-Ganneau on 27 March 1919 (Clermont-Ganneau 1919b: 91). See Hamdan and Benelli 2008: 7, who make (rightly, I believe) this connection.

<sup>163</sup> A half-medallion registered with the IAA (S-902) fits the description of this piece and is currently on display in the courthouse in Be'er Sheva', although it is unclear whether or not it is the mosaic posted for sale. Moreover, it is unclear how it would have ended up back in Israel.

<sup>164</sup> See Vincent's sketch prior to the excavations in Vincent 1919: 535.

ceased to occupy the site.<sup>165</sup> As noted above, the fact that the mosaic was not repaired following the iconoclastic event suggests that the synagogue was not in use from at least that point onward, a fact underscored by the relatively sloppy nature of the vandalism.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, we cannot determine the identity of the iconoclasts either.

There is no evidence for the date at which the building went out of use, since no datable objects found above the floor are published in Vincent's posthumous report.<sup>167</sup> Vincent suggested that the building was destroyed by fire, as burnt timbers—presumably from the roof's support-beams—were uncovered on the floor of the main hall.<sup>168</sup> Destruction by fire would accord well with the domestic buildings near the synagogue at Na'aran (see below). In addition, Hamdan and Benelli report that significant sections of the mosaic exhibit discoloration due to fire-damage.<sup>169</sup> That said, Vincent does *not* report any substantial layer of ash covering the floor, as would be expected had the entire roof collapsed and burned. Based on the evidence from the synagogue itself, it is unclear whether the building was still in use at the time of the fire.

### **2.1.5 Adjacent Settlement<sup>170</sup>**

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<sup>165</sup> Such was the case, for example, in Tomb I at Maresha (Jacobson 2007: 6, 27); see below.

<sup>166</sup> Schick (1995: 195-96) notes that in the contemporary churches there is a clear connection between the level of care taken in blotting out the images and the occurrences of repair. Namely, the unrepaired mosaics, such as at Na'aran, tended to have been destroyed in a non-meticulous manner.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Magen 1983.

<sup>168</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 165.

<sup>169</sup> Hamdan and Benelli 2008, site plan.

<sup>170</sup> In addition to the excavations discussed here, two tombs were discovered by Clermont-Ganneau in 1873-74, which may be associated with the synagogue's community; see Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 22. These tombs were never properly excavated and their relationship to the Jewish community at Na'aran is unclear.

In February-March 1983, H. Hizmi and H. Cohen excavated several domestic structures in the immediate vicinity of the Na'aran synagogue on behalf of the Staff Officer for Archaeology, in preparation for the construction of a road.<sup>171</sup> A preliminary report of these excavations appeared that year and later as an appendix to Hizmi's 2002 MA thesis.<sup>172</sup> According to these reports, two excavation areas were opened. Area H was located along the path of the planned road, about 50 m east of the synagogue.<sup>173</sup> The field-stone walls were set on bedrock, preserved to a height of 15-20 cm, and covered with a gray and greenish-yellow plaster.<sup>174</sup> The entrance to one of the rooms (L800) preserved a molded stone threshold to a height of 30 cm above the floor. The floor was paved in a polychrome mosaic carpet decorated in simple geometric designs (lines and lozenges) against a white background.<sup>175</sup> The tesserae appear to be slightly larger than those used in the synagogue's main hall.<sup>176</sup> Several bronze objects were found on the floor of this building, including a number of bowls, two with long handles (pans?), a handled cooking pot, a pitcher, a pestle, and hooks.<sup>177</sup> In the adjacent room (L801, 804),

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<sup>171</sup> See Hizmi and Cohen 1983.

<sup>172</sup> For a preliminary report, see Hizmi and Cohen 1983. For Hizmi's 2002 M.A. thesis, see Hizmi 2002. See also Magen 1983: 63. Hizmi 2002 provides drawings and photographs of some of the finds, including the pottery but does not include plans of the architecture or stratigraphic sections. Hizmi and Cohen 1983 include no plans of Area H.

<sup>173</sup> See Hizmi 2002: 113-114. The subsequent construction of the road has rendered the excavation areas unfit for further study.

<sup>174</sup> Hizmi 2002: 113 describes the walls as "built of polished stone and river rocks," but Hizmi and Cohen 1983: 73 describe the walls as "brick on a pebble foundation."

<sup>175</sup> Hizmi 2002: fig. 39. For the typological pattern and parallels, see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 165, Type A; 242, no. H1; and Pl. XVIII.

<sup>176</sup> No measurements were reported however, so it is difficult to be certain.

<sup>177</sup> Hizmi 2002: 113-14, pl. 1.



several whole, restorable cooking pots, two-handled jars (table amphorae), bowl-shaped lids, and a ceramic cauldron containing eggshells were discovered.<sup>178</sup> These finds suggest that one of the rooms was used as a kitchen or storeroom, while the mosaic-paved room was used as a guest room or for entertaining.<sup>179</sup>

Area T is located about 50 m east of Area H, down the hill and farther from the synagogue. The three buildings here were also identified as domestic structures.<sup>180</sup> A narrow street, about 2.0 m wide and paved in flagstones, separates the buildings. The walls of the buildings were constructed of local fieldstones and smooth, river rocks, as in Area H, and were preserved to a height of about 1.5 m. Mud-bricks were also found in some areas. The rooms of all three buildings are arranged around central courtyards with stone installations, perhaps for water collection. The courtyard of Building III has a set of stairs that originally led to a second story. The ceramic finds include several bowls of Late Roman Red Ware, as well as Fine Byzantine Ware (FBW) bowls, locally-made basins, cooking pots, jars, juglets, and oil lamps.<sup>181</sup> Glass, iron nails, and burnt date-pits were also uncovered, as was a fragment of a chancel screen in secondary use, possibly from the synagogue.<sup>182</sup>

It is difficult to determine why the structures went out of use. Although the excavators do not report large amounts of ash or soot, the possibility that the buildings

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<sup>178</sup> Hizmi 2002: 113-14, pl. 2.

<sup>179</sup> Hizmi 2002: 114; Magen 1983: 63.

<sup>180</sup> A general plan of Area T is included in Hizmi and Cohen 1983: 73.

<sup>181</sup> Hizmi 2002: pl. 3.

<sup>182</sup> Hizmi and Cohen 1983: 74. No photograph or drawing of the chancel screen has been published.

were destroyed by fire should not be eliminated. The presence of whole, restorable cooking pots and jars in Area H, as well as the bronze vessels, suggests that occupation came to an abrupt end.

Regarding the date, Hizmi describes the settlement as Byzantine.<sup>183</sup> While most of the pottery can be dated to as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> c., several forms continue into the 8<sup>th</sup> c. and later. For example, Hizmi identifies FBW bowls, which have a range from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> c. to late 7<sup>th</sup>/early 8<sup>th</sup> c. (Forms 1A, 1B, 1D), and forms that continued into the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> c. (Forms 2C, 2D).<sup>184</sup> He also identifies casseroles that continued as late as the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> c. (Magness' Form 1), and jars that continue into the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> c. (Magness' Holemouth Jar Form 2, Storage Jars Forms 6A and 7).<sup>185</sup> In addition, Hizmi includes several lamps in his report (though he does not identify the forms).<sup>186</sup> Among these are two large candlestick lamps (Magness' Form 3A and 3C), and at least three early channel-nozzle lamps (Magness' Forms 4B and 4C), which continued into the late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>187</sup> Based on these finds, occupation apparently continued into the Umayyad period, and perhaps even into the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c.

### **2.1.6 Conclusion**

The synagogue complex at Na'aran provides evidence of a relatively large Jewish community in the vicinity of the associated wadi and springs during the Byzantine and

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<sup>183</sup> Hizmi 2002: 114.

<sup>184</sup> For the FBW bowls, see Hizmi 2002: pl. 5; for the dates and forms, see Magness 1993: 193-94, 98.

<sup>185</sup> For the casseroles, see Hizmi 2002: pl. 6: nos. 1-2; and for their dates and forms, see Magness 1993: 211. For the jars, see Hizmi 2002: pl. 6: nos. 4-6.; and for their dates and forms see Magness 1993: 233, 227, 231.

<sup>186</sup> Hizmi 2002: pls. 7 and 8.

<sup>187</sup> Magness 1993: 251, 255.

Early Islamic periods. Since large-scale excavations of the village have not been carried out, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the location of the building relative to the town. The location at the edge of the wadi does not place the building on any sort of local high-spot, as is the case at Kh. Susiya, H. ‘Anim, and Rimmon (see below, sections 4.1, 4.4, 5.1), for example.<sup>188</sup> The proximity to the wadi may suggest a preference for a fertile place with water, although the local wadis flow only occasionally, making the primary water source for the village one of the several springs in the vicinity.<sup>189</sup>

The synagogue’s complex including the large courtyard and auxiliary room was apparently a multipurpose center. Although there are too few material remains to suggest the uses of the auxiliary room, comparative evidence and literary sources suggest that the space may have been used for various assemblies, as a *triclinium*, or as a study area, that is, a *bet-midrash*.<sup>190</sup> The smaller courtyard’s use as an atrium (see above) rests upon the identification of the square depression in its center as a water basin. The fact that the smaller courtyard does not conform to the layout of a standard atrium—as it is not surrounded by a *quadriporticus*—suggests that the water basin filled an important

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<sup>188</sup> See Levine 2005: 314-15.

<sup>189</sup> Levine 2005: 114, 316 mentions proximity to water as one factor in choosing a synagogue’s location. The suggestion was proposed by Lauterbach 1936, though he was attempting to make the connection between synagogues and water sources regarding Diaspora synagogues and those built during the 1<sup>st</sup> c. specifically. Widespread evidence of this phenomenon during the Late Roman and Byzantine period does not exist. On the occasional flow of the springs, see Hizmi 2002. The village of Na‘aran could have received its water from any one of a number of springs, including Duk, Nu‘eimah, Shusha’, or ‘Awjā to the north. The Jericho springs of Sultan and Fu`ar could also have been utilized. See Hizmi 2002: 11, Table 3, from Ben-Yosef 1979.

<sup>190</sup> Levine 2005: 317-18. The possibility that the Na‘aran synagogue complex was used as a hostel is less likely, since there are no obvious guest rooms. Moreover, the evidence for synagogues used as hostels tends to be earlier, e.g., the Theodotus inscription from Jerusalem (see Levine 2005: 318-19). No appropriate water installation was uncovered at Na‘aran which would suggest that the facilities were used for ritual ablution.

function to those frequenting the synagogue.<sup>191</sup> Literary sources mention the use of a *gornah*, that is, a basin for ritual foot-washing prior to prayer in late antique synagogues.<sup>192</sup> In any case, both courtyards probably worked together as a general place of assembly and congregation.<sup>193</sup>

Despite irregularities in the layout of the complex, the synagogue's main hall conforms to standard dimensions and forms. Vincent points out that the dimensions of the hall are nearly identical to the synagogue at Ḥ. 'Ammudim (Umm el-'Amed in Galilee), and very similar to the synagogues at Chorazin, Meiron, and Bar'am.<sup>194</sup> These similarities highlight the connection between the Na'aran synagogue and Galilean-type synagogues, although, as Vincent notes, the entrances are *not* on the Jerusalem-oriented façade but the opposite wall. It is unclear whether the orientation was due to specific theological or liturgical concerns at Na'aran, or was dictated by pre-existing structures.

As mentioned above, several features of the main hall's structure are unknown due to the state of preservation at the time of the excavations. Most significant is the southern section, which may have included an apse. If one accepts a 6<sup>th</sup> c. date for the laying of the mosaic (see above) and an 8<sup>th</sup> date for the building's destruction (see below), then the comparative evidence makes it very likely that the structure included

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<sup>191</sup> On the form of a standard atrium, see Krautheimer 1965: 359.

<sup>192</sup> On foot-washing prior to prayer in late ancient synagogues, see Bar-Ilan 1992; Levine 2005: 331. See also below on En-Gedi (section 3.1) and Gaza (section 6.1).

<sup>193</sup> Levine 2005: 330-31.

<sup>194</sup> Vincent and Benoit 1961: 161-62. For Ḥ. 'Ammudim, see Levine 1982; for Chorazin, see Yeivin 2000; for Meiron, see Meyers et al. 1981; for Bar'am, see Jacoby 1987. These synagogues had been surveyed by Vincent's day, though none was excavated; see Kohl and Watzinger 1916.

either an apse or a niche set into the southern wall.<sup>195</sup> In addition, marble fragments uncovered by both Vincent and Hizmi (see above) suggest that the synagogue had, at least for part of its history, a chancel screen demarcating the space at the southern end of the building.

The mosaic depictions in the main hall and narthex are among the most interesting of the synagogues known from Palestine. As mentioned above, the narthex menorah, with its geometric style, eleven wicks/flames, and Christianizing three-hills base is unusual in Jewish art.<sup>196</sup> The three-hills base, used in Christian art as a schematic depiction of the rock of Golgotha (see above), suggests that the community was comfortable appropriating specifically Christian motifs or unaware of the meaning of this design in Christian art. The inhabited scrolls panel of the nave suggests that the Jews of Na‘aran did not take offense to more subtle or neutral Christian or Classical motifs in their art.

Multi-paneled naves elsewhere have prompted some scholars to attempt programmatic readings of the mosaic art in synagogues.<sup>197</sup> The limits and problems surrounding programmatic readings will be discussed below, as will some of the more significant features of the mosaic. One point worth noting relates to the Helios-and-

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<sup>195</sup> See generally Chiat 1982: 339, Table 8; Hachlili 1988: 179-82; Levine 2005: 355-56.

<sup>196</sup> The use of eleven wicks/flames may have been in accordance with the rabbinic prohibition against depicting images of the Jerusalem Temple, its courts, or its furniture, specifically the seven-branched menorah, as described in the *b.Menahot* 28b, *b.‘Abodah Zarah* 43a, and *b.Rosh Hashanah* 24a-b. See Hachlili 2001: 200-01. Because this prohibition does not appear in the Palestinian Talmud, however, it is somewhat less relevant for our subject. In any case, the rest of the synagogue’s mosaic (particularly panel three of the nave) suggests that the artisan and his patrons had no qualms about depicting Temple motifs explicitly.

<sup>197</sup> Most notably, see Weiss 2005: 225-62; but see also Goodenough 1953-65: I, 241-53; Kraeling 1956; Schwartz 2000; and Kühnel 2000.

zodiac motif at Na‘aran. The synagogue building is oriented southward, *generally* toward Jerusalem, but the actual direction of Jerusalem is more southwest. If we understand Aries (the month of *Nisan*) as the first month of the year in the Jewish calendar (see above), the zodiac at Na‘aran is oriented toward Jerusalem. This is also the case in the Sepphoris mosaic.<sup>198</sup> Since the seasons and zodiac are not correlated at Na‘aran (see fig. 12), *Tishrei*/autumn is oriented toward Jerusalem. While the significance of this is beyond the scope of the present study, it is worth noting that *Tishrei* marks the beginning of the Jewish calendar for the purpose of counting years (according to the rabbinic determinations), and *Nisan* marks the beginning of the Jewish calendar for the cycle of festivals (according to the biblical, and perhaps priestly, mandate).

Although the images of the Na‘aran mosaic are impressive, the iconoclastic destruction has received the most attention from scholars. As we have shown above, the phases and dating of the iconoclasm are less certain than previous scholarship has assumed. The nature of the iconoclasm is equally curious. There are several cases in which the figures’ extremities—arms, legs, tails—were left untouched. Conversely, in the case of Daniel and the extant lion in panel three, the hand and paws were removed, but the remainder of the arm and forelegs was left untouched. One might suggest that the iconoclasts were only interested in removing specific body parts, such as heads or eyes.<sup>199</sup> However, in the cases of Cancer and Scorpio in panel two, the eyes were spared.

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<sup>198</sup> See Weiss 2005.

<sup>199</sup> Examples of such phenomena exist elsewhere, e.g., in the Dura-Europos synagogue (Kraeling 1956: Pls. LV, LVIII, LIX, LXII, LXIII, LXIV, LXXIV, LXXV), the Meroth synagogue (Talgam 1987), and Tomb I at Maresha (Jacobson 2007: 6, 27). None of these cases has been identified conclusively as iconoclasm carried out by Jews.

Furthermore, the Gazelle Mosaic and several birds were left untouched. Scholars frequently characterize the iconoclasm here as careful or meticulous—citing the caged bird in panel one and Virgo and Pisces in panel two of the nave—but there are numerous examples of seemingly haphazard destruction. Moreover, there is nothing about the iconoclasm to suggest that the perpetrators were interested in anything but defacing—rather than carefully removing—the majority of the mosaic’s figures (see for example fig. 30). That is to say, it does not appear that the iconoclasts were being as meticulous as often assumed. Therefore there is little evidence that the iconoclasts intended to continue to use the building themselves.

It follows that no study of the Na‘aran synagogue should assume that the destruction to the mosaic’s figural images was done by the Jewish community that used the building. Several other possibilities exist. For example, historical sources refer to enmity between the community at Na‘aran and their neighbors. The 6<sup>th</sup> c. *Life of Chariton* describes how violence broke out between the Jews of Na‘aran and the Christians in the monastery at Dok (Jebel Qarantal) and perhaps also in Jericho.<sup>200</sup> An aggadic commentary on the book of Lamentations refers to infighting between the Jews of Na‘aran and the Christians of Jericho.<sup>201</sup> The arrival of the Muslims and the construction of the palace complex at Kh. el-Mafjar in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. might also have led to violence, especially in light of the construction of an aqueduct to divert the waters of the springs of Nu‘eima and Duk to the palace.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, since there is

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<sup>200</sup> *Life of Chariton* 578; see Avi-Yonah 1993: 1075. On Jericho, see Eshel 1985: 86.

<sup>201</sup> *Lamentation Rabbah* 1:17.

<sup>202</sup> See Hamilton 1959: 5.

no indisputable archaeological evidence that can verify that the iconoclastic event took place prior to the building's destruction by fire, the damage could have been done at any time in the 1,100 years or so prior to the synagogue's discovery in 1918. We will consider the greater Jewish and Christian context of this iconoclasm below.

Regarding the date of the building, we are cautiously content to place the construction of the extant phase of the synagogue in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. based on the stylistic evidence of the mosaic and in lieu of stratigraphic evidence. The fire damage to the mosaics, as noted by Hamdan and Benelli, and the few burnt timbers uncovered by Vincent suggest that the building came to a violent and abrupt end, presumably at the same time that the domestic areas associated with the synagogue went out of use. Based on the ceramic finds in the domestic areas, we suggest that synagogue continued to function into the 8<sup>th</sup> c.

## 2.2 Jericho<sup>203</sup>

The synagogue at Jericho is often referred to as the “*Shalom ‘al Yisrael* Synagogue,” on account of the inscription found in the center of the hall's floor (see below).<sup>204</sup> While the identification of the building as a Jewish synagogue is not in question, the circumstances surrounding the building's excavation and publication pose a significant problem. Therefore we must rely upon some conjecture in the following

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<sup>203</sup> In addition to the site-specific references below, see the following catalog entries: Saller 1972: 44-45, no. 49; Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 189-92; Chiat 1982: 253-55; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: no. 108; Ilan 1991; Dauphin 1998: 9/82; Milson 2007: 407-08.

<sup>204</sup> This “Jericho synagogue” should not be confused with the purported Hasmonean “synagogue” identified and excavated by Netzer at Tulul Abu el-‘Ayaliq (see Netzer 2008, and literature cited there).



analysis. As with Na‘aran, however, the importance of the Jericho synagogue cannot be overstated in any discussion of late-antique Judaism.

### **2.2.1 Location and Identification**

The Byzantine settlement at Jericho is typically identified with the modern city, the center of which is about 2.0 km southeast of Tell es-Sultan (Bronze Age Jericho)<sup>205</sup> and about 2.2 km south-southeast of the synagogue site. The synagogue (NIG 241350/640250; 31°52'27"N, 35°26'58"E) is located about 500 m northeast of the tell in a flat plain, about 1.25 km southwest of Kh. el-Mafjar, and about 3.15 km southeast of the Na‘aran synagogue. There are several water sources in the vicinity, but the closest is at Tell el-Sultan.<sup>206</sup> Eusebius mentions Byzantine Jericho and was apparently aware of the distinction between that place and the biblical city, as well as 1<sup>st</sup>-c. Jericho.<sup>207</sup> In addition, he uses the site as a fixed point of reference for other sites, but since Jericho plays such an important role in the biblical traditions, there is no reason to assume that Eusebius' remarks indicate anything about the size or stature of the city in his day. *Lamentations Rabbah* 1.17 mentions Jericho along with Na‘aran, indicating the proximity of the two places; however, the suggestion here is that the community in Jericho was *not* Jewish but rather a Christian community with whom the Jews of Na‘aran had been in conflict.

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<sup>205</sup> Foerster 1993.

<sup>206</sup> See Hizmi 2002: Table 3, following Ben-Yosef 1979. The spring was estimated in the 1970s to produce 612 mm of water per hour.

<sup>207</sup> *Onom.* 104.25. Notley and Safrai 2005: 101, n. 529 suggests that Eusebius was familiar with Tell Jericho and Tullul Abu el-‘Ayaliq as the sites of biblical and Hasmonean-Herodian Jericho, respectively, though this suggestion is unsubstantiated.

### 2.2.2 Research History

The building was discovered by the landowner while preparing the area for banana cultivation.<sup>208</sup> The excavation was carried out in one short season in 1936 under the direction of D. C. Baramki on behalf of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine.<sup>209</sup> Following the excavation, the landowner constructed a building over the surviving mosaic pavement, thus preserving the site. Unlike the Na‘aran synagogue, all sections of the mosaic were retained at the site. More recently, conservation work has been carried out on the mosaic pavement in situ by the Palestinian Mosaics Workshop with the support of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum.<sup>210</sup>

The short report by Baramki suggests that the excavation in 1936 was little more than a clearing of the mosaic and a general sketching of the walls.<sup>211</sup> Baramki relates that only the mosaic pavement and foundations of the wall survived,<sup>212</sup> although the published photographs indicate that the lower portions of the walls just above the floor level also survived in some places, perhaps to a height of 50 cm.<sup>213</sup> In any case, the southeast wall and adjoining part of the northeast wall up to the entrance do not survive at all, though

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<sup>208</sup> Baramki 1938: 73.

<sup>209</sup> See Baramki 1938. Sukenik 1949b: 14 indicates that the excavation took place in 1934, though all other sources indicate that it was actually in 1936. Sukenik’s error is understandable since Baramki worked at a number of sites in the Jericho region during the 1930s.

<sup>210</sup> Hamdan and Benelli, personal communication, February 2009.

<sup>211</sup> See Baramki 1938.

<sup>212</sup> Baramki 1938: 73.

<sup>213</sup> Baramki 1938: XVII1. It is unclear what Baramki means when he says “foundation” (Baramki 1938: 73). Typically, this term refers to the mostly subterranean part of the substructure, upon which the actual walls are placed. However, some sections of the preserved walls appear to be of well-cut ashlar above the level of the floor, suggesting that they served as the base of the wall to support additional ashlar, mud-bricks, or concreted fieldstones or rubble, rather than simply a subterranean support structure.

they can be reconstructed to a fair degree of accuracy (see fig. 36). Very few finds from the excavation were reported, and none in any great detail. Most studies of the Jericho synagogue over the past seventy years have examined the inscription or considered stylistic aspects of the mosaic pavement.

### **2.2.3 Description of the Synagogue**

Compared to the Na'aran synagogue-complex described above, the Jericho synagogue is small and simple. According to Baramki's report and sketch, the building consists only of a modest-sized hall with no courtyard, narthex, or other secondary rooms or adjoining structures. It should be pointed out, however, that a formal survey of the surrounding area was never conducted by the excavators. Indeed, the use of the area for crop-cultivation over the years has left no visible features on the landscape for 100 m or so in all directions. Without a systematic survey, there is no indication as to what structures may lie beneath the surface.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, Baramki's preliminary report includes no information regarding the extent of the area excavated. It is unclear if the excavators, in their effort to expose the mosaic, explored beyond the walls of the building. Moreover, the absence of the majority of the southeast wall precludes our ability to determine the existence of adjoining rooms. This gap in the evidence does not provide us with a license to speculate wildly on the synagogue's overall form and function but rather should serve as a word of caution regarding overly-positivistic assumptions of its layout.

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<sup>214</sup> According to Magen 1983: 63, a "short survey" was conducted in the area immediately surrounding the synagogue, indicating that the building was in the center of a crowded Jewish settlement. Since no other information has been published on this survey, we cannot comment further on the nature or extent of the settlement associated with the synagogue.

Baramki does not report the dimensions of the building, but based on his sketch, the interior dimensions are roughly 11.0 m NE-SW by 8.6 m NW-SE (fig. 36), with a varying wall-thickness of 75-100 cm.<sup>215</sup> The walls, constructed of large fieldstones and cut ashlar, apparently do not meet exactly at right angles, creating a slightly rhomboidal layout. The hall is oriented roughly toward Jerusalem, with an apse pointing to the southwest.<sup>216</sup> The synagogue's hall was entered through a single portal in the northeast wall opposite the apse, measuring about 1.88 m-wide.

The long walls of the building are oriented from the northeast to southwest. The locations of the apse and doorway, as well as the orientation of the inscriptions (see below), suggest that the attention was drawn toward the southwest wall and apse, that is toward the direction of prayer—presumably Jerusalem.<sup>217</sup> The building's overall orientation toward the southwest aligns the direction of prayer specifically toward Jerusalem.<sup>218</sup> Naturally, there is good reason to assume that this was deliberate on the part of the architect(s).<sup>219</sup>

According to Baramki's published sketch (fig. 36), parallel rows of pillars created a nave, measuring 3.4-m wide, and two aisles, each measuring 1.88-m wide. The rows consisted of two pillars and two pilasters (i.e., engaged pillars) in each row. As the

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<sup>215</sup> Because Baramki included no figures in his sketch or discussion, all dimensions were derived from his sketch and are therefore only approximate.

<sup>216</sup> Baramki 1938: 73.

<sup>217</sup> On orientation of synagogues and direction of prayer, see Levine 2000a: 303-04.

<sup>218</sup> Fig. 37 shows the interior of the hall with the apse at the far end oriented southwest ward. Note the relatively flat plain of the area, with Jebel Qarantal visible in the background.

<sup>219</sup> See Levine 2000a: 302-03, but see also Amit 2003: 168-79, who identifies variations on the Jerusalem-oriented architectural plan of synagogues in the southern Hebron Hills.

sketch indicates, the two pillars and the southwest pilaster of the northwest row were not uncovered. In fact, a photograph published by Baramki (fig. 37) shows a missing section of the flooring in the northwest aisle along the line of the missing pillars. It is possible that this damage was caused after the building had gone out of use, when the stones of the pillars on the northwest side were robbed out. On the other hand, the straightness of the missing section of mosaic may indicate that a wall was constructed in a later phase of the building, at which time the two pillars and one of the pilasters of the northwest row were removed (see below).

At the southwest end of the room are two steps leading up to the apse.<sup>220</sup> The irregularly-curved wall of the apse is not bonded with the southwest wall of the hall,<sup>221</sup> perhaps suggesting that this was part of a second phase or architectural afterthought.<sup>222</sup> In any case, the floor of the apse does not survive. To the right of the apse, along the northwest wall, were two stones that may indicate a shelf of some sort.<sup>223</sup>

The estimated usable, interior floor-space of the hall is 72.45 m<sup>2</sup>, based on the dimensions above, and not including any hypothetical second-story galleries.<sup>224</sup> The pillars probably supported arches, over which wooden galleries could have been built.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Baramki 1938: 75.

<sup>221</sup> Baramki 1938: 75.

<sup>222</sup> Milson 2007 suggests this possibility.

<sup>223</sup> Baramki 1938: 75.

<sup>224</sup> Dimensions: 11.03 m × 8.63 m = 95.19 m<sup>2</sup>. From this total square-footage, subtract 3.49 m<sup>2</sup> for the pillar areas, 2.00 m<sup>2</sup> for the area in front of the door, and 17.25 m<sup>2</sup> for a sizeable area at the end of the hall and in front of the apse. Result: 72.45 m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>225</sup> For examples, see the Church of the Lions at Umm er-Rasas (Piccirillo 1993: 236-37) and Church A at Nitl (Piccirillo 1989: 263-65; Robert Schick, personal communication, March 2009).

Baramki reported that these pillars do not rest upon stylobates or deep foundations, perhaps limiting their functionality as support structures.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, the possibility that pillars supported arches and/or second-story galleries should not be discounted. In consideration of the usable floor space and possible galleries, the estimated maximum occupancy would have been between 50 and 391 people.<sup>227</sup>

The entire floor was paved in mosaics, with the northwest aisle consisting of conspicuously less fine tesserae.<sup>228</sup> Along the line of the southeast wall, there is a cut where the mosaic floor ends. The cut is less than a half-meter away from the line of the wall at the east corner but tapers off toward the southwest (see fig. 36). The irregular line and the missing section of wall along this cut suggest that the stones were robbed out for reuse.

Following Goodenough's analysis, the nave mosaic (fig. 38) is best understood as divided into three sections, each stretching the width of the nave.<sup>229</sup> Altogether the three

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<sup>226</sup> Baramki 1938: 73.

<sup>227</sup> If there were no second-story galleries and only floor-seating was utilized, then there would have been room for 96 people at 0.75 m<sup>2</sup> per person. If there *were* second-story galleries, and wooden benches were used, then there would have been room for 15 benches at 7.5 m in length on the ground-floor, and 6 benches at 10.0 m in length (facing inward) in the galleries. At 44 cm per person, the ground-floor could have accommodated 255 people, while an additional 136 people in the galleries, for a total of 391 people. It is also possible that only floor-seating was used and that no one sat in the nave (following Levine 2005: 379). In such a scenario, however, there would only have been room for 50 individuals. On the other hand, if benches were used in the aisles (facing inward), there could have been 6 benches at 10.0 m in length, leaving room for 136 people. (Thus Levine's notion that the nave was *not* utilized for seating space may be at least somewhat tenable here.) For the coefficients used here, and basic methodology see above and Spigel 2008: 128-75.

<sup>228</sup> Baramki noted that the nave mosaic contained 77 tesserae per 10 cm<sup>2</sup> (1938: 73, n.1); the northwest aisle mosaic contained 47 tesserae per 10 cm<sup>2</sup> (1938: 75, n. 4); and the southeast aisle contained 87 tesserae per 10 cm<sup>2</sup> (1938: 75: n. 4).

<sup>229</sup> See Goodenough 1953-65: I, 261.

sections measure about 10.1 m (from the inside of the threshold of the doorway to the steps leading up to the apse) by about 3.4 m (not including the inter-columnar spaces).

The first section of the nave mosaic is a narrow panel directly in front of the doorway, measuring about 3.4 m by 1.65 m. The mosaic consists of a dedicatory inscription facing the threshold, which was properly viewed by those entering the synagogue.<sup>230</sup> The six-line inscription is framed in the center by a box of two lines of single black tesserae. On either side of the inscription are square panels, similarly framed, with vegetal designs on the interior. The panel to the right of the inscription is poorly preserved but appears to enclose circular objects attached to curved and twisted branches, perhaps meant to represent flowers (if oriented in the same direction as the inscription) or pomegranates (if oriented in the opposite direction). The panel to the left of the inscription is less well-preserved than its counterpart. Only the upper right corner survives, depicting a group of small circles, arranged as a triangle with two twisted lines extending off one side. The image is apparently meant to depict a grape-bunch, viewed from the opposite direction of the inscription.

The letters of the Aramaic inscription are written in black, red, and green tesserae.<sup>231</sup> The mostly intact inscription reads as follows:<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. the Gazelle Mosaic at Na‘aran, section 2.1.3.

<sup>231</sup> Baramki 1938: 73, 76.

Remembered for good be the memory for good, (including) the entire	דכירן לטב יהוי דכרנהון לטב כל	1
holy community, the great and small ones, who were aided by	קהלה ק[די]שה רביה וזעוריה דסייע	2
the Lord of the Universe and (who) donated and made	יתהון מלכיה דעלמה ואתחזקון ועבדון	3
the mosaic. May the One who knows their names and those of their children, and of	פסיפסה די דע שמהתון ודבניהון ודאנשי	4
their households inscribe them in the Book of Life [together with]	בתיהון יכתוב יתהון בספר חייה [עם כל]	5
the righteous, the members (friends?) of all Israel. Pea[ce. Amen, <i>selah</i> .]	צדיקיה חברין לכל ישראל של[ום אמון סלה]	6

Avi-Yonah was the first to note the similarity of the phraseology in the first two lines with Jewish liturgy, specifically the *Yequm Purqan*, an Aramaic prayer that appears in *siddurim* as early as the medieval period, and continues to be read in Ashkenazi synagogues today.<sup>233</sup> According to Avi-Yonah, the epigrapher of the Jericho inscription must have been familiar with this prayer in particular. On the other hand, as Joseph Heinemann pointed out in his survey of Jewish liturgy, the tone and phrases of this sort of prayer are not unique but are characteristic of Jewish liturgy composed over several centuries in Palestine and Babylonia.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, as Naveh notes, the similarity of the phrase in line two with Talmudic language from *b.Ta'anit* 23b suggests that the form and

<sup>232</sup> This transcription and translation are slightly modified versions of those offered by Avi-Yonah 1938 and Naveh 1978: no. 69.

<sup>233</sup> Avi-Yonah 1938: 77. The *Yequm Purqan* prayer is today recited during the Shabbat and festival morning service following the recitation of the *haftarah* in Ashkenazi communities. It is not recited in the Sephardic tradition, though it does appear in Yemeni *siddurim* (Foerster 1981a: 29). For the text of the prayer, see Silverman 1946: 128. For characterization of this prayer as a “*Beth Midrash*”-type prayer, see Heinemann 1977: 261. See also Elbogen 1993: 162, 429, n. 18; Idelsohn 1932: 32, 141; and esp. Foerster 1981a: 15. The earliest attestation of the prayer’s first paragraph comes from the *Vitry Machzor*, compiled in the 12<sup>th</sup> c. (see Idelsohn 1932: 141).

<sup>234</sup> Heinemann 1977: 251-66.



wording are too common to know for sure that the epigrapher was familiar with the *Yequm Purqan*.<sup>235</sup> Additionally, several of the phrases here, such as דכירין לטב in line one, appear in Aramaic dedicatory inscriptions in synagogues all over Byzantine Palestine. As such, there are three possibilities: (1) The prayer served as the source for the inscription, i.e., the epigrapher *was* familiar with the prayer (as Avi-Yonah seemingly suggested). (2) The inscription served as the source for the prayer; that is, the author of the prayer was familiar with the inscription (which is even less likely). (3) A long-standing linguistic tradition served as the source for both the author(s) of the prayer and the epigrapher. This last possibility is the most likely.<sup>236</sup> In any case, several of the phrases used here—along with several prayers known from as early as the medieval period, including the *Yequm Purqan* and the *Mi Sheberakh*<sup>237</sup>—apparently are based on Aramaic translations of biblical Psalms. For example, the reference to “the great ones and small ones” appears in Ps. 115:13. Again though, there is no reason to assume that the epigrapher was himself translating from the Hebrew, rather than simply employing a well-known Aramaic formula from the liturgical and epigraphic traditions.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Naveh 1978: 104-05.

<sup>236</sup> Foerster 1981a suggests that there is a direct connection between the language used in the Jericho synagogue inscription (as well as several other synagogue inscriptions) and prayers found in the *siddurim* of the Jewish communities of Cochin in India and Kapha on the Crimean peninsula, especially in the *Qaddish* and the *Prayer for the Masses*, as well as *Yequm Purqan*. As Yahalom rightly points out though (following Heinemann and Naveh), the generic nature and widespread use of such formulas and wording among synagogue liturgy make it difficult to posit any meaningful conclusion based on such similarities (Yahalom 1981: 44).

<sup>237</sup> See Foerster 1981a: 23-26.

<sup>238</sup> Connections between Aramaic dedicatory inscriptions and synagogue liturgy known from later periods have been noted for some time; see Naveh 1989: 302.

Avi-Yonah also noted the anonymity and generality of this donor inscription recalling all members of the community, rather than any specific donor.<sup>239</sup> Blessings upon the masses are well-known from Jewish liturgy, as well as early Christian liturgy.<sup>240</sup> The characterization of the “community” (קהלה) as “holy” (ק[ד]י[שה]) is also notable, as it contrasts with the designation of the “holy place” used in the Na‘aran synagogue, thereby deemphasizing the sanctity of the place over the people in what may be a deliberate demonstration of the community’s theological perspective.<sup>241</sup>

The final section of the inscription appeals to God to “inscribe ... in the Book of Life” the donors and their families along with “the righteous” and “the members/friends of all Israel,” again employing phrases that appear in synagogue liturgy (like the *Yequm Purqan*).<sup>242</sup> It is noteworthy that the latter two are differentiated from those *in* the synagogue community who are mentioned in the previous line. The phrase, “members of all Israel,” petitions the prayer on behalf of those beyond the immediate community.

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<sup>239</sup> Avi-Yonah 1938: 77. Goodenough 1953-65: I, 261 likewise noted how unusual it is not to mention the donors by name.

<sup>240</sup> Foerster 1981a: 15-17, 29, 38-39.

<sup>241</sup> On the contrast between the “holy community” and “holy place,” see Naveh 1978: 104-05; and also see below on Susiya (section 4.1). On synagogue inscriptions serving as evidence for synagogue sacrality, see in general, Fine 1997: *passim*, but esp. pages 97-105. Fine is primarily concerned with showing the evidence of the “templization” of the synagogue, so he apparently omits a treatment of the Jericho inscription referring to the “holy community.”

<sup>242</sup> Naveh 1978: 105 notes that this last section—“members of all Israel”—is Hebraized, in keeping with the tradition known from y.Haggigah 83, 79d; this is likewise the case in liturgical usage as known from the modern Ashkenazi version of the *מי שברך*, as well as the second paragraph of the *יקום פורקן* known from the Cochin *siddur* (see Foerster 1981a: 24).

Alternatively, the word חברים has been translated “friends” instead of “members.”<sup>243</sup>

The term for “the righteous,” צדיקים, appears also in conjunction with the “Book of Life” on the ceremonial stone chair (“Seat of Moses”) at Chorazin,<sup>244</sup> as well as a sarcophagus at Beth She‘arim.<sup>245</sup> In those two cases and in liturgical usage, “the righteous” presumably refers to Jews, but at Jericho it is unclear.<sup>246</sup>

The second and third panels are bordered by a very simple guilloche design with only two bands twisted around each other.<sup>247</sup> The second panel is almost square, measuring about 3.4 m NW-SE by 3.1 m NE-SW. The interior of the second panel is decorated with interlocking squares and circles, laid out in an eight-by-eight grid, a fairly common design among the mosaics of late ancient Palestine.<sup>248</sup>

The third panel of the nave mosaic, southwest of the previous, is the same width but continues to the edge of the stairs of the apse, measuring 6.25 m in length. The mosaic design includes a background matrix on top of which are two centrally-located representations, both of which are properly viewed from the northeast, that is, from the

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<sup>243</sup> For the alternative translation, see Avi-Yonah 1938 and Foerster 1993: 695. See also Sokoloff 2002: 185, who points out that the use of the term חברים as “friend” is meant in the sense of “colleague” or “fellow scholar.”

<sup>244</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 17.

<sup>245</sup> See Naveh 1978: 105; Avigad 1974.

<sup>246</sup> Foerster 1981a: 24 notes that the prayers for the masses known from medieval synagogue liturgy mention both “the righteous” and “the members,” though he does not comment on their identities. In any case, there is no reason to assume that those repeating these liturgical phrases centuries later (and in very different contexts) would have intended the same meanings as their late-antique Palestinian counterparts.

<sup>247</sup> The double-band guilloche pattern does not appear in Avi-Yonah’s typology (see Avi-Yonah 1932).

<sup>248</sup> The pattern conforms to Avi-Yonah 1932: J2.

perspective of those facing away from the entrance of the hall and toward the apse. The background matrix is laid out as a crisscross pattern, diagonal to the edges of the panel. Between the diagonal lines, spades and diamonds alternate in a somewhat irregular pattern.<sup>249</sup>

About one-quarter of the way up the panel from the northeast end is a circular medallion measuring about 1.1 m in diameter.<sup>250</sup> The border of the medallion is simple, consisting of only two concentric lines of single black tesserae, separated by two rows of white tesserae. The bottom third of the medallion is sectioned off by a single-tessera line. Below the line is a Hebrew inscription written in black tesserae. It reads as follows:<sup>251</sup>

Peace upon Israel.	שלום על ישראל
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In addition to the language, the orthography of the inscription is noticeably different from that of the dedicatory inscription discussed above. The differences are most obvious in the *lameds* which have particularly long tails in this inscription, the *yod* which is much larger than those in the previous inscription, and the *'aleph* which looks more like a backwards “K.” There is little doubt that these inscriptions were laid by different hands.

While the physical aspects of the inscription—specifically the language and orthography—differ from the dedicatory inscription above, the general message is

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<sup>249</sup> The diagonal layout conforms to Avi-Yonah 1932: H1, the diamonds to Avi-Yonah 1932: E, and the spades to Avi-Yonah 1932: J6 (though without the stems).

<sup>250</sup> A copy is today located in the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt. Scopus campus. I thank Alegre Savariego of the IAA for bringing this to my attention. The object was removed from its findspot since 1967, presumably by the Staff Officer of Archaeology, although it was never registered by the IAA or the Palestinian National Authority’s Department of Antiquities. The piece was recently put on display at the Museum of the Good Samaritan near Ma’ale Adummim, east of Jerusalem.

<sup>251</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 68.

similar. The inscription's biblical antecedent is known from the closing lines of Ps. 125 and 128.<sup>252</sup> The phrase, “peace upon Israel”—or perhaps more intelligibly as the cohortative “*may peace be upon Israel*”—expresses the same sentiment as the communal prayer of the previous inscription. As with the dedication above, the central inscription parallels other blessings for peace known from Jewish liturgy.<sup>253</sup> Similar blessings for peace are known from a number of synagogue inscriptions—including, in Hebrew, En-Gedi, Susiya, Bar‘am, Gerasa, and Ḥusifah, and in Aramaic, Hammath-Tiberias and Beth-Shean.<sup>254</sup>

The inscription at Ḥusifah provides the closest parallel to this inscription in both form and location within the mosaic. While the orthography of the Ḥusifah inscription is different, the wording—שלום [ע]ל ישראל—is apparently the same and not combined with other phrases as at Jericho. In addition, the Ḥusifah inscription is situated in a

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<sup>252</sup> Naveh 1978: 66; Saller 1972: 45; Fine 2005: 93, *inter alia*.

<sup>253</sup> For example, the final line (in Hebrew) of the קדיש, known prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> c.; see Foerster 1981a: 17 and Nulman 1993: 185.

<sup>254</sup> For discussion, see Foerster 1981a: 15-17. On En-Gedi, see Naveh 1978: no. 70 (line 8). On Susiya, see Naveh 1978: no. 75 (line 6). On Bar‘am, see Naveh 1978: no. 1. On Gerasa, see Crowfoot and Hamilton 1929: 218; Naveh 1978: no. 50. On Ḥusifah, see Naveh 1978: no. 26; Dothan 1983: 53-54. On Beth-Shean, see Makhoully and Avi-Yonah 1933: 128-29, Pl. 1, fig. 2; Naveh 1978: no. 38. On Hammath-Tiberias, see Naveh 1978: no. 46. On En-Gedi and Susiya, see below also (sections 3.1.3.4 and 4.1.3). The usages at Susiya and En-Gedi may be as a closing prayer, meant to mark the end of a section within the inscription (much like אמן and סלה). Naveh 1978: no. 3, found at Alma, also includes a blessing for peace. In fact, it is more similar to the Jericho inscription, as it reads שלום על, rather than שלום ב-. The proximity of its find-spot to Bar‘am, as well as the similarity in the text of the inscription, raises the distinct possibility that the fragment originated at one of the synagogues of Bar‘am.

circular motif, in this case a wreath, and placed in a prominent spot within the synagogue, almost like a motto or seal.<sup>255</sup>

Above the inscription in the Jericho mosaic are three schematically-depicted symbols: a menorah, a lulav, and a shofar. The menorah is in the middle.<sup>256</sup> Its tripod base has two feet extending outward, while the middle foot protrudes to the left. The main shaft of the menorah extends vertically up to the branches, depicted as a half-rainbow (similar to the menorah in the narthex at Na‘aran). The branches are depicted as only single-lines of black tesserae, curving upward. The spaces above the two outer branches are filled with orange-brown tesserae, while the space above the innermost branches is filled with grayish-green tesserae. A horizontal cross-bar extends above the tips of the branches, on top of which are seven small squares, consisting of four tesserae each; these presumably represent either the flames, or wicks, or glass oil containers.<sup>257</sup>

While differing somewhat in style, the overall form of the central medallion in the mosaic of the Beth-Shean synagogue (B) is quite similar.<sup>258</sup> In the Beth-Shean mosaic, the medallion is set within an inhabited-scrolls motif, and the menorah is flanked by Jewish symbols, in this case the etrog (on the left) and an incense shovel on the right. While the supporting symbols differ from those at Jericho, they similarly recall Temple-imagery and refer to the Jewish festivals at the beginning of the year.<sup>259</sup> In one additional

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<sup>255</sup> See Makhoully and Avi-Yonah 1933: 122 and Fig. 1:B.

<sup>256</sup> Hachlili 2001: IS3.11. The photograph in Hachlili 2001: Pl. II-16 was published backward.

<sup>257</sup> Hachlili 2001: 161 identifies these as glass containers but offers no explanation.

<sup>258</sup> Bahat 1981: 84; Hachlili 2001: Pl. II-13.

<sup>259</sup> See Hachlili 1988: 267, who connects all these symbols specifically with the Feast of Tabernacles, i.e., Sukkot. While this is certainly the case for the lulav and etrog, the shofar is more properly identified with

point of similarity, the Beth-Shean mosaic includes a Hebrew inscription above the menorah that reads: *Shalom*. Despite these similarities though, the style of the Beth-Shean menorah—somewhat more veristic, with leafed branches, green-glass oil containers, and even flames—contrasts sharply with the stiff line-drawing execution at Jericho. Indeed, Hachlili notes that of all the images of a single menorah in synagogue mosaics, Jericho is the only one that does not depict ornamented branches.<sup>260</sup> Hachlili apparently includes the menorah in the narthex at Na‘aran (see above) among those that *are* ornamented. The stylized version of Na‘aran’s narthex menorah, however, is distinct from the ornamented menorahs to which Hachlili refers. It is therefore noteworthy that both Na‘aran and Jericho—two synagogues within geographic proximity—share this peculiarity of the menorah’s rendering.

This schematic style is also seen in the rendering of the lulav and shofar. The former consists of a shaft of two lines of tesserae, running parallel to the shaft of the menorah. Eight sprigs branch off of the main shaft, four on either side. The top of the lulav’s shaft is tapered, while the bottom widens to four tesserae across. The shofar, to the right of the menorah’s shaft, is depicted as a curved figure, with the narrower mouthpiece oriented upward—i.e., toward the menorah’s branches—and the broader bell-end oriented inward toward the center of the medallion. Both symbols consist of red-brown and black tesserae.

Moving southwest along the nave, toward the apse, the second symbol is depicted a little more than halfway across the panel, oriented in the same direction as the circular

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the New Year (Rosh Hashanah; Lev. 23:24 and Num. 29:1), while the incense shovel is more properly identified with the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur; Lev. 16:12). See also further below.

<sup>260</sup> Hachlili 2001: 59.

medallion. The representation was identified at its initial discovery as the “Ark of the Law” or the Torah shrine.<sup>261</sup> While comparanda and the literary evidence suggest that an *actual* wooden repository for the Torah scroll(s) stood in the hall during its use as a synagogue, there is no reason to assume that the symbol here was meant to depict its three-dimensional counterpart within the synagogue at Jericho. Instead, it should be understood as a symbolic representation that refers to more than a simple piece of furniture.<sup>262</sup> Additionally, it is very unlikely that this representation indicates the location of the hall’s Torah shrine.<sup>263</sup>

The geometrically-depicted symbol here consists of a series of squares forming a rectangle (measuring 1.1 m SE-NW by 1.4 m SW-NE) and a half-circle cap (measuring 40 cm across the southwest short end of the rectangle). On the bottom of the figure (i.e., the northeast short end), there are four short rectangles, presumably meant to represent the feet of the Torah shrine. It is worth noting that were it not for these four feet and the half-circle cap, the geometric design would not be identifiable. These two attributes—particularly the latter—are in fact crucial for a schematic representation of the symbol.

The mosaic pavements of the aisles are unremarkable geometric designs. Baramki included a few photographs of the mosaic in the aisle-mosaics in his 1938 article. The design of the northwest aisle appears to be a simple scale pattern.<sup>264</sup> The

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<sup>261</sup> Baramki 1938: 73.

<sup>262</sup> On the use of the three-dimensional Torah shrine in ancient synagogues, see Meyers 1999; Levine 2000a: 327-32.

<sup>263</sup> Contra Hachlili 1988: 278.

<sup>264</sup> Baramki 1938: Pl. XXI, 2. For pattern, see Avi-Yonah 1932: J4.



southeast aisle likewise consists of sections that correspond to designs characteristic of late antique Palestine.<sup>265</sup>

In addition to the mosaic pavement, schematic decoration appears on at least one architectural fragment of the synagogue. A stone capital uncovered at the site—probably from one of the pillars—depicts a crudely-executed menorah, flanked by two objects (fig. 39).<sup>266</sup> The schematic symbols were carved into the stone rather shallowly, and as broad, uniform lines, apparently cut with a single, flat-head tool by a relatively unskilled hand. The menorah is nine-branched, with a very short shaft and a squared-off tripod base. The branches extend broadly, encompassing most of the stone's face. To the lower-right of the menorah is an almond-shaped design, oriented roughly vertical, and bisected by an additional line. Given the context, the object is almost certainly meant to depict a lulav. To the lower-left of the menorah are two lines that meet at a ninety-degree angle, with the corner pointing inward, toward the menorah's shaft. The parallels and context suggest that the highly schematic design is meant to be a shofar.<sup>267</sup>

Baramki's cursory report does not provide details regarding the finds of the excavation. He does however mention the discovery of nine early 8<sup>th</sup> c. coins, three whole glass bottles, additional glass-bottle fragments, a bronze hanger for a lamp, and a

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<sup>265</sup> Baramki 1938: Pl. XX, 1-2. For patterns, see Avi-Yonah 1932: H1, H2, and H3.

<sup>266</sup> Baramki does not mention this piece in his 1938 report, and it does not appear in Hachlili 1988, 2001, or Milson 2007. While the whereabouts of the piece are unknown, an unpublished photograph in the IAA Archives indicates that piece was (at one time) on the grounds of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's campus at Mt. Scopus. See "IAA Archives, Mandate Records Files, file no. 77, Jericho, Tell es-Sultan."

<sup>267</sup> See Hachlili 1988: 256-66; 2001: 211-227 for ritual objects typically accompanying the menorah, including other shofars that are angled at ninety-degrees. Had one of the sides of the design described here been considerably longer than the other, we may have been inclined to identify it as a lulav. For example, see Hachlili 1988: 262.

bronze “filler” (apparently an ornamented cup with a handle).<sup>268</sup> All of these were found in the gap between the mosaic and wall to the right of the steps along the southwest wall. No ceramic finds are reported.

Photographs of the three whole glass bottles appear in Baramki’s report. One of these, a bottle with a globular body and straight neck, has parallels from Early Islamic sites throughout Palestine.<sup>269</sup> At Tiberias, this form was found in a stratum dated to 700-750; at Beth-Shean, the levels were identified as Umayyad.<sup>270</sup> Nevertheless, this form apparently continued into the 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>271</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Phases and Dates**

On account of the manner in which the synagogue was excavated and reported, the number of phases and associated dates have been open to multiple suggestions. Here we will attempt to discern the most plausible scenario based on the available archaeological evidence.

As mentioned above, the apse is the only architectural feature that *may* have been distinct from the outer walls; that is to say, the apse walls do not appear bonded, and therefore may have been part of a later phase. Unfortunately, the excavators did not expose the walls down to the base of the foundations to verify this suggestion, nor did they report the appearance of any disturbances in the soil related to the walls, i.e., construction trenches. Consequently, there is not enough evidence to determine the

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<sup>268</sup> Baramki 1938: 75, Pls. XXI, 1 and XXII.

<sup>269</sup> Baramki 1938: Pl. XXI, 1 (far right).

<sup>270</sup> On Tiberias, see Lester 2004: 182, no. 76. On Beth-Shean, see Hadad 2005: nos. 182-86.

<sup>271</sup> Sanlon and Pinter-Wilson 2001: 33; Hadad 2005: 23.

relative date of the apse's construction. As a result, here we consider the apse to be part of the same construction phase as the outer walls of the structure.

In addition, there is no indication that the excavators explored below the mosaic pavement. Therefore we cannot adequately consider the possible existence of a phase prior to the one in which the mosaic floor was laid. That said, any earlier phase probably would have been detectable to the excavators at the points where the mosaic was cut, namely in the west corner along the southwest wall, and perhaps also in the east corner along the southeast wall. Since no earlier phases were mentioned, and the foundations of the apse-wall were not explored more thoroughly, we must conclude based on the available evidence that the mosaic was part of the earliest phase of the building.

As mentioned above, a missing section of mosaic along the northwest row of pillars may provide evidence of a wall that ran the length of the hall, partitioning off the northwest aisle. The cut visible in the photograph (fig. 37) might have been the result of a robbers' trench which removed the pillars, though the straightness of the cut into the floor suggests otherwise. It appears that in a second phase of the structure, a wall was constructed here as a partition, thereby shrinking the size of the hall and creating a narrow side-room. Judging from the visible cut in the photograph, the wall would have been less than one meter thick—how much less is underterminable. The purpose of this long, narrow side-room is unknown. It seems likely though, that the synagogue had at least two phases.

Baramki suggested an 8<sup>th</sup>-c. date for the initial construction of the building based on “the coins, the basilical form of the synagogue, and the character of the mosaics and

letters.”<sup>272</sup> Since Baramki’s dating is often taken for granted by researchers, let us now consider each of his criteria.<sup>273</sup>

According to the excavator, nine coins with Kufic inscriptions dating to the early 8<sup>th</sup> c. were found in the gap in the mosaic along the southwest wall.<sup>274</sup> Because the gap was not sealed by the mosaic floor however, there is no reason to assume that the coins were deposited prior to construction. Foerster, who apparently had access to the unpublished coins, indicated that only three of them dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>275</sup> He therefore concluded that the building remained in use until the 8<sup>th</sup> c. While technically correct, Foerster would have been more accurate to say that the building remained in use *at least* until the 8<sup>th</sup> c., since the coins provide a *terminus post quem* rather than a *terminus ad quem* for the use of the synagogue. That said, it is worth recalling that the coins were found in unsealed loci. They could have been deposited at the site after the building had gone out of use, though the quantity of coins, as well as the associated finds in the deposit—including whole glass vessels and bronze implements—make this an unlikely scenario.

The “basilical form of the synagogue” to which Baramki refers similarly provides no evidence of a specifically 8<sup>th</sup>-c. date. An obvious foil—of which Baramki must have been aware—is the basilical synagogue at Beth Alpha, which is dated by an inscription to

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<sup>272</sup> Baramki 1938: 76.

<sup>273</sup> See Fine 2005: 94 and Milson 2007: 407, *inter alia*.

<sup>274</sup> Baramki 1938.

<sup>275</sup> Foerster 1993.

the 6<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>276</sup> More generally though, the basilica, as a building-type, had been in use for centuries for a variety of purposes, and for over two centuries in apsidal, religious architecture specifically.<sup>277</sup> The general form of the building is therefore not a valid criterion to suggest such a narrow date of construction.

As for the style of the mosaics, the problems of dating based on stylistic criteria have been addressed already. In the case of the Jericho synagogue, several of the geometric motifs appear as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> c. and continue through late antiquity, such as the scale-pattern in the northwest aisle. Indeed, others have suggested different dates based on the same artistic criteria: for example, Avi-Yonah suggested a 7<sup>th</sup>-c. date, and Foerster suggested a late 6<sup>th</sup>- or early 7<sup>th</sup>-c. date, both based on the style of the mosaics.<sup>278</sup> Avi-Yonah's typology assigned synagogues with aniconic and highly-geometric designs to the end of his linear development, but this does not help to clarify the absolute date of the Jericho synagogue.

Regarding the letters of the inscription, no study of the epigraphic morphology of Hebrew/Aramaic characters has yet provided a means to date inscriptions on the basis of paleography.<sup>279</sup> There are two major difficulties that inhibit the development of a paleographic typology for Hebrew-Aramaic inscriptions. First, the media of the inscriptions, i.e., mosaic and stone, lend themselves to a high degree of variability,

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<sup>276</sup> See Sukenik 1932.

<sup>277</sup> See Robertson 1945: 267-71; Krautheimer 1965; Welch 2003.

<sup>278</sup> Avi-Yonah 1965: 385; Foerster 1993. Thomsen 1936/37 also dates the construction to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c., presumably based on the style of the mosaics.

<sup>279</sup> For paleographic dating of Hebrew/Aramaic scripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Cross 1998. For an attempt at paleographic dating of Hebrew-Aramaic characters etched in stone, see Avigad 1976.

making it difficult to detect subtle changes in the script over time.<sup>280</sup> Second, and more significantly, very few of the inscriptions can be dated precisely. Unlike Greek dedicatory inscriptions in late antique churches, most Aramaic synagogue inscriptions do *not* carry their own date.<sup>281</sup> In addition, as we have seen already with Na‘aran synagogue, the associated finds often do not provide adequate dates for the inscriptions. As a result, there is almost no basis for Baramki’s suggestion that the form of the inscriptions’ letters provides a date.<sup>282</sup>

Paleography aside, the epigraphic evidence has also been considered in terms of its content. The longer of the two inscriptions in particular has served as an integral part of Hanan Eshel’s 8<sup>th</sup>-c. dating of the building.<sup>283</sup> Following Avi-Yonah’s treatment of the inscription, Eshel interprets the formula and style to have been closely related to Jewish liturgy of the Early Islamic period.<sup>284</sup> The problematic relationship between the inscription’s style and Jewish liturgy has been addressed already. To compound the matter, the date of composition for the prayers that employ similar liturgical formulas—such as the *Yeḡum Purqan*—is unclear. It is equally unclear how early the style used in

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<sup>280</sup> Naveh 1978: 5.

<sup>281</sup> Notable exceptions include the Beth Alpha inscription (Naveh 1978: no. 43) and the inscription from the Nabratein synagogue (Naveh 1978: no. 13). Also noteworthy are the funerary inscriptions from Zoar (see Misgav 2006 for overview), whose dated inscriptions are executed in red paint; the variance in media makes comparisons for dating purposes problematic. Conversely, none of the inscriptions from the Beth She‘arim necropolis, which *are* carved in stone, includes a date.

<sup>282</sup> Goodenough 1953-65: I, 262 refers to a colleague who indicated a 4<sup>th</sup>-c. date for the inscription based on the script, a claim that underscores the problem of epigraphic paleography.

<sup>283</sup> Eshel 1983 and 1985.

<sup>284</sup> Eshel 1983: 178; 1985: 83-84. For Avi-Yonah’s treatment of the inscription, see Avi-Yonah 1938.

both the inscription and prayer was used.<sup>285</sup> Indeed, the style of the inscription is just as imprecise a dating criterion—if not more so—as the artistic and architectural styles.

In lieu of datable finds from sealed, excavated contexts, Eshel provides some circumstantial evidence to propose an 8<sup>th</sup>-c. date that is worth considering. First, he points out the issue of water-access in the vicinity of the synagogue. According to Eshel, inhabitants northeast of Tell es-Sultan would not have had access to water until the construction of the palace complex at Kh. el-Mafjar, about 1.25 km away.<sup>286</sup> The closest spring is that of the tell to the southwest, about 650 m away.<sup>287</sup> With the construction of the palace complex at Kh. el-Mafjar in the second quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> c., two aqueducts apparently were erected to supply water to the bathhouse and irrigate the fields east of the palace.<sup>288</sup> One aqueduct was fed by the springs of Nu'eima and Duk, west-northwest of the site; the second aqueduct was fed by the spring at the base of Tell es-Sultan. It is the latter whose path would have edged very close to the site of the synagogue, and so presumably serviced the community there from about the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. onward.

To apply an 8<sup>th</sup>-c. date to the synagogue based on the presumed date of the aqueduct would require one to show that (a) the patrons required access to large amounts of water at their synagogue, and (b) the aqueduct is the only means by which water could have been obtained at the synagogue. In fact, no other water installations—e.g.,

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<sup>285</sup> On the dates of liturgical compositions, see Idelsohn 1932: 31-32; Heinemann 1977: 251-61; Foerster 1981a.

<sup>286</sup> Eshel 1983: 179; 1985: 84.

<sup>287</sup> Hamilton 1959: 5.

<sup>288</sup> Hamilton 1959: 5 points out that while the remnants of the aqueduct system have been reconstructed repeatedly over the centuries (right into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), the apparent line of the two aqueducts suggest that they were *originally* built for the 8<sup>th</sup>-c. palace complex. On the problems of dating the complex at Kh. el-Mafjar, see Hamilton 1969 and Whitcomb 1988.

cisterns—were excavated at the synagogue site. That said, we should recall that little to no excavation was carried out beyond the walls of the building where such an installation might be expected. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that large amounts of water were required at the synagogue. Attempts to connect the prevalence of water installations—particularly *miqva'ot* but also cisterns—to late antique synagogues have been thwarted by the statistical evidence indicating that water installations were generally *not* an integral part of the synagogue-complexes.<sup>289</sup> In any case, without further excavation and an intensive survey in the surrounding field, there is no way to know how close to the synagogue patrons lived. They may have resided in some elusive structures surrounding the building and used individual cisterns for water collection and storage; or perhaps they lived less than a kilometer away at the tell, where they would have had access to the fresh water spring.<sup>290</sup> As a result, an 8<sup>th</sup>-c. construction date for the aqueduct does not provide good evidence for the date of the synagogue.

As additional indirect evidence, Eshel posits a newly-arrived Jewish community in the vicinity of Jericho in the late-7<sup>th</sup> and early-8<sup>th</sup> centuries. He first points to the discovery of two bilingual inscriptions—Arabic and Hebrew/Aramaic—at Kh. el-Mafjar.<sup>291</sup> The inscription suggests that Jews were among the builders of the palace

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<sup>289</sup> See Reich 1990: 142-44; Levine 2000a: 308-11, though cf. below, Appendix .A

<sup>290</sup> Recent excavations by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum are said to have uncovered Byzantine domestic units on the tell, but no publication has yet appeared on these excavations to my knowledge.

<sup>291</sup> The primary publication, Hamilton 1959, does not treat these two pieces in any great detail, though a photograph of one was included (Hamilton 1959: Pl. XCIV.2), as well as in Hamilton 1993: 928. For a brief overview, see Hamilton 1959: 42-43. See also Hamilton 1978: 80. No study of this inscription has ever been carried out.



complex there.<sup>292</sup> Eshel further utilizes references to Jews living in the Jericho region and cultivating date-palms in Arabic historical sources in order to reconstruct a scenario whereby the Jews of Na‘aran were displaced to a location closer to Jericho proper in the late-7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>293</sup>

Both the inscription and the references to Jews in historical sources suggest that there was a Jewish community in the vicinity of Jericho at the beginning of the Early Islamic period. The presence of a Jewish community, however, does not help us to determine the date of the synagogue’s construction. Indeed, the archaeological evidence alone suggests that Jews were living in the Jericho region through the Byzantine period and into the 8<sup>th</sup> c. The vague and temporally-imprecise evidence provided by historical sources adds little to a discussion of the chronology of the Jericho synagogue itself.

In the end, we are left with no firm criteria to date the construction of the building. What we can say, however, is that the building remained in use at least into the 8<sup>th</sup> c.—as evidenced by the coins—and was probably occupied contemporaneously with the palace at Kh. el-Mafjar (at least in the palace’s initial phase).<sup>294</sup> The available evidence does not indicate when the building went out of use. Whether or not the building continued in use beyond the Umayyad period is unclear.

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<sup>292</sup> Hamilton 1959: 42-43; Eshel 1985: 85. Christian masons were also identified as the authors of some of the Greek inscriptions from Kh. el-Mafjar (Hamilton 1959: 42-43). No one has ever suggested that these masons be identified with one of the church communities at Jericho.

<sup>293</sup> Eshel 1982: 179; 1985: 87.

<sup>294</sup> On the problems of dating the phases at Kh. el-Mafjar, see Whitcomb 1988. Hamilton’s report addresses only the structures in their original state, and does not deal with the stratigraphy of the site. For discussions of the stratigraphy, see publications by Baramki in *QDAP* 5-10. Whitcomb 1988 suggests that Kh. el-Mafjar remained in use with only a minor disruption in occupation throughout the Abbasid period.

The finds from the synagogue may shed some light on how the structure went out of use. The whole glass vessels suggest that the building was not deliberately destroyed, and the lack of any (reported) ash covering the mosaic floor may support this. That said, the bronze utensils and coins—metal objects of inherent value and not typically discarded purposely—may suggest that the building was abandoned in haste, perhaps in the same event during which the domestic units near the Na‘aran synagogue were abandoned.<sup>295</sup> If indeed that is the case, then the synagogues at Na‘aran and Jericho, at a distance of about 3.15 km, were in use contemporaneously in their final phases, and both were abandoned toward the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. (or shortly thereafter), a date which coincides with the 8<sup>th</sup>-c. coins and the glass vessel described above.<sup>296</sup>

### **2.2.5 Conclusion**

In summary, the available archaeological evidence inhibits our ability to narrow the ranges of dates for the construction and destruction of the synagogue. Two construction phases, however, can apparently be discerned: the first, in which the structure was built as an apsidal basilica, and the second, in which the hall was partitioned with a northeast-southwest wall enclosing the northwest aisle. Since the mosaic floor with its explicitly Jewish iconography was visible in both phases, we can assume that the building was conceived of and employed as a synagogue throughout its history. The finds only indicate that the building was constructed toward the end of the

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<sup>295</sup> See above, section 2.1.5.

<sup>296</sup> Milson 2007: 407 indicates a date of 747 for the end of occupation at the Jericho synagogue, apparently attributing its destruction to the earthquake of that year, which may have also brought down the Na‘aran synagogue. The end of occupation of the Jericho and/or Na‘aran synagogues may additionally coincide with a break in occupation at Kh. el-Mafjar following the political turmoil in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. That said, Whitcomb 1988 has demonstrated that political turmoil is in fact not reflected in the stratigraphy and ceramic corpus at Kh. el-Mafjar; instead the ceramics indicate continuity from the period of the complex’s construction into the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> c.

Byzantine period or beginning of the Early Islamic period—that is, southern Palestine’s “late antiquity.” The synagogue remained in use into the Early Islamic period, at a time characterized by regional political change followed by diverse cultural and religious interaction.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DEAD SEA REGION

#### 3.0.1 Introduction

Moving southward from the Lower Jordan Valley, one arrives in the most arid region of Palestine, along the shores of the Dead Sea.<sup>1</sup> While the climate closely resembles that of the Arava Valley and the Negev to the south, the Dead Sea Basin has been linked historically and economically with the Judean Hills and Jordan Valley as well as with sites on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.<sup>2</sup> The localized topography of the Dead Sea Region is delineated from the Judean Hills by the sharp rise in elevation and rugged terrain to the west.<sup>3</sup>

#### 3.1 En-Gedi<sup>4</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Location and Identification

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<sup>1</sup> This area includes also parts of the Judean Desert east of the hill country. Here the phrase “Dead Sea Basin” or “Dead Sea Region” refers also to the eastern shore of the Dead Sea in Transjordan. See Orni and Efrat 1973: 66.

<sup>2</sup> Orni and Eftat 1973: 5.

<sup>3</sup> Milson (2007: 356) and Ilan (1981: 318) include En-Gedi among the synagogues of the Southern Hebron Hills. The present study treats the Dead Sea Region as distinct based on topographic considerations.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to site-specific references cited below, see entries in the following catalog entries: Saller 1972: 32-33, no. 33; Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 108-14; Chiat 1982: 219-24; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: nos. 73-74; Ilan 1991: 318-21; Dauphin 1998: 15-16/29; Milson 2007: 352-57.

The oasis of En-Gedi is located on the western shore of the Dead Sea (see fig. 40).<sup>5</sup> Occupation in the vicinity of the oasis is well-attested in biblical, classical, and early Christian sources.<sup>6</sup> In the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, the village probably would have been part of the city-territory of Eleutheropolis, although En-Gedi was probably more closely related to other sites along the Dead Sea and in the Hebron Hills (see below).<sup>7</sup> During the Roman and Byzantine periods the town was well-known in Palestine, and perhaps empire-wide, for its cultivation of dates and balsam bushes.<sup>8</sup> Archaeological investigations since the 1940s have uncovered evidence of human activity at En-Gedi beginning in the Chalcolithic period, with nearly continuous occupation from the end of the Iron Age (late 7<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E.) to the Early Islamic period.<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, writing during the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c., referred to En-Gedi as a “very large Jewish village” (κώμη μεγίστη Ἰουδαίων) in his day, a characterization which the archaeological evidence seems to support (see below).<sup>10</sup> Despite literary evidence attesting to destructions of Jewish communities in southern Palestine in the late 4<sup>th</sup> c., the excavation

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<sup>5</sup> The name of the site is alternatively transliterated ‘Ein Gedi or ‘En Gedi. Biblical and rabbinic literature: **עֵין גֵּדִי**; Josephus and Eusebius: Ἐνγαδδαῖ, Ἐνγάδδι. See Hüttenmeiter and Reeg 1977: 108.

<sup>6</sup> Including but not limited to 1 Sam. 23:29; 24:1; Jos. 15:62; Song of Songs 1:14; Jos., *War* 3.55; 4.402; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 5.73; Eus., *Onom.* 86:18. See Mazar et al. 2007: 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> On the boundaries of Eleutheropolis and En-Gedi’s probable inclusion, see Avi-Yonah 2002: 161.

<sup>8</sup> See Hirschfeld 2007: 10-12, 15; Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua 2007; and see below.

<sup>9</sup> For overview of the site, excavations, and finds, see Mazar and Barag 1993 and Hirschfeld and Hadas 2008.

<sup>10</sup> See Eus., *Onom.* 86:18; Hirschfeld 2007: 15.

report of En-Gedi's domestic areas has demonstrated the continuity (or establishment) of a substantial village during the Byzantine period (see below).<sup>11</sup>

The village with which the synagogue at En-Gedi is associated is located about 300 m northeast of Tel Goren and about 600 m from the coast of the Dead Sea as measured in 2010 (237500/596500; 31°27'41.57"N 35°23'32.70"E).<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the changing water-level of the Dead Sea has moved the adjacent shoreline throughout history. During the Byzantine period, the level of the Dead Sea rose by over ten meters to nearly -380 m asl, which inundated several of the anchorage sites of the Roman period. It appears that the road southward from Jericho was likewise inundated, leaving En-Gedi cut off from the north.<sup>13</sup> Overland routes would have forced travelers up one of the steep ascents westward into the Judean hills: the En-Gedi ascent followed a northwestern route toward Bethlehem and on to Jerusalem, whereas the Zeruriah ascent followed a more westerly approach toward the southern Hebron Hills.<sup>14</sup> En-Gedi was also accessible via sea routes, as evidenced in the numerous anchorages along the Dead Sea and the depictions in the Madaba Map.<sup>15</sup> Whatever route and form of transportation used, the village would have been a two-days' journey from Jerusalem and relatively isolated from nearby settlements.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hirschfeld 2007. On the literary attestations to the destruction of Jewish communities, see Avi-Yonah 1976: 209.

<sup>12</sup> On the distance relative to the Tel Goren and the coast of the Dead Sea, see Barag 2006: 17\*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 6.

<sup>14</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 6-7, Fig. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Picirillo 1989; Hadas 1992; 1993; Hirschfeld 2007: 6.

<sup>16</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 6-8.

The synagogue, which apparently stood near the center of the village, was excavated by Dan Barag and Yosef Porat with the assistance of Ehud Netzer as the project architect in 1970-72. Further work was done on the area surrounding the synagogue by Gideon Hadas in 1993-1995 and Yizhar Hirschfeld in 1996-2002.<sup>17</sup> The building stood on the highest point in the village, although the relatively flat local topography gave it only a slight advantage in elevation over the surrounding structures.<sup>18</sup>

### **3.1.2 Research History**

The numerous ancient remains around the oasis at En-Gedi have been researched and explored extensively in the past fifty years. The scholarly attention paid to En-Gedi is due to a combination of circumstances, including the wide range of periods represented, the modern commercial activities associated with the nearby kibbutz, and its cultural importance to Israelis as part of a nature reserve and popular vacation destination. En-Gedi's location within the pre-1967 borders of the State of Israel means that the site was subject to exploration prior to 1967 by Israeli archaeologists—unlike the sites of the Hebron Hills (below). As a result, all excavations have been subject to the laws established under the IDAM and the IAA, so better records and more thorough publications are available. In addition, the ancient remains have benefited from the conservation efforts of the Nature and Parks Authority, as well as the protection of the

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<sup>17</sup> See Hadas 2005 and Hirschfeld 2007. See further below.

<sup>18</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 1, 23. Hirschfeld identifies three “manmade levels” upon which the village was constructed, with the synagogue and its adjoining buildings on the highest level (ca. -370 m asl), the domestic structures on the middle level (ca. -375 m asl), and the shops and storerooms on the lowest level (ca. -380 m asl). While it is likely that the natural slope was leveled slightly for the sake of construction, it is unclear how purposeful the layout was, especially since the changes in elevation are quite subtle.

En-Gedi Nature Reserve and National Park. As a result, the En-Gedi synagogue has not suffered from the sorts of misfortunes that befell the synagogues at Na‘aran and Jericho.

That said, the materials pertaining to the excavation of the synagogue itself have had more than their share of bad luck. In 2007, the late Prof. Dan Barag explained that since the completion of the excavations in 1972, everything that could have gone wrong has, including the loss and theft of significant finds and the misplacement of some of the project records.<sup>19</sup> These setbacks and others—including the deaths of two of the three directors in the past five years—have contributed to the continued delay of the final publication.<sup>20</sup>

The synagogue initially was discovered during clearing of the area in 1965.<sup>21</sup> Two seasons of excavation were conducted in 1970-72 on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Exploration Society.<sup>22</sup>

### **3.1.3 Description of the Synagogue**

Like the surrounding village structures, the synagogue was constructed of small roughly-hewn boulders and fieldstones covered in plaster.<sup>23</sup> Hirschfeld suggests that the synagogue was roofed with red tiles, although in preliminary reports the excavators do

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<sup>19</sup> Dan Barag: personal communication, May 2007. For the delay in publication see Shanks 2002.

<sup>20</sup> In 2011, I was told that the Hebrew University’s Institute of Archaeology was assigning the duties of publication to Drs. Zeev Weiss and David Amit, however, nothing has appeared in print to corroborate this report.

<sup>21</sup> Mazar et al. 2007: 14.

<sup>22</sup> Barag and Porat: 1970; Barag et al. 1972; 1981; Barag 1993a; 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 35.



not mention any roof tiles from the synagogue.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the suggestion is based on the Madaba Map, which depicts red roofs on the buildings of En-Gedi.<sup>25</sup>

The excavators identified three phases during which the building was in use as a synagogue: Strata IIIB, IIIA, and II.<sup>26</sup> The finds will be presented here chronologically, rather than in the order of discovery.<sup>27</sup> Below the Stratum IIIB synagogue, two stepped and plastered pools were uncovered, with the remains of a contemporary structure to the southwest.<sup>28</sup> The excavators dated the pools to the Second Temple period, presumably based in part on their form, which is similar to the *miqva'ot* uncovered at Hasmonean and Herodian Jericho.

### **3.1.3.1 Stratum IIIB**

Little is known of the earliest phase identified as a synagogue, Stratum IIIB. The excavators present a trapezoidal plan, measuring 9.0-10.5 m wide, with an east wall measuring 13.5 m, and a west wall measuring 15.5 m (see fig. 41).<sup>29</sup> Two entrances along the northern wall—in the center and on the east side—are reported by the excavators. The eastern entrance continued in use throughout the synagogue's history,

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<sup>24</sup> See comments on roofing in Hirschfeld 2007: 35. It should be noted that the omission of such a detail from the preliminary reports does not necessarily suggest that the excavators did not uncover roof tiles. Whether or not Hirschfeld was aware of unreported finds is unknown.

<sup>25</sup> See Piccirillo 1993.

<sup>26</sup> Rudimentary plans of the three phases have appeared in print (see Barag 2006: 21, fig. 31), although they differ in several details that have been published repeatedly. Revised plans based on the excavators' descriptions appear in Milson 2007: 353, 355, 357.

<sup>27</sup> Information credited to the excavators can be found in Barag and Porat 1970; Barag et al. 1972; Barag et al. 1981; Barag 1993a; Barag 2006; Mazar et al. 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Barag et al. 1972: 54.

<sup>29</sup> These dimensions for the width are repeated in the preliminary reports, though it is unclear as to which walls they refer or if they indicate that the east west perpendicular length across the center measures 9.0 m and the north and south walls measure 10.5 m.

while the central entrance was blocked up in the subsequent phase (see below). Despite the excavators' written descriptions, a published plan of the Stratum IIIB synagogue depicts a third entrance along the north wall to the west, thus creating a triportal façade on the northern, Jerusalem-oriented wall.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the excavators assumed the existence of a triportal façade, similar to Galilean-type synagogues. In any case, there does not seem to be any physical evidence for a triportal façade on the north wall.

The mosaic pavement of Stratum IIIB was exposed in its entirety during excavation (fig. 42).<sup>31</sup> It was comprised of coarse white tesserae, in the center of which was a decorative rectangular panel composed of smaller pieces (for the most part black and white) measuring 8.0 by 3.0 m and oriented north-south.<sup>32</sup> Inside the panel were three squares, evenly spaced.<sup>33</sup> The southern square was bordered by a row of triangles enclosing a large swastika turning clockwise.<sup>34</sup> The middle square was bordered by a checkered pattern enclosing an inner square and a design of colored tesserae, the majority of which does not survive. The northern square is also poorly preserved, having been destroyed by the later construction during the Stratum II phase. However, most of the border is preserved, showing rows of diamonds.<sup>35</sup> The excavators indicate that it was

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<sup>30</sup> See Barag 2006: 21, Fig. 31. Cf. Milson 2007: 353.

<sup>31</sup> For additional information, see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 56-57, no. 74.

<sup>32</sup> The coarse white tesserae were at a concentration of 25 tesserae per dm<sup>2</sup>; those of the rectangular panel were at a concentration of 60 tesserae per dm<sup>2</sup>. The restorations at the site have covered over this floor with the Stratum II pavement, leaving only a small section next to the Stratum II bema visible.

<sup>33</sup> For the best published photograph, see Barag 2006: 21, Fig. 32.

<sup>34</sup> The border is a combination of Avi-Yonah 1932: A1, A3-A7. Barag suggests (2006: 17\*) that this swastika was a symbol of "good luck," though this is conjectural. Hirschfeld's suggestion (2007: 15) that it was "related to the Essenes' affinity for the solar calendar" is similarly just speculation.

<sup>35</sup> For the checkered pattern, see Avi-Yonah 1932: A8; for the diamonds, see Avi-Yonah 1932: A15.

unclear whether or not this rectangular panel was part of the Stratum IIIB pavement or was a subsequent addition. The information presented in the preliminary reports does not suggest that excavations were carried out beneath the pavement in this area.

While the evidence indicates there was a phase pre-dating Stratum IIIA (see below), the plan of the Stratum IIIB building, as Milson points out, is far less certain.<sup>36</sup> It seems that the excavators projected the plan of the main hall from the later phases to create a modest prayer hall which conforms roughly to plans of Galilean-type synagogues. The identification of this early building as a synagogue is based on the proposed plan as a public hall and the site's later use for a synagogue. It should be noted that the designs of the mosaic panel are symbolically ambiguous and religiously neutral, and so the identification must be based on contextual evidence and by projecting backwards in the site's history. Hopefully, the final publication will clarify the criteria for the excavators' conclusions regarding Stratum IIIB.

### **3.1.3.2 Stratum IIIA**

The mosaic floor of Stratum IIIB continued in use into Stratum IIIA, however, some grayish discolorations and repairs of the tesserae suggest some sort of fire damage, which may have prompted the renovations that expanded and modified the structure (see fig. 43).<sup>37</sup> To begin, three entrances were opened through the west wall of the building. Beyond these entrances, a narrow exedra or porch (about 1.5 m wide<sup>38</sup>) was built with three pillars or columns in antis. Within the hall, four pillars and two piers—constructed

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<sup>36</sup> See Mison 2007: 352.

<sup>37</sup> The entry for this phase of the synagogue in Milson 2007: 354 is mislabeled as "Stratum IIIB," and the decoration of Stratum II (i.e., the nave and bema mosaics) is attributed to Stratum IIIA.

<sup>38</sup> This is not reported by the excavators; the figure is based on the published plans. See fig. 43.

of roughly hewn blocks—were installed, creating narrow aisles along the east and south sides, perhaps to support the expanded roof.

In the newly created south aisle, three stepped benches were installed along the wall. According to the excavators, the benches were built directly on top of the coarse floor mosaic of Stratum IIIB, thus providing important evidence for the existence of the earliest phase (IIIB).<sup>39</sup> In other words, if the benches had been part of the same phase as the mosaic pavement, we should not expect tesserae to underlie the benches. While the lack of permanent benches in the Stratum IIIB phase does not necessarily argue for or against the identification of the building as a synagogue, their presence in the Stratum IIIA phase supports the supposition that the building was used as such in the second phase at the latest.<sup>40</sup>

According to the excavators, further evidence of the building's use as a synagogue during the Stratum IIIA phase is found along the north wall. The outer face of the entrance in the center of the wall was blocked up at this time with cut stones, creating a niche measuring 110-cm wide and 35-cm deep.<sup>41</sup> The excavators report that a broad green band was painted on the plaster wall on either side of the niche,<sup>42</sup> perhaps meant to draw attention to the feature. It is unclear from the publications how the excavators determined that the green paint dates to Stratum IIIA, especially since plastered walls

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<sup>39</sup> See Barag et al. 1972: 54.

<sup>40</sup> On the criteria for identifying a synagogue, see above, Introduction.

<sup>41</sup> The excavators indicate that this entry was blocked by “bricks” (Barag et al. 1972: 54; Barag 1993a; Barag 2006: 17\*). Today, the conserved site has hewn stones set into this entryway. See the photograph in Milson: 2007: 546, Fig. 7:8.

<sup>42</sup> Barag 1993a.

require occasional re-plastering over time. In any case, the excavators suggest that a wooden cabinet would have been placed in this niche to serve as the Torah repository, although no evidence for such a feature—e.g., postholes (see below)—was noted. Conversely, the niche may simply have been plastered without any external structure, similar to the niche feature in the Dura Europos synagogue.<sup>43</sup>

To the east of the niche, along the north wall, two steps less than one meter in width were installed abutting the newly-constructed pier. The excavators identified this feature as a “*Cathedra* of Moses” (קתדרא דמשה).<sup>44</sup> Sporadic and enigmatic references to such symbolic and ceremonial seats for honored members of the community and teachers are known from the literary sources as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> c. C.E. (e.g., Matt. 23:1-6).<sup>45</sup> Rabbinic testimonies to special seats in the synagogue—occasionally associated with Moses—as well as seats for teachers outside of the synagogue, have occasionally led researchers to identify seemingly ceremonial chairs within a synagogue as “seats of Moses.”<sup>46</sup> The archaeological evidence points to a range of special seating types in synagogues, from the massive set of semicircular benches in the apse of the Sardis synagogue to the (admittedly speculative) women’s galleries of the Galilean-type

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<sup>43</sup> See Kraeling 1956: 16. Barag’s confidence in this suggestion weakened in later publications; see Mazar et al. 2007: 14. The fact that the excavators do not report plaster along the face of the blocked wall does not necessarily negate its existence during the Stratum IIIA phase, since the niche was apparently blocked up and not visible in the later history of the building and so may never have been re-plastered.

<sup>44</sup> Barag and Porat 1970: 97.

<sup>45</sup> For the literary evidence, see Rahmani 1990: 197-203; Levine 2000a: 323-24.

<sup>46</sup> See the generous list of identifications presented in Levine 2000a: 325-26, which includes the feature at En-Gedi.

synagogues.<sup>47</sup> Ceremonial seating, including individual chairs, is known from non-Jewish religious contexts as well, such as seats for bishops or priests (Christian or otherwise) and the phenomenon of the “empty throne” for deities and later saints and martyrs.<sup>48</sup> The widespread nature of this phenomenon problematizes the use of these ceremonial seats as a criterion for identifying a structure as a synagogue; that is to say, this is not a specifically Jewish phenomenon.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the feature should be considered only after the structure is identified as a synagogue and not as an indicator. In any case, “seats of Moses” have been identified in the contexts of synagogues at Hammath-Tiberias (the northern synagogue), Chorazin, and Dura-Europos.<sup>50</sup>

In the En-Gedi synagogue, the feature identified as a *Cathedra* of Moses consists simply of two plastered steps next to the niche. In his brief overview of these features, Rahmani describes the stone seats from Hammath-Tiberias and Chorazin in detail but includes no description of the En-Gedi example, except to situate it to the west (instead of

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<sup>47</sup> On the Sardis synagogue, see Seager and Kraabel 1983, though cf. Magness 2005 for the building’s dating. Levine 2000a: 317-18 rejects the possibility of women’s galleries outright, but cf. Spigel (forthcoming) for another approach to the topic of women’s seating within the synagogue. Anecdotally, the inclusion of special seats is fairly widespread in synagogues today, where their use is typically relegated to community leaders, invited guests, and liturgical specialists in need of rest during the long service. Whether or not modern congregants would call these “seats of Moses” is beyond the scope of the current study (and of dubious relevance).

<sup>48</sup> Rahmani 1990: 204-07; Levine 2000a: 326-27. On non-Jewish and non-Christian use of ceremonial stone seats in contemporary religious contexts, see Fitzgerald 1929.

<sup>49</sup> The most problematic such case of a stone seat being used evidence for the use of a building as a synagogue is at Delos. See Bruneau 1970 and Matassa 2007.

<sup>50</sup> See the discussion and evaluation in Rahmani 1990. To these, we may add the inscription on a chancel screen post from Dalton (2 km north of Nabratein), which is badly worn and fragmentary but includes the word קִיְתֻדְרָה, which may be a mistaken form of קַתִּיְדְרָה (*cathedra*). See Naveh 1978: 144, no. 107; Rahmani 1990: 197, no. 28. I do not include here the example from the Delos “synagogue.” On the problems of this building’s identification, see Matassa 2007.

east) of the niche.<sup>51</sup> However, the differences are clear: the former examples are free-standing stone-carved seats, whereas at En-Gedi, the supposed seat consists of two plastered steps. Only a sketch survives of the Hammath-Tiberias seat, however, the well-published seat from Chorazin includes incised geometric and faunal designs, decorated armrests, and a dedicatory inscription.<sup>52</sup>

There are too few examples of “seats of Moses” from synagogues to identify common features, and therefore it is impossible to categorize the stepped feature at En-Gedi as such based on parallels. It is of course possible that these two plastered steps were used as some sort of ceremonial seat (the purposes of which are unclear), but such a use is not self-evident.<sup>53</sup> It is equally possible that these steps led up to a wooden podium that did not survive. Milson notes the occasional construction of small platforms offset from the focal point of the hall for the reading of liturgical texts—structures that were known in a church context as an ambo.<sup>54</sup> Such an interpretation for these two steps seems possible especially since no other raised platform was uncovered in any phase of the En-Gedi synagogue (see below).

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<sup>51</sup> Presumably, this omission was in deference to the excavators.

<sup>52</sup> On the Hammath-Tiberias seat, see Rahmani 1990: 194, Fig 1, after Slouschz 1922-1924: Fig. 1. On the Chorazin seat, see Yeivin 2000: 54, Fig. 130, 107, n. 19, and the literature cited there. On the inscription, see Naveh 1978: 36-38, no. 17.

<sup>53</sup> On the possible uses of ceremonial seats, see Rahmani 1990: 200-03 who emphasizes the problems surrounding the use of such ceremonial chairs in synagogues. In addition, we should consider the likelihood that these chairs—however pervasive they were—may have been used for different purposes in different communities. On the importance of considering synagogues, their details, and their communities on a case-by-case basis, see Miller 1999; Levine 2000a: 604-05; Spigel (forthcoming). Considering the Stratum II narthex inscription (see below), it is worth noting that the “seat of Moses” has been interpreted in light of “throne” symbolism within the Heikhalot literature; see Rahmani 1990: 209-12.

<sup>54</sup> Milson 2007: 191-93 notes the existence of such features at Susiya, Beth Alpha, Chorazin, and Beth-Shean (phases II and III).

The main entrance to the Stratum IIIA synagogue was through the western exedra and triportal façade, however, the doorway on the eastern part of the north wall remained open. In the subsequent phase, this doorway led to a small auxiliary room (see below). The preliminary reports—which focus attention on the main hall of the synagogue and on the latest phase—do not indicate whether this room was in existence during the Stratum IIIA phase.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the information provided for the surrounding structures (see below) does not help to determine whether or not the primary entrance to the synagogue was redirected to the west due to changes in the surrounding buildings and alleys.

Aside from the benches along the south wall and the niche and steps along the north wall, no other significant features or finds were noted by the excavators. Since there apparently was no break in occupation between Stratum IIIA and Stratum II, we should not be surprised to find the occupation level of Stratum IIIA largely devoid of finds; the floor surface presumably would not have been strewn with materials when the subsequent mosaic pavement was laid. (See below for the datable finds from this phase.)

### **3.1.3.3 Stratum II**

In the last phase of the synagogue, Stratum II, the building was once again extended westward (fig. 44). Along the open, western face of the exedra of Stratum IIIA, a triportal façade was constructed, with the cylindrical pillars incorporated into the wall.<sup>56</sup> Fieldstone-built thresholds in the openings along this wall suggest that these were used as

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<sup>55</sup> The plan provided in Milson 2007: 355 suggests that the northeast doorway led outside the building rather than to an auxiliary room.

<sup>56</sup> See photographs in Barag 2006: 22, 24, Figs. 33, 39.



closable doorways,<sup>57</sup> while the openings on the east side—used as the central entrances in Stratum IIIA—were left open, turning the former exedra into the western aisle of the main hall.<sup>58</sup> As a result, the dimensions of the main hall were extended about 1.5 m to the west. Based on the published dimensions and projected obstructions of furniture and doorways (see below), I estimate the maximum occupancy was between 267 and 1,127 people.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond the newly-constructed west aisle, a long hallway—described as a narthex by the excavators—was built running north-south, about 3.0 m wide, paved in coarse, white tesserae, and with entrances on the north and south ends.<sup>60</sup> The north entrance opened onto an alley (“Alley 1”).<sup>61</sup> The south entrance opened onto an unexcavated area, likely also some sort of alleyway.

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<sup>57</sup> In addition, Hadas 2005: 19\* notes impressions on the east side of the door jambs, presumably for wooden doors.

<sup>58</sup> No thresholds were uncovered in the eastern portals of the aisle in Stratum II, and the mosaic pavement of Stratum II continues through the openings of these portals. This suggests that the former entryways of Stratum IIIA were left open in Stratum II to create a western aisle and a more symmetrical hall.

<sup>59</sup> The maximum occupancy is based on the coefficients and methodology provided by Spigel 2008. If congregants sat on the benches on the south end of the hall and on the floor, and there was no second story seating, the maximum occupancy would only be about 267, based on a coefficient of 0.44 for m<sup>2</sup> per person on the permanent stone benches and 0.53 m<sup>2</sup> per person on available floor space. If congregants sat on the stone benches, as well as on portable benches in the nave and east aisle and on balconies above the south, east, and west aisles, the synagogue could have seated as many as 1127, based on the above coefficient for the stone benches, plus .264 m<sup>2</sup> per person for portable benches on the first floor and balconies. These figures however warrant caution as the precise measurements of the proposed balconies and the permanent stone benches are estimates.

<sup>60</sup> The width of the narthex is described as 3.0 m in width in Barag 1993a, Barag 2006: 18\*, 22, and Mazar et al. 2007: 15; it is described as 4.0 m in width in Barag et al. 1972: 54. The last seems to be an error.

<sup>61</sup> Hadas 2005: 42\*, Plan 1.

In the southwest corner of the narthex, the excavators uncovered a large feature described as a “cleansing” installation.<sup>62</sup> No detailed drawings of the feature have been published, but it appears in top-view as a curved, fieldstone-constructed partition set into the corner of the room.<sup>63</sup> The space within the partition is sunken slightly and plastered. Next to the installation were found a stone basin and a large ceramic jar supported on a base, suggesting it was a semi-permanent feature instead of simply abandoned just before the building was destroyed. The excavators do not comment on the manner by which the installation was filled, so perhaps the ceramic jar was used carry water from nearby cisterns.

Water installations not used for full-body immersion (i.e., not *miqva’ot*) have been identified at several synagogues, though they are not ubiquitous.<sup>64</sup> In the Diaspora, permanent and semi-permanent water basins and installations have been reported in the synagogues at Sardis, Dura Europos, Ostia, and Priene.<sup>65</sup> In Palestine, similar basins and installations are known from Arbel, Beth Alpha, Hammath-Tiberias (IB-IA), Sepphoris, and Meroth.<sup>66</sup> As with the ceremonial seats (see above) there is little consistency in

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<sup>62</sup> Barag 2006: 18\*.

<sup>63</sup> See photograph in Barag et al. 1972: 54, republished in Barag 1993a: 407.

<sup>64</sup> See discussion in Levine 2000a: 308-09, who perhaps overemphasizes the pervasiveness of this feature in the archaeological record. See also Appendix A.

<sup>65</sup> On Sardis, see Hanfmann 1963: 47; Seager 1982: 182. On Dura Europos, see Kraeling 1956: 28. On Ostia, see Runesson 2001. On Priene, see Levine 2000a: 249.

<sup>66</sup> On Arbel, see Ilan and Izdarechet 1993: 88, and on the feature’s more probably identification, see Levine 2000a: 308. On Beth Alpha, see Sukenik 1932. On Hammath-Tiberias, see Dothan 2000; On Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005. On Meroth, see Ilan and Damati 1987. See also Barag et al. 1972: 54 who alludes to an inscription from Ḥammath Gader that mentions a water installation, although the inscription does not appear in Naveh’s catalog. Levine 2000a: 309 includes Jerash, although the excavators’ comment regarding a laver basin in the forecourt of the earlier phase of the “Synagogue Church” at Jerash (Crowfoot and Hamilton 1929: 218) is speculative. A rectangular feature of some sort was noted below the (western) apse

form. The practice of hand and foot washing is well-attested in the literary sources so as to support the excavators' identification of the installation as some sort of permanent laver basin.<sup>67</sup>

In the alley to the northwest of the narthex, the excavators uncovered a set of stone stairs, leading up from the north. Since the stairs terminate at the extreme northwest corner of the narthex, they must belong to Stratum II. Stairs are unattested prior to this phase. It is unclear whether or not the stairs led to a second story gallery (see below).

To the north of the main hall, a small auxiliary room was constructed. The entrance utilized the exterior doorway that the excavators associate with the earlier phases. The purpose of this room is unclear; the excavators suggested that it was used for storage, although no finds from this area are reported.<sup>68</sup>

In the newly-constructed west aisle of the main hall, walls were built in the southwest corner to create a small room at the southern extremity. The room was entered from the north and from within the west aisle. Along the east side of the small room, a low bench of fieldstones and roughly-hewn blocks was integrated into the construction of the wall.<sup>69</sup> No finds or features were reported here to indicate the room's use. To the east of this room, the benches of Stratum IIIA remained in use. The interior walls of the

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of the later phase (i.e., where the forecourt was in the earlier phase; *ibid.* 213), but the excavators do not connect this feature with the laver basin.

<sup>67</sup> On the literary sources and possible purposes and influences of washing hands and/or feet prior to prayer within a synagogue, see Bar-Ilan 1992, and Levine 2005: 331.

<sup>68</sup> Barag et al. 54. On the use of side rooms, see Smith 1990.

<sup>69</sup> This feature does not appear in published photographs or descriptions but is visible at the site today.

main hall were plastered and, in some areas, painted. The excavators mention a “drawing of two boats and sails” on one of the piers. No photographs or detailed descriptions have been published.<sup>70</sup>

The Stratum II synagogue was paved with a mosaic floor above the previous Stratum IIIB-A floor.<sup>71</sup> Unlike the horizontal tesserae of the Stratum IIIB-A floor, the Stratum II tesserae were laid diagonally. Similar to the earlier mosaic pavement, the field was of coarse white tesserae, with a pattern of schematic bird’s-foot designs overlaying. Two main panels were laid in the nave—the central nave panel and the bema mosaic. A third panel, divided into seven sub-panels, ran the length of the west aisle. All three are polychrome mosaics of black, red, pink, brown, yellow, and bluish-gray tesserae. In the southeast corner of the hall, within the east aisle, is a small, lone bird, depicted schematically in the same style as the nave mosaic (see below), and set within a circle.<sup>72</sup>

The west aisle panel—measuring roughly 9.0 by 1.9 m—is known for its inscriptions (see below).<sup>73</sup> Four of the seven sub-panels are decorated in geometric patterns, typical of Byzantine Palestine (fig. 52). The entire panel is bordered by red triangles pointing outward.<sup>74</sup> For the sake of clarity, the panels are here numbered 1-7, starting from the north. Panel 1 consists of crisscrossing diagonal lines.<sup>75</sup> Panel 2

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<sup>70</sup> Barag 2006: 19\*. Barag 1993a: 408 mentions other designs painted on the wall plaster as well.

<sup>71</sup> For additional information, see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 54-56, no. 73.

<sup>72</sup> See photograph in Barag 2006: 24, Fig. 38.

<sup>73</sup> Since the measurements are unpublished, these are rough estimations based on the published plans.

<sup>74</sup> See Avi-Yonah 1932: A7.

<sup>75</sup> See Avi-Yonah 1932: H1.

includes a scale pattern, with the curved edges of the design oriented southward and two lines of an Aramaic inscription (see below).<sup>76</sup> Panels 3-5 are composed almost entirely of inscriptions (fig. 53).<sup>77</sup> Panel 3 has a triangle-pattern border—the same as the border of the entire west aisle panel—along the northern edge of the frame. Panel 5 has an identical border on the northern and southern edge of the frame. About three-quarters of the last two lines of the inscription in panel 3 have a background of pink tesserae instead of white tesserae. The reason for this is unclear. Given the rest of the inscription, the wording of this section could not have been changed from a different reading (see below). It may represent a repair, though there is no obvious change in the morphology, size, or spacing of the letters to suggest this; the work appears to have been by the same hand. If it is a repair, it most likely was done not long after the original laying of the mosaic.

Panel 6 consists of a square-and-hexagon geometric pattern.<sup>78</sup> Panel 7 appears as an inverted version of panel 2, with a two-line inscription along the north side and the scale-pattern on the south, with its curved edges oriented northward. The mosaic was apparently damaged during the fire at the end of the Stratum II phase. Evidence for burning is clearly visible as a broad band running east-west through panel 7, as well as in the southwest corner of panel 5 and the northwest corner of panel 6. Whether these marks can be attributed to charred beams from the second-story support structure or from

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<sup>76</sup> See Avi-Yonah 1932: J3.

<sup>77</sup> During the excavation, the inscriptions of panels 2-5 (inscriptions 1-4, below) were removed to the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, where they are now on display. A cut was made just above the first inscription in panel 2, displacing the two lines of text from their geometric context within the panel.

<sup>78</sup> See Avi-Yonah 1932: H3.

the fallen doors of the western triportal façade is impossible to determine based on the available evidence.

The inscriptions in panels 2-5 and 7 are arranged so as to be read from the south, looking northward. Such an arrangement may at first seem peculiar since the entrances are from the narthex to the west. However, the placement of the inscriptions underscores the fact that the panels of the west aisle were laid as part of a thoughtfully-conceived design with the nave and bema panels (see below) that emphasized the northerly orientation of the room.<sup>79</sup>

Measuring about 6.0 by 6.0 m and encompassing almost the entirety of the nave is the central mosaic panel, the nave mosaic (fig. 45).<sup>80</sup> The panel is bordered by a double zigzag pattern enclosing a field of schematic petal-designs (“leaf-like pattern”).<sup>81</sup> In the center is a smaller square panel, measuring roughly half the length and width of the outer square and bordered by a line of black tesserae. Within this panel are two squares of equal length whose diagonals measure the length and width of the square in which they are set. These innermost squares are arranged on top of one another, offset at a 45-degree angle so as to create an octagram (i.e., an eight-pointed polygon). The crisscrossing lines of the octagram create a central octagon, the center of which is filled mostly with a large circle, bordered by bands of black and red tesserae.

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<sup>79</sup> The use of mosaic direction for room-orientation is often overlooked for synagogues in which the liturgical orientation is corroborated by other features, such as the location of the doors, benches, or a bema. For examples, consider the synagogues at Sepphoris (Weiss 2005), Gaza (see below, section 6.1), and Ma'on-Nirim (see below, section 6.2). On the other hand, synagogues in which mosaics are laid in different directions, such as Beth Alpha (Sukenik 1932), Na'aran (see above, section 2.1), and Susiya (see below, section 4.1) should force a reconsideration of the building's liturgical orientation.

<sup>80</sup> For the best published photograph, see the color plate following page 440 in Barag 1993a.

<sup>81</sup> Barag 2006: 18\*. For the zigzag pattern see Avi-Yonah 1932: A7. For the petal-designs, see Avi-Yonah 1932: J4.

In each of the four corners of the inner panel are two birds facing each other and flanking bunched circles, presumably meant to be grapes, though the colors vary from corner to corner. The birds, depicted almost schematically in profile without any obvious attempt at realism, have large feathers extending backward, long necks, and three tufts protruding off the crown of their heads, suggesting that they were meant to represent peacocks.<sup>82</sup>

In the triangular points of the octagram that are oriented to the cardinal directions are colorful schematic petal designs (similar to the rosette in the synagogue at Susiya).<sup>83</sup> In the alternating triangular points are diagonal bands of polychrome tesserae. The space between the octagon and inner circle is filled with a floral pattern of tendrils, leaves, and bunches of circular objects in threes (grapes?). Inside the circle are two pairs of birds, depicted in profile and facing each other. The upper pair shows each bird with short feathers, long legs, and a crooked neck. The lower pair shows each bird with a similar sort of body but shorter necks and legs. These designs are simple in execution and style, and there is no indication they were meant to depict local fauna.

In the field matrix along the northern border of the nave mosaic panel are depictions of three menorahs.<sup>84</sup> They are small, no more than about 25 cm in height, and set equidistant from each other with the bases touching the border of the nave mosaic, so as to be viewed from the south along with the larger panel.<sup>85</sup> All three are identical.

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<sup>82</sup> Barag 1993a: 408.

<sup>83</sup> Following the pattern of Avi-Yonah 1932: I8. On Susiya, see below, section 4.1.

<sup>84</sup> These are catalogued in Hachlili 2001: IS3.14, Pl. II-20a. For color photograph, see Levine 1981: Pl. I.E.

<sup>85</sup> The precise measurements of the menorahs are not published.

Each consists of six curved branches of a single line of red tesserae, with a line of black tesserae interspersed between the two outer branches; the interior of the innermost branch is filled in with white tesserae. A crossbar connects the tops of the branches, above which sit six black-tesserae triangles, oriented with their points up. A single black tessera crowns the top of each triangle, presumably meant to represent a flame. The shaft of each menorah is a straight line of single, red tesserae, leading down to a tripod base. The feet of the tripod base of each menorah are arranged at right angles (like an “E” on its side). Between the feet are black circular objects, representing no obvious feature but perhaps simply filling the space. Hachlili’s catalog produces no comparanda for this last detail.<sup>86</sup>

Hachlili compares the schematic nature of these menorahs to those on the mosaic floor at Jericho (see above, section 2.2.3) and at Susiya to the right of the Torah shrine in the Bema B mosaic (see below, section 4.1.3 and fig. 82).<sup>87</sup> Another schematic parallel comes from the narthex at Na‘aran (see above, section 2.1.3). Hachlili discusses the similarity between these sorts of schematic depictions in mosaic form to those carved in shallow relief at a number of sites, including Rimmon (see below, section 5.1), Capernaum, Ashkelon, and Kochav ha-Yarden.<sup>88</sup> The stylistic comparison with carved examples, however, seems problematic on account of the difference in media.

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<sup>86</sup> Hachlili 2001.

<sup>87</sup> Hachlili 2001: 152.

<sup>88</sup> Hachlili 2001: 152-53.



Hachlili identifies the triangles on top of the menorahs as glass oil-containers and includes these depictions in a group she characterizes as “elaborately realistic.”<sup>89</sup> As with the depictions at Jericho and Na‘aran, this is a mis-characterization. In fact, there is nothing “realistic” about the depictions of glass bowls or flames here; it is just the opposite. That is to say, they are schematic symbols explicitly referring to a notion beyond the physical menorah itself and *not* depicting a realistic menorah.

In any case, it is noteworthy that En-Gedi, Na‘aran, and Jericho share the common peculiarity of such geometrically depicted menorahs. Geographical proximity may suggest that these communities employed the same artisans (or rather, schools of artisans). On the other hand, perhaps shared tastes and predilections toward more abstract schematic designs—rather than the “elaborately realistic” representations from mosaics in Galilee and elsewhere in the southern Palestine<sup>90</sup>—should be credited with the resulting commonality.

Toward the northern extremity of the nave, just beyond the large mosaic panel, is a feature described by the excavators as the Stratum II “bema” (fig. 46). The term “bema” typically connotes a *raised* platform.<sup>91</sup> However, there can be little doubt that the “bema” at En-Gedi was *not* a platform but rather an enclosed area at the focal point of the main hall (see below). Nevertheless, for the sake of consistency—and in lieu of a more appropriate term—I follow the excavators’ terminology.

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<sup>89</sup> Hachlili 2001: 161.

<sup>90</sup> In Galilee, for example, the menorahs depicted at Hammath-Tiberias IIa (Dothan 1983: Pl. 27) or Sepphoris (Weiss 2005: 66, Fig. 11). For southern Palestine, see below on Susiya (section 4.1) and Ma‘on-Nirim (section 6.2).

<sup>91</sup> Hence the biblical etymology of the word, referring to mountains or “high places.”

While the nave mosaic panel is aligned with the parallel east and west walls, the bema (along with its mosaic) is aligned with the north wall. (Recall that the main hall is trapezoidal [see fig. 44].) The feature consists of a row of roughly-hewn blocks set into the floor to form a rectangular frame.<sup>92</sup> The rectangle encloses a small mosaic panel—the bema mosaic.

The top of the stone feature rises above the pavement by a few centimeters and creates a rectangle measuring roughly 3.3 by 2.0 m.<sup>93</sup> This feature must have served as a base for a structure, presumably of wood. Four circular postholes about 15 cm in diameter are visible in the corner blocks (fig. 46).<sup>94</sup> The excavators hypothesized that the postholes supported a wooden chancel screen.<sup>95</sup> This suggestion presumably was based in part on the lack of any marble fragments uncovered. Moreover, chancel screen bases from churches in Palestine typically include shallow troughs between the postholes to provide additional support for the weighty panels.<sup>96</sup> The lack of such grooves suggests that the panels were of a lighter material such as wood.

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<sup>92</sup> Although the excavators do not report it explicitly, this point is clear from the published photographs. Moreover, the conservation work at the site—which left the Stratum IIIB-A mosaic in situ and replaced the Stratum II mosaic on top—left a small area in front of the bema exposed down to the level of the Stratum IIIB-A mosaic. As a result, the stone blocks of the bema are visible in profile. In the reconstruction, the base of the stone blocks is several centimeters above the Stratum IIIB-A pavement (see fig. 47). It is not clear whether this reconstruction reflects the manner in which the feature was uncovered. That said, the published photographs of the Stratum IIIB-A phase (esp. Barag 2006: 21, Fig. 32) suggest that the blocks of the bema were never removed during excavation and may have been conserved in situ (see fig. 41).

<sup>93</sup> Barag 2006: 18\*.

<sup>94</sup> The precise measurements of the postholes are not published.

<sup>95</sup> Barag et al. 1972: 53.

<sup>96</sup> See for example, at Kh. el-Beiyudat (Hizmi 1993: 156, 158 [plan and photograph]) and in the Southwest Church at Hippos-Sussita (Segal et al. 2005: 19).

The excavators do not comment on the arrangement of the chancel screen. Entrance to the enclosed area within must have been from the south, since the structure to the north of the chancel screen (see below) would have blocked access from that direction. One could hypothesize that the enclosed area was open on the shorter east and west sides, however, the wooden panel on the south side would have blocked the view of the bema mosaic from the nave. As a result, it seems likely that the panels were set up on the short east and west sides, as well as perhaps along the south side while leaving a gap in the middle third of the south side, so as to allow the congregants to view the mosaic. A deep rectangular notch appears just west of center along the top of the south side (see fig. 42), so we may surmise that the southern face of the chancel screen did not utilize the entire length of the base on that side. In addition, two circular depressions appear within the enclosed area where the mosaic was damaged (fig. 46). Perhaps these marks are the result of a later addition of posts. The wooden furniture to the north of the stone base (see below) suggests that the area was open to the north.

As mentioned above, the bema could not have been a raised platform. The level of the bema mosaic within the stone base is the same as the pavement in the nave. Had a wooden platform been located on top of the base within the chancel screen, the bema mosaic would have been obscured.

The bema mosaic is a square panel encompassing the north-south length of the bema within the chancel screen base (fig. 48). The panel is bordered by a single line of black tesserae forming a square. Set within the square is another square offset at a 45-degree angle, whose diagonal equals the side-length of the outer square. Within the inner square are two concentric circles enclosing a bird. The design is very similar to the nave

mosaic, leaving little doubt that they were made at the same time. Four triangles are created by the inset-square. The northeast and the southwest triangles are identical to each other, as are the northwest and southeast triangles. The former consists of parallel diagonals of alternating rows of black and red diamonds. The latter consists of polychrome schematic petals, similar to those in the nave mosaic. The bird within the concentric circles is in profile, facing right. Its form is nearly identical to the lower birds in the center of the nave mosaic (see above).

The similarity in style and execution of the nave and bema mosaics suggests that they were part of a single renovation associated with Stratum II. By extension, we may assume that the stone base of the chancel screen was part of this same renovation. Since the excavators do not mention any evidence suggesting that that pavement had been cut through to install the stone base—indeed, they assume that it was integrated from the outset—we should conclude that these features were built as part of Stratum II's only major phase of construction.

Abutting the chancel screen base on the north side, the excavators uncovered a series of hewn stones arranged as a flat, semi-circular surface whose curved face was oriented northward in line with the Stratum IIIA Torah niche (see fig. 49). The top level of this feature was somewhat higher than the stone-base of the chancel screen. Surrounding this semi-circular feature to the north, east, and west were charred remains, stretching to the face of the north wall of the building and to the Stratum IIIA Torah niche. A significant number of finds were uncovered in and around the charred remains and niche. The descriptions provided in the preliminary reports suggest that the excavators struggled to interpret the finds here. I quote from a recent publication:

... [I]n this phase a rectangular wooden construction 3.25 m. wide was built, which protruded ca. 1.5 m. into the nave. In the center of the wooden construction was an apse facing Jerusalem, with a base of dressed stones, which apparently functioned as the Ark of the Law. The interior of the wooden structure (between the wooden wall and the northern wall of the synagogue) was used as a storage place for various objects and a *geniza*.<sup>97</sup>

The suggestion that the semi-circular stones formed the base of an apse is particularly confusing since an apse is typically understood as recessed space.<sup>98</sup> Conversely, a base suggests a free-standing feature. Perhaps the excavators meant to suggest that the semi-circular feature was the base of an apsidal wooden structure that served as the Torah repository. Measuring little more than a meter across and a half-meter in depth, such a structure would have stood precariously upon the apsidal stone pedestal, which seems unlikely.

According to the excavators, the charred remains formed a roughly rectangular area, measuring 3.25 by 1.50 m, between the stone base of the chancel screen and the face of the north wall of the synagogue, south of the Stratum IIIA niche. A photograph of the area from the time of excavation, published by Benjamin Mazar (fig. 49), shows the relationship between these features, including some of the charred remains—and the finds therein (see below)—in the western portion. It appears that the apsidal stone feature stood upon (or just above) the Stratum IIIB-A floor, similar to the stone base of the chancel screen. Moreover, the rectangular area does not appear to have been paved with the Stratum II mosaic floor. As a result, we must conclude that either (a) the wooden structure that stood here was conceived of as part of the construction of Stratum

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<sup>97</sup> Barag 2006: 18\*. See equally confusing reports in Barag and Porat 1970: 97, 100; Barag et al. 1981: 117; and Barag 1993a.

<sup>98</sup> Robertson 1945: 380.

II, or (b) the Stratum II pavement was later removed in this area in order to set the base of the wooden structure below the floor level. Considering the placement of the apsidal feature, the former option seems more likely. Hopefully the final publication will clarify this issue by elaborating upon the relationship between the charred remains and the edges of the rectangular area, as well as the level of the base of the apsidal feature.

Numerous finds were uncovered within the ashy debris of this rectangular area. These include a bronze goblet with a hinge on the rim for a lid (fig. 50) along with a hoard of thousands of bronze coins (fig. 51). In addition, two decorative menorahs were uncovered in the debris. A cast bronze menorah without its base measured 22 cm in the width of its crossbar and 14.5 cm down to the broken end of the shaft (fig. 50).<sup>99</sup> Hachlili suggests that this menorah was used as a lamp, but this seems unlikely as there is no apparent place over the smoothed crossbar to affix oil-containers.<sup>100</sup> The second menorah was of silver, but no detailed description or photograph has been published of this find.<sup>101</sup> The excavators' suggestion that the silver menorah served as an ornament for a *parokhet*—a curtain covering the Torah repository—implies that it was relatively small in size.<sup>102</sup>

Several ceramic oil lamps were also found in the debris, though none is published in detail. A photograph of a mold-made lamp with a decorated, sunken discus was

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<sup>99</sup> The object is catalogued in Hachlili 2001: IS2.7. For description, see *ibid.* 55.

<sup>100</sup> Hachlili 2001: 288.

<sup>101</sup> It was not included in Hachlili's catalog.

<sup>102</sup> On the archaeological evidence for the *parokhet* elsewhere, as well as its depiction in Jewish and Samaritan art, see Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2009.

published and reportedly found within the “niche.”<sup>103</sup> Similar lamps were found in the adjacent settlement (see below) and are dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>104</sup> A decorated ceramic bowl was also uncovered “near the niche,” as were fragments of glass vessels.<sup>105</sup>

Pieces of a burnt parchment and a wooden disc and rod found within the burnt debris suggest the use of scrolls in the synagogue, perhaps for the recitation of the Torah. Unfortunately, the remains disappeared following the completion of excavations, and no photographs or records have been published.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, the excavators report a “dark lump of matter” that they identified as a badly burnt codex based on the shape and size.<sup>107</sup> The verification of both of these finds would provide the earliest archaeological evidence for the use of Torah scrolls and codices in synagogues, however, no photographs or records of either are published.<sup>108</sup>

The religious character of the finds as described by the excavators prompted the identification of the area as a “*geniza*,” i.e., a storage area or *favissa* for Jewish ceremonial objects (especially texts) that are no longer used.<sup>109</sup> The precise findspots of these objects are variously reported as “behind the niche,” “in the rubble west of the

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<sup>103</sup> See the photograph in Barag et al. 1981: 118.

<sup>104</sup> On the examples from the adjacent settlement, see de Vincenz 2007: 266. Examples of this type are known from northern sites and from Caesarea. See Magness 1992. Although Magness originally suggested a pre-6<sup>th</sup>-c. date, she now inclines towards 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. date for these lamps (personal communication, September 2011).

<sup>105</sup> See photograph in Barag et al. 1981: 118.

<sup>106</sup> Barag, personal communication, May 2007.

<sup>107</sup> Barag et al. 1981: 117.

<sup>108</sup> Christian use of the codex, however, is attested from a fairly early period; see Roberts and Skeat 1983.

<sup>109</sup> For an earlier identification of a *favissa* as a *geniza* in the context of a synagogue, see Yadin 1966: 187. For a definition, see Sokoloff 2002: s.v. גניזה.

niche,” “in the niche and to the east,” “in the overlying floor of the niche,” “flanking the semi-circular base of the niche,” “near the Ark of the Law,” and so forth.<sup>110</sup> Part of the confusion may be the result of terminology, since the hypothetical wooden structure that stood on the apsidal feature is frequently referred to as a “niche.” What seems clear, however, is that the finds were *not* limited to a specific and tightly hoarded cache but were strewn about the 3.25-by-1.50-m space. Such an arrangement of finds suggests that they had fallen from a higher place, presumably shelves within the wooden structure that is evidenced by the ashy debris.

In light of the published descriptions and photographs, the excavators’ interpretation of the area north of the chancel screen base may be revised. First, the distribution of the ashy debris over the 3.25-by-1.50-m area, as well as the depression in the floor (see above and fig. 49), suggest that a wooden structure encompassed the whole of the rectangular section north of the bema. Whether the wooden structure was set into the niche of the north wall or meant to block off the niche is unclear. The finds suggest that the wooden structure served as a cabinet or closet for religiously-meaningful items, such as the decorative menorahs and Torah scroll, as well as the items that may or may not have had religious significance, such as the goblet and coin hoard. The presence of a Torah scroll and perhaps a codex is enough to define the wooden feature loosely as a Torah repository or shrine.

A Torah shrine with such a substantial base (3.25 by 1.50 m) could have stood to an imposing height to emphasize its importance. The semi-circular stone, extending about 50 cm into the Torah shrine, might therefore have served as a step leading partially

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<sup>110</sup> See Barag and Porat 1970; Barag et al. 1972; Barag et al. 1981; Barag 1993a; Barag 2006; and Mazar et al. 2007.



*into* the shrine itself, and thus allowing access to the objects placed on shelves within. Indeed, a step or steps leading up to Torah shrines are attested elsewhere among the synagogues of southern Palestine, such as at Susiya and Eshtemoa (see below), as well as in northern Palestine, such as at Umm el-Qanatir.<sup>111</sup>

Such a reconstruction of the Torah shrine seems plausible in light of the distribution of finds in the ashy debris as well as the location of the apsidal stone. Thus, rather than being stored in a “*geniza*,” these objects seem to have been stored in the Torah shrine and probably were used as part of the liturgical activities until the synagogue’s destruction.

A different phasing scheme may also be suggested tentatively, at least until the final report is published. The preliminary reports fail to identify evidence for:

- (a) a contiguous west wall of Stratum IIIB that would support the interpretation that the three entrances were an addition to, rather than part of, the original structure;
- (b) foundations of the six pillars and piers that would demonstrate they are associated with Stratum IIIA and *not* part of the Stratum II renovation;
- (c) the precise periods of usage for the two north wall portals/niche of Stratum IIIB; and
- (d) the construction of the niche and steps (the “*Cathedra* of Moses”) along the north wall of Stratum IIIA that indicates their construction was distinct from the renovations that laid the Stratum II mosaic pavement.

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<sup>111</sup> Similar bases have been noted in churches as supports for ambos. See for example Stabler and Holum 2008: 30.

Regarding (d), the niche and steps, it is not self-evident (based on the published descriptions) that these features existed during the Stratum IIIA phase. It *is* apparent (*pace* Barag et al.) that the benches, niche, and steps were constructed prior to the laying of the Stratum II mosaic pavement, since the bottoms of all three are at a lower level. Whether this was actually part of a previous phase—as the excavators suggest—or simply initial steps during the renovations for Stratum II is entirely unclear. Dated finds sealed within and directly below the steps and benches might clarify the matter.

This may also be the case for (b), the pillars and piers. The fact that these structural supports cut through the Stratum IIIB-A pavement does not necessarily indicate they should be assigned to Stratum IIIA. They could have been built as part of Stratum II, which would coincide with the addition of the exterior stairs (to the northwest) leading to second-story galleries (see above).

The north wall portals assigned to Stratum III, (c), present another problem. The stones that blocked the central portal—identified by the excavators as a Torah niche in Stratum IIIA—may not necessarily have been intended to create a “niche” but only a wall.<sup>112</sup> The excavator’s presumption that the blocked doorway was used as a Stratum IIIA Torah repository is speculative. Indeed, the only other example for the usage of a doorway as a “Torah niche” comes from the (equally problematic) synagogue at Beth

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. for example Milson 2007: 216-17, who accepts the excavators’ Torah-niche explanation. Milson groups this feature with two other examples of Torah niches and proposes that blocked doorways formed a “type” of Torah niche construction.

She‘arim.<sup>113</sup> As for the eastern entrance along the north wall, the excavators provide no evidence that this portal existed prior to the addition of the auxiliary room in Stratum II.

Considering the questions raised by the preliminary report, I suggest that there may have been only *two* distinct phases of the synagogue: Stratum III, consisting of a large hall with three entrances and an exedra to the west and an additional single portal in the center of the north wall; and Stratum II, consisting of a narthex (which necessitated the addition of piers and pillars to support a larger roof), second-story galleries, and a larger main hall divided into a nave and aisles on the three sides (east, south, and north walls) with benches against the south wall. To the Stratum III phase, we should assign the coarse lower mosaic with geometric designs. To the Stratum II phase, we should assign the upper mosaic decorated with birds and menorahs, as well as the inscriptions (see below). The niche in the north wall—which in this reconstruction was a blocked doorway rather than a Torah repository—would only have existed in Stratum II. To Stratum II, we should also assign the bema with wooden chancel screens and the wooden Torah shrine as well as the two plastered steps (“*Cathedra* of Moses”) to the east, which may have served as an ambo. This reconstruction negates the existence of the earliest phase of the synagogue identified by the excavators (IIIB), following the reservations expressed by Milson.<sup>114</sup>

The eventual publication of stone-by-stone plans and photographs—particularly showing the relationship between the southwest pier and the west wall of the hall and the

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<sup>113</sup> The reconstruction of the second phase of the Beth She‘arim synagogue has the doors on the southeast wall blocked, though see Milson 2007: 216-217, 328-29 for the problems. Moreover, the blockage of doorways to re-orient traffic is attested elsewhere; see *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Milson 2007: 352.

southwest room—will help elucidate the phases and stratigraphy of the building. The importance behind the existence (or lack thereof) of distinct phases of Stratum III will be discussed below. In any case, Stratum II, with its fascinating inscriptions, is the best-attested phase of the synagogue, and has received the most attention in secondary literature.

### 3.1.3.4 Inscriptions

The six inscriptions discovered in the synagogue have all been assigned to Stratum II. Inscriptions 1-4 are the panels from the west aisle that were published in 1971, not long after their initial discovery.<sup>115</sup> Taken as a unit (as they typically are), they comprise the second-longest inscription found among the synagogues of Palestine, after the Rehob synagogue.<sup>116</sup> Here they have been divided on the basis of the sections created by the mosaic borders (see above and figs. 53-54). Inscriptions 5 and 6 have not been published, although both are mentioned in preliminary reports.

Inscription 1 reads as follows:

Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared	אדם שת אנוש קינן מהללאל ירד	1
Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth	חנוך מתושלה למך נוח שם חם ויפית	2

<sup>115</sup> The inscription was first published by Mazar 1971: 20-21, but the better-known transcriptions and translations are found in Levine 1981b (English translation) and Naveh 1978: 105-09, no. 70 (Hebrew translation), the latter following Mazar's original translation for the most part. See also Naveh 1989 on the names in Inscription 3, line 1.

<sup>116</sup> See Sussmann 1981.

The Hebrew inscription quotes the opening lines of the biblical book of Chronicles (1 Chr. 1-4), with only minor vocalization variants from the Masoretic text.<sup>117</sup> These figures are typically identified as the “ancestors of the world”<sup>118</sup> or the earliest “forefathers of Israel,”<sup>119</sup> and all appear in Gen. 4-6 as well, although the order suggests a deliberate reference to Chronicles.<sup>120</sup>

Inscription 2, immediately to the south of the previous inscription, reads as follows:

Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo	טלה שור תאומים סרטן ארי בתולה	1
Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, and Aquarius, Pisces	מאוזניים עקרב קישת גדי ודלי דגים	2
Nisan, Iyyar, Sivan, Tamuz, Av, Elul	ניסן אייר סיון תמוז אב אילול	3
Tishrei, Marheshvan, Kislev, Tevat, Shevat	תשרי מרחשון כסליו טבית שבט	4
and Adar. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Peace.	ואדר אברהם יצחק ויעקב שלום	5
Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Peace upon Israel	חנניה מישאיל ועזריה שלום על ישראל	6

Here we find several features encountered in the synagogues of Na‘aran and Jericho discussed above. Lines 1-2 of this Hebrew inscriptions list the twelve signs of the zodiac,

<sup>117</sup> The only notable differences are in line 2: נוח for גח; and ויפית for ויפת. On the minor differences, see Kalimi 2009: 133-34., who suggests that the differences between the spellings here and in the Masoretic text were “probably due to citing from memory.”

<sup>118</sup> Levine 1981b: 140; Naveh 1978: 108 (“אבות העולם”). See also Kalimi 2009: 133, “the “world’s 13 ancestors.”

<sup>119</sup> De Vries 1989: 22.

<sup>120</sup> Kalimi 2009: 133.

followed by the twelve months of the year in lines 3-5. The lists are calibrated so that the signs are in the same order as the associated months, beginning with Nisan-Aries.<sup>121</sup> Following the final month, Adar, in line 5 the three biblical Patriarchs are listed. Line 6 names the three companions of Daniel.

Some spellings differ from the forms found at Na‘aran and elsewhere—viz. “ארי” for “אריה” and “מאוזנים” for “מוזנים”—and two of the months include similarly lengthened vowels as indicated with the letter *yod* (“טבית” “אילול”).<sup>122</sup> The only additional peculiarity of lines 1-4 is at the end of line 2, where the conjunction -ו (“and”) precedes the penultimate Aquarius rather than Pisces. Mirsky proposes plausibly that this is an acknowledgment of competing traditions—as seen in contemporary *piyyut* literature—in which the order of Aquarius and Pisces within the zodiac is contested.<sup>123</sup> Whatever the explanation, it should be noted that similar peculiarities exist elsewhere in zodiac inscriptions: in the Stratum Ila synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias (the “Severos

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<sup>121</sup> On the order, see Hachlili 1977.

<sup>122</sup> Naveh 1978: 108.

<sup>123</sup> Mirsky 1971.

synagogue”) the word for Aquarius (דלי) is reversed,<sup>124</sup> and in the mosaic of the Beth

Alpha synagogue, where the conjunction -ו precedes both Aquarius and Pisces.<sup>125</sup>

Inscription 3 follows the previous one within the next panel, separated by a two-tesserae-thick black line. The Aramaic inscription reads as follows:

Remembered for good Yose, 'Ezrin and Ḥeziqin, sons of Ḥalifi.	דכירין לטב יוסה ועזרין וחזיקין בנוה דחלפי	1
All who cause division among his fellow men or speak	כל מן דיהיב פלגו בן גבר לחבריה הי אמר	2
libel concerning his fellow to the gentiles or steal	לשן ביש על חבריה לעממיה הי גניב	3
his fellow's possession, or who reveals the secret of the town	צבותיה דחבריה הי מן דגלי רזה דקרתה	4
to the gentiles—the One whose eyes gaze upon all the Land	לעממיה דין דעינוה משוטטן בכל ארעה	5
and sees what is hidden, He will set his face on that man	וחמי סתירתה הוא יתן אפוא בגברה	6
and his offspring and He will eradicate him from under the Heavens.	ההו ובזרעיה ויעקור יתיה מן תחות שומיה	7
And all of the people said, Amen and Amen, <i>selah</i> .	וימרון כל עמה אמן ואמן סלה	8

The transcriptions of the names עזרין and חזיקין in line 1 follow Naveh's revised reading.<sup>126</sup> The name Ḥalifi—or Ḥalfi or Ḥilfi—is found in various forms in synagogue

<sup>124</sup> Dothan 1983: 46, Pl. 16.7. The color plate in the publication (Pl. 33.7) was printed incorrectly, i.e., the plate was inverted so as to read correctly. See also the comments in Naveh 1978: 50, no. 27.

<sup>125</sup> Mirsky 1971 address both Hammath-Tiberias and Beth Alpha in his article as well. The inscriptions from Na'aran and Sepphoris do not preserve the inscriptions for Aquarius, so it is difficult to say whether or not a peculiarity existed there. On the former, see above; on the latter, see Weiss 2005: 119-21, 202. That said, a different sort of peculiarity exists in the inscription for Pisces at Sepphoris, where the *gimmel* is doubled: “דדגים”; see *ibid.* 202. This form does not seem related to the above phenomenon.

inscriptions elsewhere including Na‘aran (see above, section 2.1.3), and seems to be fairly common.<sup>127</sup> In line 2, the phrase **פּלְגוּ דִּיהִיב** may be translated alternatively as “who cause dissension” or “controversy,” although here we follow Naveh’s reading.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, the English of this line may be rendered “between a man and his friend.”<sup>129</sup> The end of line 2 and beginning of line 3 translate literally as “who speak the evil tongue.” The phrase’s use for “slander,” “libel,” “gossip,” and “denunciation” has biblical precedents and rabbinic attestations as well.<sup>130</sup> In line 5, the term **אַרְע** is used similarly to the Hebrew **אֶרֶץ**, in that it could refer to a specific country/land rather than the habitable earth in general. It may have been meant to refer specifically to **אַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל** (“the Land of Israel”) as used in Talmudic language, though the meaning here is ambiguous.<sup>131</sup>

Following the previous panel, inscription 4 reads as follows:

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<sup>126</sup> Naveh 1989: 308. Naveh notes that the addition of a final *nun* at the end of names is similar to the name Yudan, which is derived from the Hebrew Yehudah.

<sup>127</sup> See Naveh 1978: 152. For alternative vocalizations of the name, see Hirschfeld 2007: 59-64 (Ḥalfi) and Levine 1981b: 140 (Ḥilfi). It should be noted that we are assuming a masculine identity of Ḥalfi, despite the feminine identity of Ḥalifu in the Na‘aran inscription.

<sup>128</sup> See Levine 1981b: 140 and Sokoloff 2002: 434.

<sup>129</sup> Levine 1981b: 140.

<sup>130</sup> See Brown et al. 1953: 546; Holladay 2000: 179; Jastrow 2005: 720.

<sup>131</sup> See Sokoloff 2002: 76-77.



Rabbi Yose the son of Ḥalifi, Ḥeziqin the son of Ḥalifi, remembered for good.	רבי יוסה בן חלפי חזקין בן חלפי דכירין לטת	1
A great deal have they done in the name of the Merciful. Peace.	דסגי סגי הנון עבדו לשמה דרחמנה שלום	2

The messiness of the script here has been noted by Naveh.<sup>132</sup> Several letters are difficult to read, although they can be assumed by the context (see below). The tesserae appear to be slightly larger than those used in the adjacent inscriptions. Moreover, the tesserae immediately surrounding most of the inscription are laid at right angles to the frame of the panel, rather than the diagonally-laid tesserae that appear above the words but below the frame of the panel. While it is tempting to suggest that this inscription was laid subsequently to the above inscriptions, this seems unlikely since (a) the tesserae at the western (left) end of the inscription are in line and integrated with those of the surrounding field, and (b) the color of the tesserae does not seem to differ from the other panels.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, inscription 4 may have been laid by a different hand or perhaps as an afterthought to the above inscriptions. That is to say, the form, execution, and content suggest that this inscription should not be considered as part of the same unit as inscriptions 1-3.<sup>134</sup>

In line 1, the reading of חזקין rather than חזקיי follows the similar reading in line 1 of inscription 3 (above).<sup>135</sup> Naveh (and Levine) transcribe the third and sixth words of

<sup>132</sup> Naveh 1978: 109.

<sup>133</sup> The suggestion was first made by Mazar 1971: 21, 23.

<sup>134</sup> See Levine 1981b: 144, n. 5.

<sup>135</sup> Contra Naveh 1978: 107, no. 70 and Levine 1981b: 140. Naveh 1989 corrects the reading for inscription 3.

line 1 as **בר**, although considering the dedication of inscription 3, line 2 (above)—as well as the appearance of the letter<sup>136</sup>—it seems more appropriate to read the word as **בן**. In addition, the above transcription prefers Sokoloff’s suggestion for line 2—**דסגי סגי**—as opposed to Mazar’s—**דרגי סגי**.<sup>137</sup> Lastly, the appellation for God in line 2, **רחמנה** (“the Merciful”) is rare but also found in a stone-inscribed block in secondary use at Kokhav ha-Yarden, north of Beth-Shean.<sup>138</sup>

Inscription 5 is located in panel 7 of the west aisle. Because it was separated from inscriptions 1-4 by panel 6 (see above and fig. 52), it was not published in the original treatments of the En-Gedi inscriptions.<sup>139</sup> It was, however, removed along with the other inscriptions at the time of excavation. The inscription has been on exhibit in the Hecht Museum in Haifa since 2006 (see fig. 54).<sup>140</sup> It reads as follows:

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<sup>136</sup> Naveh 1978: 109 notes that the letters appear to be a final *nun* rather than a *resh* but still opts for the latter since the inscription is otherwise in Aramaic.

<sup>137</sup> See Mazar 1971. For Sokoloff’s suggestion, see Naveh 1978: 109.

<sup>138</sup> Naveh 1978: 70, no. 42.

<sup>139</sup> Notably Lieberman 1971; Mazar 1971; Mirsky 1971; Urbach 1971; Dothan 1970-71; Felix 1971; Barag 1972; Levine 1981b; Foerster 1981a; Binaymin 1989; Schwartz 2001: 264-63; Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua 2007. Although not published or translated in full, sections were mentioned in Barag 1972; Barag et al. 1972; Barag 1993a; and Barag 2006: 19\*, 24.

<sup>140</sup> See Rimmon 2006.

Remembered for good, all the people (members) of the community who gave of themselves	דכירין לטב כל בני קרתה* דיהב גרמה	1
and repaired the synagogue. Remembered for good Jonathan (the) <i>hazan</i>	ותקין כנישתה דכיר לט יונתן חזן	2
who gave of himself in the repair of the synagogue. Peace.	דיהב גרמיה בתקינה דכנישתה שלם	3

The last letter of the fifth word in line 1 appears as a *resh*, although it should be read as *קרתה*, given the use of this word in inscription 3 (see above).<sup>141</sup> The term *קרתה* appears also at Ḥusifa, Beth Alpha, and Susiya.<sup>142</sup> The term *גרמה*, emphasizing the individuals' role within the community, is less common though attested elsewhere.<sup>143</sup> The term *כנישתה* to refer to a synagogue is also unusual but not unparalleled.<sup>144</sup> The identification of a *hazan* as a donor is notable and found elsewhere, although the occurrence at En-Gedi is perhaps the most prominent example and the only one found in situ.<sup>145</sup> The spelling of the final word, *שלם* ("peace") is peculiar. Inscriptions that end with this standard closing elsewhere use the Hebrew form, *שלום*. This appearance of the

<sup>141</sup> See Barag 1972 who argues for the reading of *קרתה* in both inscriptions.

<sup>142</sup> For Ḥusifa, see Naveh 1978: no. 39; for Beth Alpha, see Naveh 1978: no. 43; for Susiya, see Naveh 1978: no. 83, and below, section 4.1.

<sup>143</sup> See Naveh 1978: no. 33 (Ḥammat Gader).

<sup>144</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 34 (Ḥammat Gader) and no. 71 (Beth Guvrin).

<sup>145</sup> See Naveh 1978: no. 40 (Ḥ. 'Ammudim) and no. 28 (Aphek, northeast of Hippos-Sussita).

term in Aramaic (presumably) is otherwise unattested in synagogue inscriptions.<sup>146</sup> The morphology and spacing of the letters are more similar to inscriptions 1-3 than inscription 4.

Inscription 5 begins as a standard dedicatory inscription, but instead of recalling a single donor, the inscription refers to the community (בני קרתה). Epigraphic references to the community as a whole have already been noted at both Na'aran and Jericho, though here the terminology varies (see Appendix B). The reference to communal efforts and those of an individual (Jonathan) to maintain the synagogue facilities in a single inscription is unusual. On the one hand, it might suggest that the *hazan* is considered to be a member of the community first and foremost, rather than the holder of a particular position of honor (like the family of Ḥalilfi in inscriptions 3-4). On the other hand, it might suggest that the communal efforts were seen in the same light as those of prominent individuals—Jonathan and the family of Ḥalilfi specifically—and therefore he is listed as among the donors. Or, of course, there may be no intended significance behind the placement and order of the dedications at all.

The final inscription, number 6, consists of a single word—גביה—painted onto the plaster of one of the pillars within the hall.<sup>147</sup> No photographs or sketches of the inscription have been published, so it is impossible to determine if this is a whole word—

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<sup>146</sup> See Naveh 1978: 151, who points out that only the determinative is used in inscriptions. See also Sokoloff 2002: 554.

<sup>147</sup> Barag 1993a.

possibly meaning “collect”—or part of a longer word.<sup>148</sup> In any case, the existence of this highly fragmentary epigraphic find serves as a reminder of the potentially-significant evidence from the walls of the building that is lost to archaeological record.<sup>149</sup>

Of the six inscriptions, numbers 4 and 5 are standard dedicatory inscriptions that identify both the donors and their donations.<sup>150</sup> The first line of inscription 3 begins in the same manner as most dedicatory inscriptions—“remembered for good”—but it does not identify the three individuals—Yose, ‘Ezrin and Ḥeziqin, the sons of Ḥalifi—as donors per se, since no donation is cited. Perhaps we are meant to assume as much based on the formulaic phrase and context.<sup>151</sup> In any case, we can assume that the “Yose” and “Ḥeziqin” (both sons of Ḥalifi) in inscription 4 are the same individuals from inscription 2, despite that the former is identified as “Rabbi” only in inscription 4, and the spelling of the latter differs slightly (though not significantly given the overall difficulty of inscription 4 [see above]). These subtle differences emphasize the point that inscription 4 was laid by a different hand and perhaps at a different time.

The cryptic language and intriguing symbols identified in inscriptions 1-4 have been the subject of several studies and interpretations. At the time of discovery, several synagogues were already known to have incorporated zodiac, calendrical, and biblical

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<sup>148</sup> Barag 2006: 19\* suggests that the word means “himself.”

<sup>149</sup> The walls and pillars of the synagogue at Rehob were painted with inscriptions; see Vitto 1981: 92. Evidence of painted plaster was reported also from the synagogues at Qaşrin (Ma‘oz and Killebrew 1988: 8), Beth She‘arim, Capernaum, Hammath Tiberias (IIB-IIA), Kh. Shema‘, and Sumaqa.

<sup>150</sup> On dedicatory inscriptions, see Naveh 1978: 7-12.

<sup>151</sup> Here, I follow the definition of dedicatory inscriptions outlined by Naveh 1978: 7-8 based on the opening formula—“remembered for good”—rather than the explicitly mentioned donations.

imagery into their mosaic floors. The revelation of a literal rendition of the zodiac and months at En-Gedi has not attracted an overwhelming amount of scholarship compared to the ever-increasing volume of literature on the pictorial versions.<sup>152</sup>

The lists of the biblical Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and companions of Daniel (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) in inscription 2, however, were treated in more detail on account of both their singularity within Jewish epigraphy (more or less) and a reference within rabbinic literature.<sup>153</sup> In *Midrash Tehilim* 1:15, we read:

And this is what people say: upon whom does the world rest? Upon three pillars. Some say Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; others say Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and still others say the three sons of Korah.<sup>154</sup>

We should avoid drawing conclusions regarding the role of rabbis within the En-Gedi synagogue based only on the connection between the inscription and this passage. Instead, this passage indicates that the biblical Patriarchs and Daniel and his companions served as potent images in the symbolic language of Judaism in Byzantine Palestine, whether in the form of literature, epigraphy, or mosaic representation (see below). That the two sets of three are described as “pillars” of the world in literary sources, with a third set of three in the inscription—the sons of Ḥalifi—suggests that the latter were themselves “pillars” of the community.<sup>155</sup> This conclusion might help explain why

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<sup>152</sup> With the exception of Mazar 1971, the earliest treatments of the inscriptions in the 1970s-80s gloss over inscriptions 1-2 for the most part. More recent treatments of the Helios-and-zodiac motif in synagogues have considered the role of the En-Gedi inscription; see Fassbeck 2000; Schwartz 2001 (discussed below); and Magness 2005b: 36.

<sup>153</sup> Mazar 1971: 22-23 was the first to note their significance, while Levine 1981b was among the first to treat this section in detail.

<sup>154</sup> The translation here follows Levine 1981b: 142.

<sup>155</sup> Mazar 1971: 23 points out the third set of three but does not connect their role in the community with the broader role of the Patriarchs and companions of Daniel.

‘Ezrin appears in inscription 3 but not in inscription 4; he was only included in the former to create a set of three that paralleled the first two sets.

Most treatments of the En-Gedi inscriptions have focused on inscription 3, which describes the curses upon the one “who causes division among his fellow men or speaks libel ... to the gentiles, or steals his fellow’s possession, or who reveals the secret of the town to the gentiles.” Several theories have been put forth to explain this cryptic language. Explanations of the “curse” in particular have ranged from general to highly specific. Among the latter is Aharon Dothan’s early suggestion, which reads the inscription in light of liturgical impositions of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. *Codex Justinianus*, specifically the limitations upon the use of “*deuterosis*” (Oral Law), and the promotion of Greek in synagogue liturgy through the “freedom of language” act.<sup>156</sup> The “secret,” according to Dothan, was the continued use of the Hebrew Torah despite the mandate from Constantinople, and perhaps also despite divisions on the issue within the Jewish community.<sup>157</sup> Such an interpretation of this “secret” seems unlikely since (a) it would require the improbable reading of רזה דקרייה (“secret of the reading”) rather than רזה דקריתה (“secret of the town”),<sup>158</sup> and (b) it applies the legislation of the *Codex Justinianus* to En-Gedi uncritically, an historical interpretation that is contradicted by the plethora of 6<sup>th</sup>-c. Hebrew inscriptions from Palestine.

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<sup>156</sup> Dothan 1970/71. See Linder 1987: no. 66.

<sup>157</sup> See Linder 1987: 403-05.

<sup>158</sup> On the corrected reading and the problems of Dothan’s transcription, see Barag 1972. In any case, there can be no reasonable objection to the reading of קרתיה (see fig. 53).

Benjamin Mazar's suggestion likewise considers the political aspects behind the "secret."<sup>159</sup> He theorized that the internal divisions and suspicions within the community expressed in the inscription attest to the divided political affiliations or loyalties of Palestinian Jews, who were split between the Byzantine rulers to the west and the Sasanian Persians to the east in the late 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> c. Mazar's reading requires dating the inscription to the very end of the synagogue's history (see below).<sup>160</sup>

Other scholars have suggested possible economic explanations, relating the "secret" to the local production of balsam. The oasis of En-Gedi was known throughout the Roman world for its production of balsam, which was used predominantly in expensive perfume.<sup>161</sup> While the hypothesis was first put forth by Lieberman and Felix, the most detailed case has been made more recently by Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua.<sup>162</sup> They argue that the agro-technical knowledge for balsam as well as date production at En-Gedi was a well-kept local secret and boon to the En-Gedi economy. The clandestine nature of the local cash-crop's cultivation, according to the authors, explains the apparently dense population and wealth of the community. While the literary evidence may suggest that En-Gedi held a monopoly over balsam cultivation during the Roman period, the evidence for the Byzantine period suggests that the crop was cultivated at oases all along the Dead Sea up to the Early Islamic period; that is, it was not a "secret"

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<sup>159</sup> See Mazar 1971: 23.

<sup>160</sup> Levine 1981b: 145 points out this potential difficulty with the dating.

<sup>161</sup> See the discussion and literary evidence pertaining to the Roman period in Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua 2007.

<sup>162</sup> Lieberman 1971; Felix 1971; Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua 2007.



unique to En-Gedi when the inscription was laid.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, the evidence presented by Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua for the wealth and size of En-Gedi may be somewhat overstated.<sup>164</sup>

Another difficult aspect of the agricultural-secret hypothesis is the application of the supposed monopoly to the inscription in the synagogue. While the presence of agricultural concerns within religious edifices is well-attested, the authors fail to explain why such ambiguous language was employed; that is to say, if the “secret” was the agro-technology, why not refer explicitly to the crop?<sup>165</sup> A reference to “balsam” or “dates” would not have revealed any secret of cultivation.

As Levine notes, we will never know what was meant by “the secret of the town,” and so those discussions of the inscription that *avoid* deciphering the “secret” may provide more useful information for understanding the community’s character and religiosity.<sup>166</sup> Urbach, for example, offers a less specific explanation to get at the heart of the socio-religious motivations behind the inscription. He suggests that the language and

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<sup>163</sup> Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua 2007: 636.

<sup>164</sup> On the evidence for the extent of Byzantine cultivation of balsam, see Hepper and Taylor 2004. The population estimate of En-Gedi provided by Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua (2007: 627-28) as numbering around 900 seems arbitrary, especially after they admit that the estimate must be based in part on the inhabited area, which is unknown. They make up for this gap in knowledge using an estimate from Josephus’s claim that 600 people were killed at En-Gedi in 70 C.E. (*War* 4:403), an assertion which is itself suspect and anyway antedates the period under question by nearly half a millennium. Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua go on to estimate the cereal-consumption at En-Gedi based on the above figure of 900, and thus extrapolate the required arable land at the oasis. The studies cited by Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua on arable-land-usage and quantity of cereal products disagree dramatically on how much land would be required. The estimation is further problematized by the use of *modern* water output of the En-Gedi springs to determine the ancient agricultural prospects. All this is to demonstrate that the community’s wealth at En-Gedi necessitated a highly desirable and exportable cash crop.

<sup>165</sup> Agricultural concerns pervade religion worldwide and throughout history. For late antique Judaism specifically, see the mosaic inscription at Rehob (Sussman 1981) and the depictions of agricultural processes in the synagogue at Chorazin (Yeivin 2000).

<sup>166</sup> See Levine 1981b: 145.

formulas of the inscription recall the oaths taken by sects, guilds, and other voluntary associations in the Greco-Roman world and thus may provide important context.<sup>167</sup>

While Levine is correct to point out that Urbach's examples are from literary sources antedating the En-Gedi synagogue by several centuries, there is no reason to assume that the phenomenon of oaths and communal loyalty found expression only during the Early Roman period.<sup>168</sup> To the contrary, the inscription is concerned explicitly with division in the community and socio-religious cohesion vis-à-vis those *outside* the community. A formal declaration of loyalty may not be stated in the inscription itself, but certainly the spirit of such oath-taking is evident.

Moreover, political and economic interpretations, such as described above, neglect the biblical style and language of the inscription, as well as the religious context.<sup>169</sup> In addition to the explicit biblical references exemplified in the quotation from 1 Chr. and the lists of the Patriarchs and companions of Daniel, Dothan demonstrates the use of formulaic biblical phrases and terminology by the epigrapher, the symbolic usage of which would not have been lost on the synagogue patrons.<sup>170</sup> Likewise, Jodi Magness has pointed out the similarity between the religious language used in the inscription and that of Heikhalot literature, specifically in the Sar ha-Torah texts.<sup>171</sup> In her interpretation, the "secret" should be read against the backdrop of

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<sup>167</sup> Urbach 1971.

<sup>168</sup> See Levine 1981b: 145.

<sup>169</sup> Dothan 1971; Naveh 1978: 108-09; Levine 1981b: 144.

<sup>170</sup> Dothan 1971; translated in Levine 1981b: 144. Kalimi 2009: 134 suggests that while line 5 of inscription 3 could have been an explicit attempt to parallel the phrase from Zech. 4:10 (*pace* Dothan), it is more likely to have been taken from 2 Chr. 16:9.

<sup>171</sup> Magness 2005b: 44.

mystical beliefs that were likely to have been more prevalent in late ancient synagogues that has previously been thought. Such secret language was typically related to Torah knowledge and the use of divine and angelic names.<sup>172</sup>

In his treatment of synagogue inscriptions, Gideon Foerster demonstrates that the language used preserves liturgical elements, recalling Yom Kippur liturgy as well as the more regularly-chanted *Mi Sheberakh* and *Qaddish* prayers.<sup>173</sup> For example, line 8 of inscription 3—**ויהרון כל עמה אמן ואמן סלה**—parallels the formulaic phrase from Jewish liturgy, **ונאמר אמן** (“and let us say, Amen”).<sup>174</sup>

Ben-Zion Binyamin points to additional examples of similarities between Yom Kippur liturgy and the inscription. He observes that the curse found in inscription 3 employs language and style known from the *Birkat ha-Minim* (“benediction [malediction?] concerning the heretics”) of the *Amidah* liturgy.<sup>175</sup> The curses found in early versions of the *Birkat ha-Minim*, implore God to enact vengeance upon “informers” or “collaborators” (**מלשינים** or **מוסרים**), similar to the En-Gedi inscription.<sup>176</sup> As Seth Schwartz and Gabriele Fassbeck have both pointed out, the negative spirit of these curses is demonstrated also in Jewish amulets, two of which have been found in southern

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<sup>172</sup> See Magness 2005b: 44, as well as the literature cited there, especially Swartz 1996 and Elio 2004.

<sup>173</sup> Foerster 1981a: 33-35.

<sup>174</sup> Foerster 1981a: 35.

<sup>175</sup> Binyamin 1987.

<sup>176</sup> Binyamin 1987: 72. Binyamin’s connection between the inscription and the *Birkat ha-Minim* is persuasive, despite his problematic historical reconstruction of the “*minim*” in Jewish usage. For other midrashic allusions to slandering and the punishments involved, see the discussion in Yadin 1983: I, 377 and the works cited there.

Palestinian synagogues (see below, on Rimmon [section 5.1.4] and Ma'on-Nirim [section 6.2.5]).<sup>177</sup>

Schwartz's interpretation of the En-Gedi synagogue is among the more complex, particularly because he views inscriptions 1-4 as a unit that requires a programmatic reading, similar to interpretations of the Helios-and-zodiac panels in synagogues elsewhere.<sup>178</sup> Programmatic readings necessitate that the viewer take into account all parts in deciphering the intended message. According to Schwartz, inscription 1—the ancestors of the world—is analogous to the biblical scenes depicted at Beth Alpha (the *'Aqedah*) and Na'aran (Daniel in the lions' den), while inscription 2 continues with the zodiac/months known elsewhere. According to Schwartz, the lists of the Patriarchs and the companions of Daniel, rather than simply being a continuation of the genealogy of inscription 1, are symbols of prototypical and successful worshippers. The curses of inscription 3 are a reference to the Torah shrine—paralleling the uppermost panels elsewhere—imploping God in a manner similar to the amulet placed in the Torah shrine at Ma'on-Nirim (see below, section 6.2.5).

There are several difficulties with Schwartz's interpretation. First, it is based on a general interpretation for the tripartite panels of the Helios-and-zodiac motif, for which Beth Alpha serves as his archetype. The problem is that the “three fixed elements” are not universal.<sup>179</sup> The zodiac wheel and the Torah shrine panels appear at Beth Alpha, Hammath-Tiberias, and Sepphoris, however, the third element varies (as Schwartz

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<sup>177</sup> On the latter, see Fassbeck 2000.

<sup>178</sup> Schwartz 2001: 261-63. For programmatic readings of synagogue mosaics, see Weiss and Netzer 1998; Schwartz 2000; Weiss 2000; and Weiss 2005.

<sup>179</sup> See Schwartz 2001: 254.

acknowledges); the evidence for the remaining three synagogues is less clear, though certainly the nave mosaics at Japhia and Ḥusifa did not adhere to the scheme.<sup>180</sup> (Susiya is far too fragmentary to determine [see below, section 4.1.3].) Since his interpretation cannot be universally applied to these six synagogue mosaics, it cannot be used to explain the En-Gedi inscription, either. Second, Schwartz's suggestion that the curses of inscription 3 refer to the Torah shrine does not make sense. Perhaps if he interpreted the Torah shrine depictions elsewhere as a supplication of God, it would be more persuasive, but this is not the case. Third, Schwartz—and most other scholars—neglect to acknowledge the crucial point that Helios and the four seasons are *not* present in the inscription. To suggest that the zodiac and months are analogous to the Helios-and-zodiac wheels negates the central image of the latter; this is an important distinction between the Helios-and-zodiac motif and the En-Gedi synagogue.<sup>181</sup> In the end, it seems that Schwartz's interpretation is simply an attempt to squeeze the inscriptions into a general mold for the six other synagogues—Na'aran, Hammath-Tiberias, Japhia, Ḥusifa, Susiya, and Sepphoris—in support of his understanding of late antique Judaism.<sup>182</sup>

While the precise meaning(s) of the symbolic language presented in inscriptions 1-3 eludes us, it is important to note that it is just that: symbolic. The ancestors of the world, the zodiac signs, the months, the Patriarchs, the companions of Daniel, the sons of

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<sup>180</sup> On Japhia, see Sukenik 1951: 22; on Ḥusifa, see Makhoul and Avi-Yonah 1933.

<sup>181</sup> Admittedly, the figure of Helios is not identified epigraphically in the few extant examples. However, the four seasons are identified with inscriptions elsewhere.

<sup>182</sup> See Schwartz 2001: 263. Another problem with Schwartz's interpretation of the En-Gedi synagogue is his explanation for the choice of epigraphic rather than figural representation of these symbols as an expression of iconophobia.

Halifi, and the curses are all part of a symbolic vocabulary displayed in a public manner that would have been endowed with meaning by the local patrons and perhaps also those outside the community.

### **3.1.4 Adjacent Settlement**

Sections of the contemporary village surrounding the synagogue were uncovered by the original excavation team in the 1970s. In 1993-1995, Gideon Hadas carried out two seasons of excavation in the area to the north and east of the synagogue in preparation for the construction of the large tent that now attracts visitors to the synagogue.<sup>183</sup> A separate excavation was carried out by Yizhar Hirschfeld to the north of the synagogue in 1996-2002 on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>184</sup>

With the help of ground penetrating radar, Hirschfeld's excavation estimated that the village of En-Gedi covered an area of about 40 dunams (4 hectares) in an elliptical shape, running 220 m N-S by 180 m E-W, with the synagogue roughly at the center.<sup>185</sup> The excavations to the immediate north and west of the synagogue, as well as the expanded excavations farther to the north, uncovered contiguous structures and alleys, suggesting a dense population. Hirschfeld estimated that there were 25 inhabitants per dunam, yielding a population of roughly 1000 people at the height of the settlement. According to Hirschfeld, such a population would have made En-Gedi substantially larger than the average village in Roman and Byzantine Palestine.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> See the final report in Hadas 2005.

<sup>184</sup> See the final report in Hirschfeld 2007.

<sup>185</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 23-25.

<sup>186</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 25. Hirschfeld cites no sources for the methodology of his population estimates.

During the 1970-72 excavations, several rooms and courtyards to the north and southwest of the synagogue and a complex of rooms abutting the synagogue immediately to the west were uncovered.<sup>187</sup> The alleys and buildings surrounding the synagogue were constructed of fieldstone walls, similar to the synagogue, with white-plaster floors covered in a fairly thick layer of ash (10 cm in some places), presumably from the destruction of the village. Few details were reported from these rooms, and their assigned uses seem to be speculative. In the alley and houses to the west of the synagogue a large number of finds was found, suggesting a hasty abandonment.<sup>188</sup>

According to Hadas's report, the finds on the floors of the rooms and alleys to the north and west of the synagogue date to the Byzantine period, with the earliest no later than ca. 390.<sup>189</sup> In several rooms and alleys to the north and west of the synagogue, Hadas identified a stratum predating the floors associated with the destruction layer. The finds on the floor of this lower stratum suggest an Early Roman date.<sup>190</sup> No finds dated exclusively to the Late Roman period were reported.

To the southwest of the synagogue, the original excavators uncovered a stepped plastered structure, which should probably be identified as a *miqveh* (Hadas's L.522).<sup>191</sup> The structure in which the *miqveh* was set was not connected to the synagogue directly

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<sup>187</sup> See Barag et al. 1972: 54.

<sup>188</sup> Barag et al. 1972: 54.

<sup>189</sup> Charred building materials in L.508 were dated to 230-390 C.E. (Hadas 2005: 45\*).

<sup>190</sup> Hadas 2005: 41\*. Hadas attributes the destruction of the lower stratum to the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132-35 C.E.). However, the finds suggest that the First Jewish revolt (66-70 C.E.) is equally likely. The only find described by Hadas which may suggest that the destruction dates to the Bar-Kokhba revolt comes from L.516/L.520, where burnt fragments of wheat were dated to 70-220 C.E. (Hadas 2005: 43\*).

<sup>191</sup> Hadas 2005: 44\*.

but stood across the alley. The date of the structure is unclear. While the form appears similar to *miqva'ot* of the Second Temple period, the published plans suggest that this structure was contemporary with the synagogue.<sup>192</sup> Although patrons of the synagogue could have attended the *miqveh* prior to entering the synagogue, the two were not part of the same complex.

In the large area excavated by Hirschfeld, north of the synagogue, the excavators uncovered a series of alleys/streets, houses, and shops. Among the more interesting finds were several lamps and fine ware vessels with crosses.<sup>193</sup> One of the lamps bears a *crux gemmata*, a relatively rare form which de Vincenz suggests held special symbolism in referencing the Christian reverence for the True Cross relic, and so the owner “must” have been a Christian.<sup>194</sup> While we should not rule out the possibility that the occasional Christian resident inhabited the village of En-Gedi alongside (within?) the Jewish community, the assumption that Jews could not have used or owned such objects is far too simplistic. In fact, examples of “Christian” symbols on artifacts found at Jewish sites exist elsewhere.<sup>195</sup>

Hirschfeld identified several strata in his area: Stratum IV (Early Roman, 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C.E. - 1<sup>st</sup> c. C.E.), Stratum III (Late Roman, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c.), and Stratum II (Byzantine, 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c.). The destruction of Stratum II, as evidenced in thick layers of ash and debris, coincided with the destruction of the synagogue and its adjoining structures. The latest

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<sup>192</sup> On the form of Second Temple period *miqva'ot*, see Reich 1990.

<sup>193</sup> See de Vincenz 2003; 2007a: 325; 2007b.

<sup>194</sup> de Vincenz 2003: 41.

<sup>195</sup> For example, a sherd of Late Roman Red Ware stamped with a cross was uncovered in the excavations of the synagogue at Kh. Shema'; see Meyers et al. 1976: Pl. 8.11.10.



coins within this destruction debris were dated to no later than 600, while the latest ceramics included wheel-made slipper lamps and “Umayyad” cooking pots, both dated to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>196</sup>

While the excavators report both Late Roman and Byzantine strata within the excavated area, they do not associate any features, loci, walls, or surfaces with Stratum III (Late Roman). Indeed, they admit that Stratum III could not be differentiated from Stratum II.<sup>197</sup> That is to say, there is no evidence for two distinct phases. The vast majority of finds from above the floor levels of Stratum II are Byzantine in date. In most areas, excavation was not carried out below the floor. In the few “probes” conducted below the Byzantine floors though, the finds were almost exclusively Early Roman, with occasional Byzantine materials.<sup>198</sup> While some Late Roman coins dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. were uncovered at the site, the overwhelming majority was dated to the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, two coins found embedded in the plaster of the “Lower Pool” date to 351-361, suggesting a mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. *terminus post quem* for that structure.<sup>200</sup> This seems to suggest

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<sup>196</sup> Regarding the cooking pots, Hirschfeld disagreed with the project’s ceramicist, de Vincenz, over the date, the former preferring a late 6<sup>th</sup> c., the latter preferring an early 7<sup>th</sup> c. date (Hirschfeld 2007: 27). Pottery assemblages of the late 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> c. are notoriously difficult (or impossible) to distinguish.

<sup>197</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 25, 35.

<sup>198</sup> See Hirschfeld 2007: 47-48, 64, 82-90. Hirschfeld 2007: 55 identifies the pottery in L.3349 (below the floor) as Byzantine, however, de Vincenz 2007a: 271 identifies the assemblage as Early Roman. Hirschfeld 2007: 67-68 identifies the pottery in L.3455 (below the floor) indicating an early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. *terminus post quem* for the floor above. However, de Vincenz 2007a: 282 dates the pottery found here to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. and beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. C.E. Hirschfeld 2007: 70 claims that a 3<sup>rd</sup> c. coin was found below the floor in L.3444, but no such coin is published in the excavation’s numismatic report (see Bijovsky 2007). In de Vincenz’s discussion of the ceramics (2007: 301-04), she passes directly from the Early Roman to the Byzantine materials.

<sup>199</sup> Bijovsky 2007: 158, Table 2.

<sup>200</sup> Hirschfeld 2007: 78. The excavator indicates that the plastering of the pool consisted of two layers: a coarse bottom layer and a smooth upper layer (Hirschfeld 2007: 77-78). It seems that these two layers were part of the same construction phase since they worked together; that is to say, they do *not* represent two

that Stratum III-II consisted of only a single phase dating to no earlier than the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. That said, some pottery dating to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to early 4<sup>th</sup> c. was found among the Byzantine assemblages. It is therefore logical to conclude that there was *some* Late Roman activity in the area of the oasis. However, given the lack of Late Roman material from Hadas's excavation, it appears that there is no evidence of Late Roman occupation (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to early 4<sup>th</sup> c.) in the immediate vicinity of the synagogue.<sup>201</sup>

This conclusion raises two problems. First, Eusebius refers to “a large village of Jews” in the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. It seems that Hirschfeld's assumption that the village existed in the Late Roman period was based primarily on Eusebius's testimony. Even if the settled area at En-Gedi had shifted to the spot of the Byzantine village in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c., we would still expect to find *some* traces of 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. activity in the area, especially since 1<sup>st</sup>-c. structures below the Byzantine stratum have been identified.

The second problem concerns the dating of the synagogue itself. The excavators dated the earliest phase of the structure to the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. As with the literary evidence, Hirschfeld no doubt had this date in mind during excavation, as well.<sup>202</sup> To resolve this second issue, we now turn to the dating of the synagogue.

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distinct phases of the pool's plaster. The excavator's description of the find-spot of the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. coin is not more specific than “within the plaster,” however, because he does identify multiple phases of the pool's plastering, we must conclude that the coin represents the *terminus post quem* for the construction of the entire installation.

<sup>201</sup> The Roman bathhouse, located about 150 m to the north of the northernmost extent of the village, went out of use in the middle of 2<sup>nd</sup> c., according to the ceramics report (Johnson 2007: 428). In any case, the bathhouse does not seem to be directly related to the Jewish village of En-Gedi but was part of the Roman presence at the site in the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. The fact that some 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. pottery apparently was mixed in with the Byzantine assemblages suggests local occupation at En-Gedi at that time; however, the nature of this occupation is unclear. Based on Hirschfeld's report, there does not seem to be any distinct phase that can be dated to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to early 4<sup>th</sup> c. Perhaps future excavation will reveal the location of Late Roman activity at En-Gedi.

<sup>202</sup> In fact, he repeats it at the outset of his excavation report (Hirschfeld 2007: 15).

### 3.1.5 Phases and Dates

As we have seen, the excavators identified three phases of the synagogue: Stratum IIIB, IIIA, and II. Stratum IIIB is dated, according to the excavators, by “[t]he pottery lamps and the coins preserved in the *genizah* of the Stratum II synagogue.”<sup>203</sup> The “*genizah*” here refers to the deposition of finds to the north of the apsidal stone feature of Stratum II. The association of these finds with Stratum II (not Stratum IIIB) is made clear by the published photographs showing the finds among the debris found *on top* of the upper floor. (To use these finds to date Stratum IIIB, they would had to have been discovered below the lower floor.) Moreover, while none of these finds has been published in detail, a lamp from the deposit may be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c. (see above), suggesting that the deposition of finds should be associated with the final phase (Stratum II) and therefore provides a *terminus post quem* for the destruction of the synagogue.

Stratum IIIA—to which the excavators assigned the re-orientation of the entrances to the west and the creation of a niche in the north wall—was dated to the mid-3<sup>rd</sup>/early 4<sup>th</sup> c. Barag suggested “that the practice of placing the Torah ark in the wall facing Jerusalem began in synagogues in Palestine and the Diaspora” at this time.<sup>204</sup> Presumably, he had in mind the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> c. synagogue at Dura-Europos as well as the Galilean-type synagogues of the traditional synagogue typology. No study has conclusively dated this practice to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> c., but regardless, this is not a viable criterion for dating. Since the two steps along the north wall (the “*Cathedra* of Moses”)

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<sup>203</sup> Barag 2006: 17\*.

<sup>204</sup> Barag 1993a.

and the area below apparently were not excavated, no datable finds could be associated with this phase.

The latest finds uncovered above the Stratum IIIB-A floor but below the Stratum II floor would give the earliest date for the construction of the latter. The excavators suggest a mid- to late 5<sup>th</sup>-c. date for the construction of the Stratum IIIA floor, though they do not report what finds were uncovered to support this dating. It is therefore impossible for us to verify.

The destruction of the synagogue was originally dated to the mid-6<sup>th</sup> c. on the basis of a coin hoard uncovered in one of the structures to the west of the synagogue. However, based on the finds of Hirschfeld's excavations in the village, Barag revised the dating of the synagogue destruction to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>205</sup>

As discussed above, the evidence for three phases in the synagogue is weak, and therefore I have suggested two phases. The Stratum III phase, with the western triportal façade associated with the lower mosaic, cannot be dated with any degree of certainty based on the excavators' report. The extent of excavations below the lower mosaic pavement is unclear, but they seem to have been very limited; there is no indication that the walls were excavated down to their foundations. Therefore, we may not be able to date the early phase. Based on the excavations of Hadas and Hirschfeld though, we may suggest that there was no substantial occupation in the village of the synagogue between the late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. and the mid- to late 4<sup>th</sup> c. Thus, the early phase of the En-Gedi synagogue should be dated after the mid- to late 4<sup>th</sup> c.

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<sup>205</sup> Barag 2006: 19\*.

Regarding the later phase of the synagogue, we have no criteria beyond the suggestion of the excavators to revise the date of the renovation. Therefore we must tentatively conclude that the later phase was constructed no earlier than the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. (as proposed by the excavators) and destroyed no earlier than the late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> c.

### **3.1.6 Conclusion**

All conclusions regarding the En-Gedi synagogue are based only on the published information, and so should be considered preliminary to the final publication of the synagogue excavations. The evidence outlined above suggests that the community of En-Gedi built a this synagogue during or after the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c., directly on top of remains of a Jewish village that ceased to be occupied in the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. The synagogue's main hall was decorated with modest geometric mosaics, and already in its initial phase had a triportal façade opening on to an exedra to the west. Sometime during the mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. or later, the wealth of the village—or perhaps merely that of the family of Ḥalifi—enabled a renovation, adding a narthex, an elaborate mosaic pavement, and a decorated wooden Torah shrine and bema. This enlarged structure likely included second story balconies along the east, west, and south sides. The building was in use by the inhabitants of En-Gedi until the destruction of the village a century or so later.

The presence of at least one doorway along the north wall of the earlier phase raises questions regarding the liturgical orientation. While the western triportal façade presumably served as the primary entrance into the synagogue, the additional doorway(s) along the Jerusalem-oriented wall might have been a distraction during organized services, though the situation does not appear to have been a problem in Galilean-type

synagogues.<sup>206</sup> That said, it should be noted that the identification of the earlier building as a synagogue is based on (a) the use of the building as a synagogue in the later phase, and (b) the fact that it apparently was a communal hall in a Jewish village (cf. above, section 1.2.1). It is significant that there are no features of the earlier phase that can be associated with its use—such as inscriptions, benches, or a bema—as in the later phases. This is not to say that such a public meeting space was not used as a synagogue but rather that the character of the building in earlier phase was somewhat different from the later phase.

In any case, the decorated structure of the mid-5<sup>th</sup> to late 6<sup>th</sup>/early 7<sup>th</sup> c. was a synagogue with those features readily associated with the institution—such as a bema, benches, and dedicatory inscriptions. The character of the associated Jewish community has been described as relatively affluent, but the building's modest size—which is significantly smaller than the Na'aran synagogue—and limited decorative schemes do not imply extraordinary wealth.<sup>207</sup>

Nevertheless, En-Gedi appears to have prospered through its export of balsam and date products up until the 7<sup>th</sup> c. The local network of trade would have brought the community into contact with villages along the Dead Sea as well as westward into the Judean Hills. The inaccessibility of the northern road along the Dead Sea during the

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<sup>206</sup> See *inter alia* Avi-Yonah 1973; 1978; Kloner 1981: 12-14. On the use of space and liturgical orientation, see also Spigel 2008: 34-126.

<sup>207</sup> Notably Rosen and Ben-Yehoshua 2007, although most scholars seem to agree based in part on Eusebius's description.

Byzantine period may suggest that the village of En-Gedi was connected commercially to the villages in the southern Hebron Hills, the region to which we now turn.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> On the roads westward from En-Gedi, see Hirschfeld 2007: 6.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SOUTHERN HEBRON HILLS

#### 4.0.1 Introduction

The southern hill country of Palestine, known as the Judean Hills, is divided into three ranges running north to south: the Bethel Hills, the Jerusalem Hills, and the Hebron Hills. The Hebron Hills rise higher than the Jerusalem Hills to the north and drop steeply to the east and west.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Lower Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea Region, the area to the south of the city of Hebron comprised a fairly dense settlement zone during the Roman and Byzantine periods, mostly consisting of small villages.<sup>2</sup> It is this area that the historical sources typically identify as the “Darom.”<sup>3</sup>

The Jewish settlements of the southern Hebron Hills served as the topic for David Amit’s 2003 doctoral dissertation.<sup>4</sup> His work at the sites of Ma‘on (in Judea) and Ḥ. ‘Anim was the core of the study, while the synagogues at Kh. Susiya and Eshtemoa as well as finds from sites elsewhere in the southern Hebron Hills provided the materials for comparative discussions, specifically regarding the architectural orientation of the buildings and the symbolic use of the menorah among the synagogues’ artistic repertoire.

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<sup>1</sup> Orni and Efrat 1973: 58-60.

<sup>2</sup> See Schwartz 1986: *passim*; Amit 2003.

<sup>3</sup> On the ancient designation, see Avi-Yonah 2002: 160-61. On historical usage in general, see Peleg 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Amit 2003.



Amit's study includes the most comprehensive discussions of the four synagogues—Kh. Susiya, Eshtemoa, Ma'on (in Judea), and Ḥ. 'Anim—available to date. His chapters on Ma'on and Ḥ. 'Anim present the finds of the excavation and therefore serve as an unpublished final report for the fieldwork. The sections on the sites *not* excavated by the author—Kh. Susiya and Eshtemoa—provide a comprehensive analysis of the relevant studies and preliminary reports. Since it would be redundant to reiterate all of Amit's work here, we will limit our discussion and descriptions to the most relevant features of the synagogues and sites, as well as those details not included by Amit.

#### **4.1 Kh. Susiya<sup>5</sup>**

Kh. Susiya (henceforth Susiya) is one of the most important sites for the study of Jewish village life in late ancient Palestine.<sup>6</sup> The extensive remains include some of the Second Temple period, although the majority of the structures preserved are Byzantine in date.<sup>7</sup> The communal religious structure at Susiya is among the best preserved and most enigmatic of the Palestinian synagogues.

##### **4.1.1 Location and Identification**

The ruins of Susiya comprise about 20 acres (80 dunams) on a horseshoe-shaped ridge among the southern Hebron Hills (fig. 55), about 13.5 km south of the city of

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the references below, see the following catalog entries on Susiya: Saller 1972: no. 81; Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 422-32; Chiat 1982: 230-35; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: no. 170; Ilan 1991: 311-17; Milson 2007: 467-68.

<sup>6</sup> On the excavations at Susiya (other than in the synagogue) and overviews of the site, see Hirschfeld 1984; Negev 1985a, 1985b; 1991; 1993, Amit 2003: 38-49; Baruch 2005; Sar-Avi 2008.

<sup>7</sup> On the finds dating to the Second Temple period and the nature of the settlement at Susiya at that time, see Baruch 2008: 31-35; Sar-Avi 2008: 208.

Hebron and 6.0 km north of the Green Line which marks the West Bank (NIG 209800/590500; 31°24'23"N 35°06'06"E).<sup>8</sup> The site sits at 750 m asl, a stark contrast from En-Gedi (see above), which is reflected in the cooler and wetter climate.<sup>9</sup>

The modern name “Susiya” comes from the local Arabic designation, although it has ancient roots.<sup>10</sup> While a 12<sup>th</sup>-c. record undoubtedly refers to the site, the name Susiya probably goes back to the Early Islamic period and possibly the Roman period.<sup>11</sup> It seems strange that the site is not mentioned by this name explicitly in Roman, Christian, or Jewish sources.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of textual references lends support to Avraham Negev’s suggestion that Kh. Susiya be identified with one of the sites known by Eusebius as “Carmel.”<sup>13</sup> To

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<sup>8</sup> On the area of the site, see Sar-Avi 2008: 210.

<sup>9</sup> On the climate, see Orni and Eftat 1973: 58-60, 135-38, 144-46. The annual precipitation is somewhat lower than the Shephelah and coastal plain to the west. On the elevation of the site, see Gutman et al. 1972: 47.

<sup>10</sup> See Amit 2003: 38.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see Amit 2003: 38-39. The 12<sup>th</sup>-c. source mentions a land-grant of Baldwin I to the Hospitalers; see Ehrlich 1996. On the name of the site during the Early Islamic period, see the brief comments in Talshir 1987. Regarding the name of the site in the 1<sup>st</sup> c., Ze’ev Safrai has suggested that the “sons of Sosa” mentioned by Josephus (*War* 4.235) were in fact from Susiya (Safrai 1972). Amit (2003: 38) seems convinced by this, if for no other reason than because of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. finds at the site. It is a difficult case to make, and Safrai may be on firmer grounds when he suggests that an inscription from the Beth She’arim necropolis that is typically read as “Sussita” may instead be read as “Susiya” (contra Mazar and Amit). Guérin initially identified the site as the biblical Hazar-susa, mentioned as part of the tribe of Simon in Josh. 19:5 (see Negev 1985: 231). However, few accept this identification because its location and the apparent lack of Iron Age remains at the site. The suggestion seems reasonable to me for the later periods, that is to say, it is possible that the inhabitants of the city during the Roman and Byzantine periods identified their home with the biblical site. That said, we would expect to find an entry in the *Onomasticon* had it been identified with a biblical site.

<sup>12</sup> Sar-Avi 2008: 207. In addition to the possible references mentioned by Safrai (see above), Joshua Schwartz suggests that the late 3<sup>rd</sup>-c. *’amora’* R. Jacob ben/bar Susi was from Susiya (Schwartz 1986: 221, 267). Since the site is not identified with any biblical toponym, we should not expect to find it in Eus., *Onom.*

<sup>13</sup> See Negev 1985a: 249-51; 1985b: 101-02.

be sure, Eusebius's entries on this village are confused. He mentions "Carmel" and its variants three times.<sup>14</sup> In the first instance, it is called Χερμαλά (*Onom.* 465/93), which is said to be located next to the village of Ziph, about 6.5 km southeast of Hebron; Eusebius considered this village Jewish. The second time (*Onom.* 611/118), the site is spelled the same way, said to lie at the tenth mile-marker from Hebron, and home to a Roman garrison. The third reference indicates that the site of Χερμέλ (*Onom.* 953/172) is a "very large village" (*not* identified as Jewish) situated south of Hebron, where a garrison is stationed. The entry refers the reader to a previous entry, but it is unclear which of the other two is meant. Negev's solution to the repetitions and seeming inconsistencies is to suggest that there were *two* villages known as Carmel (or Χερμαλά/Χερμέλ): (1) a "very large" Christian village, located at Kh. Kirmil (Karmil, el-Kurmul), about 3.0 km northeast of Kh. Susiya; and (2) the smaller Jewish village, located at Susiya. In support of this suggestion, Negev notes that the synagogue inscriptions (see below) refer alternatively to members of the קרתה ("village") and the קהלה קדישה ("the holy congregation"), thus differentiating between the Jews of Jewish Carmel (Susiya) and the Jews inhabiting the larger Christian Carmel (Kh. Kirmil).

There are several problems with Negev's hypothesis. While it may be reasonable to believe that Jews inhabited a predominantly Christian village at Kh. Kirmil, there is no

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<sup>14</sup> I do not include here the reference to the mountain called Carmel near the northern coast, also mentioned by Eusebius.

reason to assume that קרתה and קהלה refer necessarily to two different groups.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the location, neither of these sites—Susiya or Kh. Kirmil—is close enough to the village of Ziph to be associated with it, thus suggesting that Eusebius was not as knowledgeable about the Hebron Hills as he claimed. But more to the point, Eusebius’s work is characterized by inconsistencies and confusion. As noted by Notley and Safrai, “[n]o forced resolutions of the inconsistencies need be sought.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, we should recall that Eusebius does not list *all* sites in Palestine but only those he connects with biblical toponyms.

Although we may set aside Eusebius’ testimony, we must still account for the absence of Susiya in our sources. We are left with the following options (which are not mutually exclusive): (a) It is a matter of chance that Susiya does not appear in the extant sources,<sup>17</sup> (b) the site is mentioned indirectly,<sup>18</sup> and/or (c) the site was known by a different name altogether during the Roman and Byzantine period and the proper identification is unknown. In any case, for our purposes, it is enough to recognize the site as a substantial village among the religiously-mixed region of the Hebron Hills in the Roman-Byzantine period, at the center of which stood a grandiose synagogue.

#### **4.1.2 Research History**

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<sup>15</sup> Mixed communities were a typical feature for larger towns and cities in Palestine, but there is little evidence for such situations in villages as small as Susiya. That said, the evidence for mixed communities may be difficult to determine, especially in cases where one group was a large majority.

<sup>16</sup> Notley and Safrai 2005: 89-90.

<sup>17</sup> Schwartz 1991: 97-98.

<sup>18</sup> Safrai 1972, and see above.

The ruins of Susiya (see fig. 57) have been known in scholarship since their exploration in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., and the large building on the crest of the hill was noted early on.<sup>19</sup> The synagogue was surveyed intensively by Shemarya Gutman in 1969, and excavations took place in 1971-72.<sup>20</sup> The excavations were directed by Gutman, Ze'ev Yeivin, and Ehud Netzer on behalf of the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture, the IDAM, the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University, and the IES, operating under the auspices of the Military Command of Judea and Samaria (now the Staff Officer of Archaeology). As with Na'aran and Jericho (see above), the post-1967 work done at the site was not subject directly to the Antiquities Authority, despite the involvement of IDAM archaeologists.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the whereabouts of many of the finds and records from the excavation are unknown. The marble fragments of the chancel screen and bema decorations (see below) are currently on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Extensive conservation work has been done at the site since the 1980s, following the establishment of the nearby Israeli settlement of Susya [sic] and the promotion of local tourism. As a result, the level of preservation at the time of excavation is unclear. Certainly, the pillars of the courtyard and the arches (see below) were re-erected and sections of the benches and the bemas were replaced after excavation.<sup>22</sup> A roofed

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<sup>19</sup> For overview of researchers and the site, see Amit 2003: 39-49. For 19<sup>th</sup> c. explorations, see Tristram 1865: 387; Guérin 1869: 172-73; Condor et al. 1883: 414-15. Guérin identified the building as a church; the *Survey of Western Palestine* team correctly identified the building as a synagogue a few years later. The site was also surveyed by Kochavi in 1968 following the Six-Day War (Kochavi 1972: 19-89).

<sup>20</sup> Gutman et al. 1972: 47; 1981: 123.

<sup>21</sup> Much of the work was carried out by Ze'ev Yeivin, an official with the IDAM, although the primary investigators were affiliated with the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

<sup>22</sup> For the state of preservation in the courtyard at the time of excavation, see the photograph in Yeivin 1993b: 1418.

structure built over the main hall allowed some mosaics to remain in situ, however, they have suffered from exposure to the elements (and local wildlife) anyway. From a research perspective, the most problematic conservation efforts involve the mosaics. According to the few published photographs from the original excavation, the mosaic pavements of the main hall and narthex were very badly damaged. Some of the damaged sections were apparently repaired in antiquity, as evidenced in discrepancies in the sizes of the tesserae seen in the earliest photographs (fig. 56), as well as identifiable techniques typically used in the repair of iconoclastic damage (see below).<sup>23</sup> Many areas though, suffered from poor preservation over the centuries since the building went out of use, so when the site was prepared for tourism in the 1980s, sections of the mosaic were filled in for practical and aesthetic purposes. While some areas were repaired with a fine cement—e.g., part of the secondary bema (see below)—other areas were filled in with large tesserae, similar to those used by the ancient repairers. As a consequence, it is difficult to differentiate between ancient and modern repairs. It seems that the modern conservators used tesserae that were of more uniform and larger size and slightly grayer than those of the ancient repairs, and they laid the pieces in much more regular rows and columns than did the ancient mosaicists. Nevertheless, barring the publication of the excavation and conservation records (assuming such records exist), a more intensive study is required to determine the level of preservation at the time of excavation and the conservation accomplished since then.

#### **4.1.3 Description of the Synagogue**

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<sup>23</sup> See Gutman et al. 1972: 49, 51; Naveh 1978: 120.

The synagogue lies on a sloped hill at the end of the long main road that traverses the site southeast-northwest (see fig. 57).<sup>24</sup> While the change in elevation over the hilltop is not particularly dramatic, the building's position on the high point of the hill is obvious to the naked eye.<sup>25</sup> The height, construction materials, and general preservation made the building stand out to the earliest researchers, and no doubt this aspect was not lost on the inhabitants in antiquity. The choices of location and construction materials were likely intended to emphasize the building's importance relative to the surrounding buildings in the settlement.<sup>26</sup>

The synagogue complex consists of an open courtyard, a narrow narthex, a long main hall, and two auxiliary rooms (fig. 58). The long-walls of the overall plan are oriented east-west, with the main entrances to the courtyard and hall on the east walls. Assuming the direction of prayer was northward toward Jerusalem (see below), the congregants would have faced the long north wall of the main hall during prayer. For this reason, the Susiya synagogue has been identified as a broadhouse or transitional type.<sup>27</sup>

The courtyard is nearly rectangular, with interior dimensions of about 15.4 m along the east wall, 11.75 m along the north and south walls, and 15.0 m along the west wall.<sup>28</sup> The primary entrance to the courtyard appears to be through the east wall from

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<sup>24</sup> For the most detailed preliminary reports on the excavations in synagogue, see Gutman et al. 1972; 1981; Yeivin 1993b.

<sup>25</sup> None of the publications includes relative elevations within the site.

<sup>26</sup> Amit 2003: 68.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see Levine 2000a: 296; Fine 2005: 88. On synagogue typology, see above, Chapter One.

<sup>28</sup> Precise measurements for the courtyard and narthex have not been published, but a fairly detailed plan appears in Yeivin 1993c: 16-17. See fig. 58.

the main road, located slightly off-center; a secondary entrance is located on the eastern half of the north wall, adjacent to the entrance of the subterranean facility (see below).<sup>29</sup> Both entrances could be closed with large rolling stones, which were uncovered adjacent to the doorways (fig. 59).<sup>30</sup> Each measures about 2.0 m in diameter and was set into runners.<sup>31</sup> Similar rolling stones have been uncovered at eleven sites south of Hebron and three east of Jerusalem, all apparently from the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>32</sup> In all cases, the stone was used to block the entrance of a monastery, church, or private dwelling; Susiya is the only example in a specifically Jewish context. Nir Tal concludes that the use of rolling stones is evidence of insecurity on the desert fringe during the late Byzantine period, although perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is evidence of security *concerns* and the *perception* of insecurity.

Covered porticoes line the north, south, and east sides of the courtyard, measuring 2.25, 2.25, and 2.50 m-wide, respectively.<sup>33</sup> The roofs of the porticoes were held up by square pillars and pilasters, between which sprang stone arches. Presumably wooden rafters for the roof would have been laid above (fig. 60). In the northeast and southeast corners of the courtyard were two very small rooms, each measuring less than 2 by 2 m. Both rooms were accessible from within the north and south porticoes respectively. The southeast room also had an entrance from the east portico. The doorway from the south

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<sup>29</sup> Amit 2003: 69 characterizes the primary and secondary entrances as stated above, and considering the location of the main road, I agree.

<sup>30</sup> The precise findspot of the rolling stones is unclear, since they have since been re-erected in their (presumably) intended positions.

<sup>31</sup> Amit 2003: 70.

<sup>32</sup> See Tal 1996.

<sup>33</sup> The south portico widens somewhat toward the east.



portico into the southeast room was apparently blocked at some point toward the end of the building's history (fig. 61). The excavators suggest that these rooms were used for storage, apparently based on their size.<sup>34</sup>

The excavators uncovered two floor levels within the courtyard: the earlier floor was a flagstone pavement, and the later was a “crude mosaic floor.”<sup>35</sup> The flooring of the east portico seems to have been a flagstone paving as well, with the stones laid less regularly. The south portico was paved with a mosaic carpet of relatively coarse polychrome tesserae (fig. 61). The mosaic design is comprised of a two-strand guilloche border enclosing rows of interlaced circles.<sup>36</sup> At the eastern extremity of the south portico was a Hebrew inscription, oriented so as to be read from the west, and set within a *tabula ansata* of red tesserae:<sup>37</sup>

Remembered for good, the sanctity of my master Rabbi	זכור לטובה קדושת מרי רבי	1
Isai the priest, the honorable, <i>birebbi</i> , who made	איסי הכהן המכובד בירבי שעשה	2
this mosaic and plastered its walls	הפסיפוס הזה וטח את כותליו	3
with lime, which was donated at a feast [of]	בסיד מה שנתנדב במשתה	4
Rabbi Johanan, the priest, the scribe <i>birebbi</i> ,	רבי יוחנן הכהן הסופר בירבי	5
his son. Peace upon Israel. Amen.	בנו שלום על ישראל אמן	6

<sup>34</sup> Gutman et al. 1972: 47.

<sup>35</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 124.

<sup>36</sup> For border pattern, see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: B2; for field pattern, see Avi Yonah 1932: B11.

<sup>37</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 75. The inscription originally was published in Gutman et al. 1972: 51, no. 4. See the color photograph in Levine 1981a: Pl. II. The translation here follows Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 102, with the exception of the term **בירבי**, left untranslated. For the most complete and recent discussion of this inscription, see Rosenfeld 2005.

Hebrew inscriptions of this length are rare, but the dedicatory formulas used here are quite common, as we have seen already. That said, there are several unusual aspects about this inscription. First is the number of appellations given to the two individuals—Rabbi Isai and Rabbi Johanan—both of whom are priests.<sup>38</sup> Second is the appellations themselves, most of which are otherwise unattested or rare. The term קדושת (“the sanctity of”) is nowhere else attested in Hebrew or Aramaic inscriptions in reference to an individual, though as Naveh notes, this usage is found in gaonic letters of correspondence and in the Palestinian Talmud.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, similar appellations of holiness appear in Christian inscriptions.<sup>40</sup> This usage of מכובד and הסופר is also unattested in synagogue inscriptions.<sup>41</sup> The term בירבי appears among synagogue inscriptions elsewhere only at Beth Alpha, but it is attested six times in funerary contexts at Jaffa, Beth She‘arim, and Zoar.<sup>42</sup> The designation מרי (“my master”) is likewise not used in inscriptions elsewhere in Hebrew to refer to anyone but God.<sup>43</sup> It is a strange

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<sup>38</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 128.

<sup>39</sup> Naveh 1978: 116. See y.Nedirim 6, 40a; y.Sanhedrin 1, 19a. The original excavators argued that the inscription was late based on the gaonic comparanda, though Shmuel Safrai demonstrated that the language had been used also in earlier literature; see also Amit 2003: 75 and Rosenfeld 2005: 170-71.

<sup>40</sup> Rosenfeld 2005: 171.

<sup>41</sup> Rosenfeld 2005: 169, 172. As Rosenfeld points out, the term מכובד does not have any specific religious connotation (unlike the other appellations), however, the term is used in rabbinic literature (see *ibid.*). Rosenfeld suggests that this term is a translation of the Greek *παλατινος*, from the Latin *palatium*.

<sup>42</sup> For Jaffa and Beth She‘arim, see Cohen 1981: 8, and the literature cited there. One of the inscriptions from Jaffa appears in Greek rather than Aramaic: Βηρεβι. For Zoar, see Naveh 2000: no. XXII; and Misgav 2006: 46, no. 17.

choice here since the term is actually Aramaic, and a Hebrew equivalent—such as אֲדוֹן or בעל—might have served to create consistency in the use of an antiquated tongue. It may have been meant as a translation from the Greek κῶρος or κύριος, as seen in synagogues elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> The term בִּירְבִי likewise is Aramaic, and should be understood as either “the Venerable” or “the Esteemed” or simply “the Important One.”<sup>45</sup> In any case, both these terms—מְרִי and בִּירְבִי—along with הַמְּכֻבָּד, should be read as somewhat redundant titles of honor and not meant to indicate any specific and determinable function within the community. On the other hand, the title הַסּוֹפֵר (“the scribe”) in line 5 presumably denotes an actual role and perhaps even occupation, although whether this is literally a “scribe” or a teacher of some sort is unclear.<sup>46</sup> Last, we should point out the recurrence of the closing phrase here—“Peace upon Israel, Amen”—as has been seen at Jericho and En-Gedi.

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<sup>43</sup> See Naveh 1978: no. 20, at H. ‘Ammudim (Umm el-’Amed) in Lower Galilee, “דְּמַרֵי שׁוּמִיא.” Rosenfeld 2005: 171 suggests that the term here has a religious connotation.

<sup>44</sup> See Roth-Gerson 1987: 180.

<sup>45</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 102 translates “the venerable.” Sokoloff, who considers the term to be a form of בִּיר רַבִּי (literally “son/member of rabbi”), translates the term as “important person” (2002: 101-02). The term is also attested epigraphically at Beth Alpha (Naveh 1978: 43), and in Greek—BHPEBI—in funerary contexts at Jaffa and Beth She’arim. On this term in general, see Naveh 1978: 116; Miller 2004; and Rosenfeld 2005: 173, and the literature cited there.

<sup>46</sup> On the use of the Aramaic equivalent, סַפֵּר, to mean “teacher,” see Sokoloff 2002: 386; and Rosenfeld 2005: 176, citing *Bereshit Rabbah* 70.19.

Shmuel Safrai proposed that the Rabbi Isai (or Isi) mentioned in this inscription be identified with or related to a Galilean rabbi of the same name who was apparently a teacher of Rabbi Jacob bar Susi.<sup>47</sup> The former is said to have visited Eshtemoa, while the surname of the latter perhaps suggests that he was *from* Susiya.<sup>48</sup> However, both of these rabbis probably lived before the Susiya synagogue was constructed (see below), and a familial connection is little more than speculation.<sup>49</sup> In any case, the name Isai is not altogether unknown in the epigraphic sources. It is likely an Aramaicized version of the Hebrew name יִשׂי or Jesse. Alternatively, the name, יִסַּי, may be a variant of the name Yose—a shortened form of the name Joseph—as the 2<sup>nd</sup>-c. *tanna*, Yose ben Akavyah, is known in Talmudic literature by the name Issi (or Isai), as well.<sup>50</sup> Greek versions of the name appear in two different forms in the Gaza synagogue: Ἰσσηῖτος and Ἰσσηῖ(τος) (see below), and a variant spelling in Aramaic appears at Eshtemoa (see below).

Regarding the placement of the mosaic, Ben Zion Rosenfeld suggests that the southern portico of the courtyard was used specifically for teaching and so is the proper place to have an inscription identifying and honoring the teachers, Rabbi Isai and Rabbi Johanan.<sup>51</sup> The parallels cited by Rosenfeld, however, are too disparate to be convincing.

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<sup>47</sup> Safrai 1973-74; see also y.Pesaḥim 84, 31b; y.Megillah 82, 73c.

<sup>48</sup> Schwartz 1986: 267.

<sup>49</sup> On the problem of the date, see Amit 2003: 75-76 and Rosenfeld 2005: 170. A further problem for this identification is in the discrepancy of the name—יִסַּי versus יִסַּי. On the issue of identifying figures from synagogue inscriptions with those of rabbinic literature in general, and with specific reference to this case, see Cohen 1981: 11; Levine 2011.

<sup>50</sup> See Abermach 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Rosenfeld 2005: 174.

While it is of course possible that the portico served as an impromptu school, this is far from certain.

In the southeast corner of the courtyard's open area is an entrance to a cistern that extends below much of the eastern half of the courtyard (see fig. 60). The presence of water installations in synagogues has been noted already at Na'aran and En-Gedi (and see Appendix A). The extent of this subterranean cistern at Susiya, however, suggests that it predates the construction of the courtyard. That said, we should not rule out the possibility that either (a) the cistern was built as part of the original conception of the overall plan, or (b) the presence of a cistern was taken into consideration for the construction of the synagogue. In any case, it appears that the cistern was in use throughout all phases of the structure for rain collection.<sup>52</sup>

In the eastern section of the north portico, adjacent to the northern entrance, the floor opens onto several rock-cut steps leading down below the courtyard and to the east. From the steps, a passageway hooks up with a large subterranean complex that extends to the north for about 70 m and lets out on the north side of the hill (see fig. 57). The original function of the structure is unclear, though the numismatic finds suggest that it was initially used during the First Jewish revolt and sealed in the 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>53</sup> At least some sections of it appear to have been used as a quarry.<sup>54</sup> Aharon Pniel and David Amit have suggested that while the synagogue was in use, the complex served primarily as a refuge

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<sup>52</sup> Gutman et al. 1972: 48; 1981: 124. Similarly a reused cistern opening into the synagogue has been excavated recently at Huqoq (Magnes, personal communication, September 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Pniel 1992; Amit 2003: 70.

<sup>54</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 124.

cave and an escape route, a suggestion perhaps supported by the rolling stones.<sup>55</sup> While there are numerous subterranean facilities throughout the site (see below), this complex is the most extensive published. Assuming the complex predates the synagogue, the original builders and synagogue patrons must have been aware of the cave's existence when choosing their site.

Following the local topography, five broad steps along the west side of the courtyard lead up 1.5 m to the narthex.<sup>56</sup> Six columns in antis—four full and two engaged—stand along the east side of the narthex, supporting the roof over the open-air porch.<sup>57</sup> A small room at the southern end of the narthex includes a portal to the south portico of the courtyard, as well as four stairs which presumably ascended to a second story. The east-west width of the narthex is about 2.5 m. The north-south length of the narthex is about 13.9 m, that is, 1.1 m shorter than that of the courtyard (see above). The discrepancy is due to the thickening of the north wall of the narthex, which is about double the thickness of the north wall of the courtyard. The broad north wall of the narthex and main hall is badly damaged in some spots (see below), though it appears to be about 1.90 m-thick (see fig. 58).

At some point the narthex was paved with a polychrome mosaic decorated with a geometric pattern and at least three separate inscriptions. Most of the narthex mosaic is poorly preserved. It was damaged and repaired at least once with white tesserae in antiquity. Modern conservation work has obscured the extent of the ancient repairs (see

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<sup>55</sup> Pniel 1992; Amit 2003: 70.

<sup>56</sup> Gutman et al. 1972: 47-48; 1981: 124. This open-air narthex, or exonarthex (see Krautheimer 1965: 361) has alternatively been referred to as a porch or exedra.

<sup>57</sup> Gutman et al. 1972: 47-48; 1981: 124.

above; fig. 62 and 63).<sup>58</sup> It is clear, however, that the repairs covered large irregularly shaped blotches rather than purposefully-removed sections (cf. on Na‘aran above). The border of the mosaic, visible at the north end, consists of a wavy ribbon scroll and ivy leaves (fig. 64).<sup>59</sup> The visible parts of the mosaic field pattern—mostly on the south side—have curvilinear designs similar to mosaics elsewhere dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. (fig. 63).<sup>60</sup> There are three inscriptions in the narthex. The first, in Aramaic, is a single line located at the northern end (fig. 64)<sup>61</sup>:

[Re]membered be for good the <i>advocatus</i> (?) Yeshua‘ the witness and <i>advocatus</i> (?) Sh[ ]	[ד]כירין לטב מנחמה ישוע [ ] שהדה ומנחמה ש	1
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The term **מנחמה** is strange and otherwise unattested in epigraphic and literary sources.<sup>62</sup>

The excavators suggest that it is a form of the name Menaḥem, though they acknowledge that it is relatively rare in rabbinic literature.<sup>63</sup> Naveh rejects the suggestion and proposes that **מנחמה** is a title or profession, perhaps derived from the verb, **נחם** (“to console”)

<sup>58</sup> Note the discrepancies between the images of figs. 63 (taken on 30 May 2005) and 65 (taken at the time of excavation in 1971-72). The tesserae that cut through the inscription do not match; that is to say, the ancient repairs were removed by the conservators and replaced with similar, though noticeably distinct, monochrome tesserae.

<sup>59</sup> See Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 101, B1+J6.

<sup>60</sup> For example, in the crypt of St. Elianus at Madaba (see Piccirillo 1993: 124-25), and the church at Shavei Zion (see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: pl. CXLVIII). Perhaps most similar are the patterns from the church at Shiqmona (see *ibid.*, nos. 222-28, esp. no. 227).

<sup>61</sup> The transcription and translation here follow Naveh 1978: no. 77. The inscription originally was published in Gutman et al. 1972: no. 2.

<sup>62</sup> See Sokoloff 2002: 317.

<sup>63</sup> Gutman et al. 1972: 51; 1981: 126. That said, it is occasionally attested; see the references in Jastrow 2005: 799. See also below on the dedicatory inscription from Gaza, section 6.1.3.2 and Appendix B.

and related by Christian authors as *consolator* in translation from the Greek παράκλητος (e.g., John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).<sup>64</sup> In Syriac translation, the term appears as מנחמנא.<sup>65</sup>

The New Testament meaning of “intercessor of the Holy Spirit” is probably less likely here than “legal assistant” (Latin, *advocatus*).<sup>66</sup> The latter is supported by the secondary title of “witness.”<sup>67</sup> In any case, the precise understanding here of the donors’ occupation, title, or proper name eludes us, and in light of the inscription from Gaza (see below), we should not dismiss the possibility that the personal name, Menahem, is intended.<sup>68</sup>

The second inscription in the narthex, also in Aramaic, is located a few meters to the south of the previous one. The inscription here is set within a space between the geometric bands, a style used elsewhere (see below), and is oriented so as to be viewed from the south.<sup>69</sup> It reads as follows:<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Naveh 1978: 119.

<sup>65</sup> Naveh 1978: 119.

<sup>66</sup> Liddell et al. 1940: s.v. παράκλητος.

<sup>67</sup> Naveh 1978: 119.

<sup>68</sup> On the Gaza inscriptions, see below, section 6.1.3.2.

<sup>69</sup> For an example of a similar placement of an inscription, see the Samaritan synagogue at Ramat Aviv (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Pl. CXXXIV.1).

<sup>70</sup> The transcription and translation follow Naveh 1978: no. 78. The inscription was originally published in Gutman et al. 1972: no. 1.



Remembered [for good]	דכיר	1
Joshua Yudan	יושוע יודן	2
[ ] who gave	[ ] דיהב	3
[ ]	[ ]	4

Here we have another standard dedicatory inscription. The name Joshua may refer to the same individual as in the previous inscription, despite the different spelling.<sup>71</sup> Even more common is the name Yudan, an Aramaicized version of יהודה (Judah/Judas).<sup>72</sup>

About 50 cm to the north is a very fragmentary inscription (fig. 63), consisting of only four letters: -חומה.<sup>73</sup> The rest of the word is unknown.<sup>74</sup>

From the narthex, a triportal façade provided access to the main hall of the synagogue. A fourth doorway, at the southern end of the narthex, leads westward into a long room south of the main hall (see below). The thresholds and doorjambs of the triportal façade were carved out of massive blocks, and the doorjambs were decorated with engaged square pillars (fig. 66).

The main hall is a large open room measuring 9.0 m N-S by 15.6 m E-W. Unlike the halls at Na‘aran and En-Gedi, the Susiya synagogue had no interior colonnade. Three tiers of ashlar benches line the south and west walls and a 3.75-m section of the north

<sup>71</sup> Naveh 1978: 120. On the variances of this name, see Avigad 1976: 248-50

<sup>72</sup> The epigraphic evidence gives the impression that the name Judah, along with its variants, was the most popular male name in late ancient Jewish society; see the list in Naveh 1978: 152, Appendix g.

<sup>73</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 79.

<sup>74</sup> Naveh 1978: 120 proposes that the word be read “[מנ]חימה.”

wall in the northwest corner. Two bemas are affixed along the north wall (see below). With the exception of the bemas and the benches, the interior of the synagogue's main hall is paved entirely in mosaic.

As mentioned above, the repairs and changes to the main hall's mosaic pavement over the course of the building's history (and since its excavation) make the reconstruction of floor's phases very difficult. Moreover, no detailed plan of the pavement has been published. Ze'ev Yeivin's plan (fig. 58)—published in the site's guidebook and modified slightly by David Amit in his doctoral dissertation—is the most detailed, although the schematic drawing provides only a hypothetical plan of one of the synagogue's phases.<sup>75</sup> We will attempt to provide as much information on the mosaics as possible without getting bogged down by the confusing details and changes that hopefully will be addressed in the future final report.

The mosaic pavement (see fig. 58) can be divided into several panels set over a monochrome field. An inscription precedes a long central carpet that stretches from the entrances to the west end of the room. The central mosaic carpet is divided into three unequal sections, following a pattern similar to Na'aran (see above). Abutting the easternmost panel of the central carpet, to the north, is a single rectangular panel, referred to here as the Bema B mosaic. To the northeast of this panel is a smaller geometric panel. An additional geometric panel lies to the north of the westernmost panel of the central carpet.

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<sup>75</sup> For Yeivin's plan, see Yeivin 1993: 16-17; for Amit's modifications, see Amit 2003: fig. 7.

According to the excavators, a white monochrome mosaic covered the floor of the main hall in the building's initial phase.<sup>76</sup> Evidence for this mosaic apparently was uncovered below the central bema (Bema A, see below). Unfortunately, the level of this floor was not reported, though presumably it was lower than the subsequent pavement visible today. The excavators suggest that the polychrome mosaic of the narthex (see above) belongs to the same phase as the monochrome mosaic below Bema A. However, this seems unlikely since the narthex mosaic appears to be at the same level as the later mosaics within the hall. We would expect the narthex to be lower if it belonged to an earlier phase. Further evidence of this earliest phase must await final publication of the excavation.

The inscription between the central door and the central mosaic carpet consists of six lines of Hebrew (fig. 56):<sup>77</sup>

Remembered for good and for ble[ssing ]	[ זכורין לטובה ולברכה ]	1
(they) who maintained and made [this ... in]	שהחזיקו ועשו [את ה ... הזה [בשנה]	2
the second [year] of the Sabbatical [ ]	הש[ני]ה שלשבוע [ ]	3
[in the] four thousand [... hundred and ... year]	[ב] ארבעת אלפי[ן] ... מאות ו... שנה]	4
[since] the wor[ld] was created [ ]	[מ] שנברא העול[ם]	5
[ ] in it. May there be pea[ce.]	[ ] לי בו יהי שלום	6

The left side of the inscription apparently was damaged and partially repaired in antiquity, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the width. Evidence appears in the

<sup>76</sup> Gutman et al 1972: 50; 1981: 126.

<sup>77</sup> The transcription follows Naveh 1978: no. 76. The inscription was originally published in Gutman et al. 1972: no. 3.

upper-left corner of the excavation photograph (fig. 56). While the names of the donors are lost, the plural verb forms indicate that originally at least two individuals were listed. The use of לְבִרְכָה (“for a blessing”) in line 1 is peculiar and otherwise unattested. This term is used frequently in inscriptions in the synagogues of Galilee but usually is found in a formulaic phrase at the end of a dedicatory inscription, wishing a blessing upon the donor. Its usage here strays from the simple “remembered for good” formula known from synagogues around Palestine.<sup>78</sup> The peculiarity may suggest that the efforts of the community as a whole were recognized, as we have seen already at Jericho and En-Gedi (see below, Appendix B), but the preservation of line 1 makes the identity of the donors no more than speculation.

More regrettable is the loss of lines 3-5, since dated synagogue inscriptions are rare.<sup>79</sup> The inscription here establishes the date by (a) the Sabbatical year, and (b) the Creation of the World (*anno mundi*).<sup>80</sup> Dating according to the Sabbatical—i.e., the seven-year ritual cycle—is well-known from the Jewish tombstones at Zoar, along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.<sup>81</sup> The Zoar tombstones likewise record a second (more

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<sup>78</sup> On the usage of the term “לְבִרְכָה” see Naveh 1978: 150 and the entries cited there.

<sup>79</sup> The only other synagogues in Palestine with a dated inscription in Hebrew or Aramaic are Nabratein, dated according to the destruction of the Temple (see Avigad 1960; Naveh 1978: no. 13; and Meyers and Meyers 2009: 92-95) and Beth Alpha, dated according to the reign of Justin I or II (see Sukenik 1932; Naveh 1978: no. 43). Three synagogues include dated inscriptions in Greek: Gaza (see Roth-Gerson 1987: no. 21, and below, section 6.1); Ashkelon (see Roth-Gerson 1987: no. 3); and Deir Aziz in the Golan (see Di Segni 2006-07: 123-24). Gaza and Ashkelon are reckoned according to the foundations of their respective cities; Deir Aziz counts from the destruction of the Temple.

<sup>80</sup> Gutman et al 1972: 51; 1981: 127; Naveh 1978: 117.

<sup>81</sup> For an overview of the Zoar tombstones, see Misgav 2006. See also Ben-Zvi 1944; Sukenik 1944; Naveh 1995; Stern 1999; Naveh 2000; 2001; Stern and Misgav 2006. On the Sabbatical in Jewish tradition, see Lieber et al. 2007.

chronologically relevant) date in order to specify *which* Sabbatical cycle. However, at Zoar the inscriptions count from the destruction of the Temple in 70 rather than from Creation.<sup>82</sup> The Zoar dates range from the mid-4<sup>th</sup> to late 6<sup>th</sup> c. Jewish era calculation using *anno mundi* goes back to at least the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> c. (though probably much earlier), but it is not thought to have become general practice in Jewish context (as it is today) until the 11<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>83</sup> The calendrical use of *anno mundi* was used primarily by rabbinic authors to calculate the arrival date of the messiah.<sup>84</sup> While this system is otherwise unattested in Jewish epigraphy, the practice of dating from Creation is attested in dedicatory inscriptions in churches in Palestine, all dating to the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c., somewhat earlier than the epigraphic use of *anno mundi* in churches outside Palestine.<sup>85</sup> The Jews at Susiya therefore seem to be employing a lesser-known Jewish custom that was part of a broader Palestinian tradition in local churches.

Extending westward across the hall is the central mosaic carpet, which is divided into three unequal portions (fig. 67). In its conception, the details created a highly decorative scheme, replete with figural imagery. At some point, the designs were subjected to intense iconoclasm followed by an extensive repair. The entirety of the central mosaic carpet was framed with a broad meander design, interspersed with images

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<sup>82</sup> Misgav neglects Susiya: “the use of two Jewish systems of reckoning—one of a *halakhic* (legal) nature and the other of an historical nature—is an entirely new phenomenon” to scholars (2006: 36). Di Segni notes that in the rare instances when Jews did record dates epigraphically, it was typically according to the destruction of the Temple (Di Segni 2006-07: 123). See also Irshai 2000; Meyers 2010a; and Flesher 2010, who suggests that dating according to the Temple’s destruction was condemned in rabbinic sources.

<sup>83</sup> Isser 2007: 706; Rosenthal 2007: 236.

<sup>84</sup> Irshai 2000; Di Segni 2006-07; see also Stern 2001: 191-92.

<sup>85</sup> Di Segni 2006-07, esp. pages 117-19. The practice was likewise well-known from Christian literary sources of the same period.

of birds, fruit, and plants (fig. 68).<sup>86</sup> While the border has not survived intact, all of the preserved images of birds were defaced deliberately and repaired. The tesserae within the birds' outlines have been removed, mixed-up, and replaced, in the so-called scramble-technique known from church mosaics in Palestine and Transjordan.<sup>87</sup>

The east panel of the central mosaic carpet measures about 5.6 m E-W by 3.1 m N-S (fig. 68). It seems that the majority of this panel, particularly across the center, did not survive to the modern period. Much of the visible mosaic was replaced as part of the conservation efforts. Enough of the panel survives to determine that the pattern consisted of two octagons with radiating squares and lozenges, a fairly common design among the mosaics of Byzantine Palestine, as seen also in the church at nearby Beth Guvrin.<sup>88</sup> The designs/images within the octagons cannot be reconstructed, although small sections of scrambled tesserae in the eastern octagon suggest that the image was subjected to iconoclasm and repair, and therefore probably was figural and most likely faunal.<sup>89</sup>

Of the sixteen squares surrounding the octagons, only six survive in part. The surviving images appear to depict various birds, all of which were subjected to forms of deliberate defacement and subsequent repair (figs. 69-74). The outlines and details of the birds indicate that they vary in the species depicted. For example, the bird of the north-

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<sup>86</sup> The border conforms to patterns A1+A19+A1 (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 101). The meander pattern follows *ibid.* 252, the second pattern illustrated from the bottom of the page. This border pattern is fairly common in Byzantine mosaics of Palestine; for example, see the Shellal church mosaic, dated by an inscription to 561/2 (Trendall 1973: 13-16, pl. I-II).

<sup>87</sup> See Schick 1995: 181-200; see further below.

<sup>88</sup> The pattern conforms to H13 (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 101, 204). For the example in the church at Beth Guvrin, see Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 18-20, pl. XI.

<sup>89</sup> Thus is the case in comparative examples from Beth Guvrin and Beth-Shean (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 205). On the other hand, cf. the first panel of the northern hall in the church at Hazor-Ashdod, where the central image is a Christian cross (*ibid.* no. 93, pl. LXXVIII).

northwest square of the west octagon is a long-necked water fowl (fig. 74), the bird of the east-northeast square of the east octagon is a rooster (fig. 71), and the bird of the north-northeast square of the east panel (fig. 69) is a fat bird with long legs and tail, perhaps a pheasant (fig. 69).<sup>90</sup> The birds were all repaired with the scramble-technique, except for the west-northwest square of the west octagon, where the image was removed and replaced with a patch from a mosaic elsewhere; the patch depicts a lozenge (fig. 73). As with the scramble-technique, the use of patches with other mosaic pieces is well-attested in church iconoclasm.<sup>91</sup>

The central panel to the west of the east panel measures about 4.3 m E-W by 3.1 m N-S (fig. 75). Although the mosaic here is mostly intact, the original design of the central panel is only preserved in a narrow strip (less than 50 cm across) along the southern side of the panel (fig. 76). Here a curved guilloche indicates that a circle once encompassed the whole of the panel, and an additional guilloche extends inward to create what would have been a wedge section (or pie-slice) of the circle. Based on parallels we can assume the design once formed the familiar Helios-and-zodiac motif, known from Na‘aran and elsewhere (see above, section 2.1.3).<sup>92</sup> Remains of colored tesserae appear within the pie-slice sections that are still visible; these presumably are the remnants of zodiac figures, but they are too fragmentary to identify. In addition, a large wing was visible within the panel but on the exterior of the guilloche, in the southeast corner. This

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<sup>90</sup> For examples of comparanda (of which there are many): the water fowl, see Ovadiah and Ovadiah Pl. XXXVII2 (Caesarea); the rooster, see *ibid.* Pl. XXIII1 (Beth-Shean, Monastery of Lady Mary); and the pheasant, see Avi-Yonah 1960: pl. V1 (Ma‘on-Nirim).

<sup>91</sup> See Schick 1995: 195-200.

<sup>92</sup> The two-strand guilloche pattern conforms to B2 of Avi-Yonah 1932 and Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987. It can also be seen as the outer border for the Helios-and-zodiac motif at Sepphoris; see Weiss 2005: 105.

wing presumably belonged to one of the personified seasons.<sup>93</sup> The curvature of the remaining section indicates that the diameter of the zodiac wheel would have been about 3.1 m across, that is to say, the entire north-south width of the central panel. The center of the circle would have been at the east-west mid-way point of the panel. Because the panel is longer than it is wide, there would have been a 60-cm gap on the east and west sides of the wheel. These gaps in the motif contrast with the examples known from other synagogues, where the circle more-or-less occupies the entirety of the square panel in which it is set.<sup>94</sup>

It is impossible to say any more about the form and style of the Helios-and-zodiac motif at Susiya because about ninety-five percent of the panel was replaced at some point in the building's history. The newer design was only about 2.95 m N-S (fig. 77). The renovated central panel consists of a field of squares within overlapping octagons, surrounded by a border of denticulated triangles.<sup>95</sup> Superimposed over the field, slightly off-center (edging to the north) is a circular medallion, about 1.4 m in diameter, with a multi-colored rosette and a border consisting of rows of squares between parallel lines.<sup>96</sup> The color-scheme of the rosette and the border do not follow any discernable pattern, thus giving the repaired panel, along with the off-center placement of the medallion, a

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<sup>93</sup> The poor conservation of the mosaic in this section has more or less eliminated these colored tesserae and the wing, which are visible in an early photograph published in Hachlili 1988: pl. 75.

<sup>94</sup> See above on Na'aran (fig. 13); on Beth Alpha, see Sukenik 1932: Pl. X; on Husifah, see Makhoully and Avi-Yonah 1933: 119, fig. 1; on Hammath-Tiberias, see Dothan 1981: Pl. 26; on Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005: 105, Fig. 46. And see also the probable evidence of a Helios-and-zodiac motif at Kh. Wadi el-Hammam in Leibner 2010: 36.

<sup>95</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 101. The field pattern conforms to Avi-Yonah's H3; the border conforms to Avi-Yonah's A5-6.

<sup>96</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 101; the border pattern conforms to Avi-Yonah's A15.



haphazard appearance. The placement of the circular medallion over the geometric field is reminiscent of the mosaic pavement in the Jericho synagogue (see above). The westernmost section of the panel is missing on account of a wall that was constructed later in the building's history (see below).

The replacement of the Helios-and-zodiac motif with this geometric design is peculiar in several respects. The short width and offset placement of the geometric design suggests that (a) the panel was removed from a pre-existing pavement and re-installed in the synagogue, resulting in dimensions that did not quite fit; and/or (b) the patrons or craftsmen *wanted* to leave some evidence of the pre-existing design. The practice of leaving behind obvious evidence of the iconoclasm is characteristic of this phenomenon.<sup>97</sup> In addition, the tesserae that make up the edges of the rosette appear to be fully integrated within the surrounding field, i.e., not added subsequently to the overall design. That said, the addition of a panel containing a large rosette suggests that the patrons or craftsmen intended to draw a connection to or recollect the image that had previously existed there without actually leaving that image.

The final panel just to the west of the central panel measures 2.2 m E-W by 3.1 m N-S. It is subdivided into three smaller sections, each measuring just over one meter north-south (fig. 78). The small sections are delineated only by single-tessera black lines. Only the northern and central sections preserve details, in the form of scenes that are viewed properly from the south.

The northernmost section was damaged and repaired in antiquity with monochrome tesserae, and additional repairs have been made since excavation (fig. 79).

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<sup>97</sup> Schick 1995: 189-98, 218.

The remaining images include a series of small mounds at the bottom of the panel, presumably meant to depict landscape features. At the left side of the panel is a depiction of a green plant growing nearly to the upper-frame. At the right side of the panel is the back of a quadruped. The animal faces toward the left side of the scene; and the outline of its head is just barely visible over the mid-section of the plant, as if it is eating or bound to the plant. The stature and shape of the head vaguely resemble a ram or ibex. The remainder of the image has been blotted out by ancient defacement and repairs, although there is clearly another figure to the left of the plant. The excavators described this panel as a depiction of a “hunt scene,” but there is no obvious image of a hunter here (the quadruped?).<sup>98</sup> Comparative examples from the Beth Alpha, Sepphoris, and Dura-Europos synagogues suggest that this might be a ram caught in the thicket, one of the central images of the ‘*Aqedah* or “Binding of Isaac” (Gen. 22:1-19).<sup>99</sup> In addition to the quadruped and foliage, the mounds at the bottom of the panel are reminiscent of those in Band 6 of the Sepphoris synagogue mosaic, where a scene from the ‘*Aqedah* is depicted.<sup>100</sup> Given the nature of the evidence, such a suggestion seems more probable than that of the excavators.

The central section of the west panel is badly damaged but includes some of the most interesting imagery within the mosaic (fig. 80). Only about a third of the original scene is still visible. The entire southern half and most of the eastern portion have been

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<sup>98</sup> See Gutman et al. 1972: 50; 1981: 126.

<sup>99</sup> On Beth Alpha, see Sukenik 1932. On Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005: 141-53, who includes a detailed discussion of the ‘*Aqedah* in Jewish and Christian art. On Dura-Europos, see Kraeling 1956: 56-59, pls. XVI, LI.

<sup>100</sup> See Weiss 2005: 141-43, figs. 82-83.

replaced with poorly-laid monochrome tesserae. It is unclear whether this is an ancient repair or modern conservation.<sup>101</sup> At the extreme west-end of the scene is a long, thin, curved shape of yellowish tesserae outlined in black, no doubt meant to represent an animal's tail. In the center of the scene is a human figure, as evidenced by his right hand, arm, and head, all of which have been removed purposefully and replaced with monochrome tesserae, faintly preserving the outline. The right hand is raised and open in a heraldic gesture. To the left of the tesserae that blot out the head are two Hebrew letters: לָא- (fig. 81). As the excavators proposed, this is a depiction of the well-known scene of Daniel in the Lions' Den from the book of Daniel. The inscription would thus be completed as לָא[דני]; and the animal would have been a lion, with a counterpart mirrored on the right side of the panel. The iconic scene has already been noted in the mosaic panel at Na'aran (see above, section 2.1, and below Appendix C).

A secondary panel in the main hall of the synagogue preserves a highly decorative mosaic scene. The panel—known as the Bema B mosaic—is located directly north of the east panel of the central mosaic carpet, described above (see fig. 58). It measures 5.9 m E-W by 1.7 m N-S.<sup>102</sup> The scene, viewed properly from the south (fig. 82), depicts a Torah shrine façade flanked by menorahs, ritual objects, and rams. The Bema B mosaic

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<sup>101</sup> The haphazard placement of the tesserae suggests that the repairs are ancient, although the color and the fact they are distinct from the patches over the figure's face in this panel suggest that they are modern repairs.

<sup>102</sup> Yeivin 1989: 93.

is the only decoration in the synagogue for which a detailed description by one of the excavators has been published, so it is worth repeating here:<sup>103</sup>

From the remains it is possible to discern clearly the holy ark and its two doors. Each door is divided into squares (apparently three in number), a pattern which seems to be characteristic of wooden doors. A decorated pillar stands in the center where the two doors close, separating and connecting them. Above the frame of the ark, a conch is depicted. On either side of the ark stands a seven-branched *menorah*. On the right, there is a *menorah* whose branches, body, and legs are drawn in outline and, on the other side, there is a *menorah* whose branches, body, and legs are composed of small circles, one touching the next. On both *menorot*, a bar connects the ends of the branches, and above the bar, oil lamps are depicted.<sup>104</sup>

Flanking the right *menorah*, one can make out a *shofar*, with a remnant of the lower section of a palm branch (*lulav*) and a citron (*ethrog*). Flanking the left *menorah*, a remnant of what appears to be a censer can be distinguished.

The ark and the *menorot* are enclosed by a construction consisting of a gabled roof resting on four pillars with the two central pillars supporting the gable.

The pillars rest on bases. That supporting the farthest pillar on the right is partly square and partly rounded. The base of the second pillar (from right to left) is square. The base of the third pillar is missing, and the base of the fourth pillar, that farthest to the left, is square.

To Yeivin's description we may add the following comments.

The conch design above the doors is a fairly ubiquitous detail of the Torah shrine motif in synagogues.<sup>105</sup> Regarding the menorahs, the differences between the two forms are notable. While slight differences between flanking menorahs appear in synagogue mosaics elsewhere, the example at Susiya is exceptional.<sup>106</sup>

In addition, Yeivin points out that the apparent "channel" cut through the mosaic, creating a groove extending about one meter south from Bema B (see below), and about

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<sup>103</sup> Yeivin 1989: 93.

<sup>104</sup> The menorahs are catalogued in Hachlili 2001: IS3.3.

<sup>105</sup> See Hachlili 1988: 280-85.

<sup>106</sup> For examples of differences between flanking menorahs, see Na'aran (above) and Beth Alpha (Sukenik 1932).

three meters east west across the middle of the mosaic panel. Yeivin proposed that the cut was made in order to install posts and runners for a chancel screen.<sup>107</sup>

Yeivin neglected, however, to point out the iconoclastic defacement and repair in the panel. While the ram flanking the Torah shrine to the west was left untouched, the ram to the east was almost entirely removed, leaving only about two-thirds of the animal's midsection (fig. 83). From the top of the head to the fore-hooves, as well as from the top of the hind-legs to the hind-hooves, the tesserae were removed and replaced with larger monochrome tesserae.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the same coarse white tesserae were used to create a straight line (north-south) along the edge of the groove that was cut through the panel (visible just to the west of the defaced ram [fig. 83]). This suggests that the groove was cut as part of the same renovation in which the defaced figures were repaired.

In addition to the highly-decorative mosaic pavements described above, the main hall had two smaller, purely geometric panels, both of which seem to be little more than space-fillers. To the east of Bema B, in the northeast corner of the hall is a panel measuring about 1.9 m E-W by 1.4 m N-S, and consisting of a field of crosshatch reticulate pattern with diamonds.<sup>109</sup> To the west of Bema A (the central bema, see below), in the northwest corner of the hall is a panel measuring about 2.3 m E-W by 1.25 m N-S, and consisting of a crosshatch of scales radiating in four directions.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Yeivin 1989: 93. Gutman et al. 1981: 125 proposes less plausibly that the groove was for a canopy.

<sup>108</sup> It is clear from the published photographs that this was accomplished in antiquity.

<sup>109</sup> The pattern conforms to Avi-Yonah's H1; see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 101.

<sup>110</sup> The pattern conforms to Avi-Yonah's J5; see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 101.

Directly north of the central panel in the central mosaic carpet, along the north wall of the building are the remains of the central bema, Bema A (fig. 84). According to the excavators, Bema A went through a series of changes over the course of the building's history (fig. 85).<sup>111</sup> In its initial phase, Bema A consisted of stepped benches—similar to those that line the walls of the hall on the south and east—plastered, with steps ascending to a niche. In the second phase, a stone socle and additional benches were installed to create a platform and a chancel screen was erected. In the final phase—at the “synagogue's height”—curved steps were added on the east and west sides, and the entire bema was faced in gray marble (fig. 86).<sup>112</sup>

Despite the publication of the excavators' top-plan of Bema A (fig. 85), it is difficult to evaluate their conclusions regarding the form (and existence) of the earlier phases of the feature without a more detailed explanation and records. The final phase was the subject of a short article by Yeivin.<sup>113</sup> He describes five steps leading up to the platform, and the depressions and grooves for the chancel screen, both still visible at the site today. Yeivin proposes that the Bema B mosaic—depicting a gabled structure with columns over a Torah shrine—is an accurate representation of the actual Torah shrine that would have stood atop Bema A (fig. 87). His speculation is based on (a) depressions in the stones and small stone column fragments that he believes would have supported a gabled structure above the whole of the feature, and (b) three hypothetical niches in the wall behind the bema, serving as a Torah repository flanked by menorahs, as seen in the

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<sup>111</sup> See Gutman et al. 1972: 50; 1981: 125.

<sup>112</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 125.

<sup>113</sup> Yeivin 1989.

mosaic. Yeivin reconstructs three niches in the wall on the basis of comparison with the synagogue at Eshtemoa (see below, section 4.2.3). As discussed above in the case of Jericho though, there is no reason to assume that mosaic images of Torah shrines were intended as accurate depictions of the building's furniture, especially since it is a common symbolic motif, much like the flanking rams in the Bema B mosaic (which surely were *not* stationed permanently next to the building's Torah shrine!). While we can be reasonably certain that a Torah shrine of some sort did exist in the Susiya synagogue, it would not be wise to seek details in the mosaic depiction.

Although Yeivin's reconstruction is not impossible, it does not seem to be supported entirely by the physical evidence, particularly regarding the three niches. The British survey team in the 1860s recorded a gap in the north wall, and although they misidentified the feature as a well dug into the wall at a later time, they measured the extent of the feature to be 2.0-m across, too small for the niches projected by Yeivin.<sup>114</sup> The feature was noted by Mayer and Reifenberg during the excavation of the synagogue at Eshtemoa in the 1930s. By the time of Gutman's arrival in 1969, the wall was too badly damaged to determine the outline of the niche(s). Since none of the previous surveys noted the existence of three niches, Yeivin's proposed reconstruction cannot be verified.<sup>115</sup>

That said, about ten fragments of a seven-branched marble menorah, carved in-the-round, were uncovered at Susiya in the vicinity of Bema A (fig. 88), which may have been placed in a niche next to the Torah shrine (as in Yeivin's proposed reconstruction

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<sup>114</sup> For discussion, see Amit 2003: 74.

<sup>115</sup> Yeivin's proposed reconstruction was accepted and used by the conservators at the Israel Museum, who have recently reconstructed the marble fragments to re-erect the furniture in a permanent exhibit.

[fig. 87]).<sup>116</sup> The reconstructed height of the piece is about 73 cm, with a reconstructed width of about 80 cm.<sup>117</sup> The arms of the menorah took the form of a bead-and-reel, between which were lattice-patterns, connected by a horizontal crossbar at the top.<sup>118</sup> A two-line Hebrew inscription was carved into the face of the crossbar, of which only a few letters survive:<sup>119</sup>

[?]	נה[ ]	1
... save ...	הושיעה[ ]	2

Yeivin suggests that the word in line 1 word be reconstructed as נה[ב], “built,” but this conjecture.<sup>120</sup> An inscription is similarly carved on a three-dimensional marble menorah from the synagogue at Sardis.<sup>121</sup>

Additional marble fragments—mostly from large panels, posts, and decorative inlays—were found strewn about the area of Bema A, the majority of which were part of the elaborate chancel screen. Those pieces that include inscriptions were published by Ze’ev Yeivin in 1974, and other pieces have been published as well (see below).<sup>122</sup> The

<sup>116</sup> See discussion in Amit 2003: 159-60.

<sup>117</sup> Dimensions here are based on the published sketch; see Yeivin 1989: fig. 13.

<sup>118</sup> Amit 2003: 160.

<sup>119</sup> Yeivin 1974: no. 20; Naveh 1978: no. 86.

<sup>120</sup> Yeivin 1974: 209; cf. Naveh 1978: 124.

<sup>121</sup> Amit 2003: 160. For the example from Sardis, see Hanfmann and Ramage 1978: no. 226. See also Rautman 2010b.

<sup>122</sup> See Yeivin 1974, included also in Naveh 1978: nos. 80-85, as well as the uncatalogued fragments on pages 124-25. Discussions of other fragments, particularly those with designs, as well as the publication of photographs and drawings, have appeared in Yeivin 1989: figs. 6-10; Foerster 1989: 1811, 1816, 1819-20, figs. 12-14, and Israeli 1999.



marble chancel screen from Susiya—which has recently been reconstructed and put on permanent exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem—is the most decorative and ornate example to have been uncovered from a Byzantine-period synagogue in Palestine.

In addition to the menorah inscriptions, eighteen fragments with inscriptions were uncovered by excavators, all of which are in Hebrew or Aramaic. Yeivin divided the inscriptions into three groups on the basis of the marble on which they were inscribed.<sup>123</sup> As Foerster points out, however, the inscriptions were almost certainly carved on-site, so there is no reason to ascribe any particular significance to the type of marble used.<sup>124</sup> More informative is Naveh's groupings, which recognized those fragments that fit together as part of the same piece.<sup>125</sup> Here we use Naveh's groupings.

The first inscription comes from a 50-cm long triangular fragment; the piece is 36-cm thick and decorated on one side with a geometric pattern.<sup>126</sup> The Hebrew inscription reads:

Yudan the Levite son of Simeon made [the ...]	יודן הלוי בר שמעון עשה את [ה...]	1
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The definite article at the end, -ה, should not only be assumed because of the direct object pronoun, תא, but also because an inscribed mark at the broken edge of the piece suggests the letter. The name Yudan has been seen already in one of the narthex

<sup>123</sup> Yeivin 1974: 201.

<sup>124</sup> Foerster 1989: 1811.

<sup>125</sup> Naveh 1978: nos. 80-85.

<sup>126</sup> Yeivin 1974: no. 17; Naveh 1978: no 80. On length, see Naveh 1978: 120. On thickness, see Yeivin 1989: 94. For photograph, see Naveh 1978: 120. For a drawing (including the obverse with decorative pattern), see Yeivin 1989: figs. 10-11.

inscriptions (see above). Because it is such a common name, we should not assume that this inscription refers to the same person, known above as “Joshua Yudan,” particularly since the first part of the name—Joshua—does not appear on the chancel screen, and because he is not identified as a Levite in the narthex. The use of בר, Aramaic for “son of,” rather than Hebrew בן, is not unusual, in spite of the fact that the remainder of the inscription is in Hebrew.<sup>127</sup> The Aramaic forms of the donor’s name in general—יודן instead of יהודה and בר instead of בן—perhaps highlights the special nature of the use of Hebrew in this synagogue.

The second inscription was assembled from four curved fragments that apparently served as decorative inlay or wall-fixtures behind the bema. The Aramaic inscription has been reconstructed by Yeivin and Naveh as follows:<sup>128</sup>

[Rabb]i Yudan the Levite son of Sime[on ... .. may the Kin]g of the universe giv[e his blessing for his deeds ...]	... .. שמעון בר לויא יודן לויא בר שמעון ... .. [... .. עלמה יתן ברכתה בעמלה ...]	1
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It seems likely that this Yudan is the same as the donor mentioned in the previous inscription, which means we have a third rabbi mentioned among the Susiya inscriptions. The completion of the inscription is based primarily on three parallels from Ḥammat

<sup>127</sup> See Naveh 1978: 121.

<sup>128</sup> Yeivin 1974; nos. 1-2; Naveh 1978: no. 82.

Gader, which appear as a formulaic concluding phrase to a dedicatory inscription: “May the King of the universe give his blessing for his (i.e., the donor’s) deeds.”<sup>129</sup>

The third inscription was completed from eight fragments. This inscription similarly appears to have come from decorative inlay or fixtures. The Aramaic inscription reads as follows:<sup>130</sup>

<p>[Remember]ed for good [a]ll the members of the town [who] support[ed ... ] ... [May] the King of [the universe give his blessing for their deeds. A]men. A[men.] Peace.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">[דכיר]ין לטב [כ]ל בני קרתה          [ד]מתחזק[ין] [ ... ] ... מלך [עלמה יתן          ברכתה בעמלהון א]מן א[מן] שלום</p>	1
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Here we have another dedicatory inscription, but this time the donors are the members of the town *en masse*. The terminology employed—בני קרתה—is used also in the En-Gedi inscription, and, along with the references to the communities from Na‘aran and Jericho, provides yet another example of the community being praised as a group (see below, Appendix B).

As with the second inscription, the fourth inscription was inscribed into a curved decorative piece with floral designs carved on top (fig. 89). The Aramaic inscription reads as follows:<sup>131</sup>

<p>The holy [comm]unity who sustained [... and] who ga[ve ...]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">[קה]לה קדישה דאתחזק [ו]מן דה[בון]          [...]</p>	1
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<sup>129</sup> Yeivin 1974: 203; Naveh 1978: 122. For the parallels from Ḥammad Gader, see Naveh 1978: nos. 32-34.

<sup>130</sup> Yeivin 1974: nos. 4-9; Naveh 1978: no. 83.

<sup>131</sup> Yeivin 1974: nos. 10-11; Naveh 1978: no. 84.

As with the previous inscription, the community is referred to as a group here, and praised for their communal support of their synagogue. As Naveh notes, Dan Barag’s suggestion that the terms קרתה and קהלה indicate different types of settlements is foiled by the use of both terms here at Susiya.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, it does seem that the terms are not entirely interchangeable, with the latter apparently meaning “congregation” or “community.”<sup>133</sup>

The fifth inscription is found near the top of two chancel screen posts, which presumably would have stood next to or across from each other on either side of an entrance through the chancel screen (e.g., see fig. 90). The Aramaic inscription reads as follows:<sup>134</sup>

Post 1	Post 2	Post 2	Post 1	
and Lazar	his sons	בנוי	ולעזר	1
donation of			נידבת	2

It seems probable that these inscriptions go together, though we are missing the remainder of the inscription, which was presumably inscribed on other posts. That the epigrapher chose to stretch the inscription out over multiple posts is curious and perhaps suggests that the inscription was added at a later time (see below).

<sup>132</sup> See Naveh 1978: 123. For Barag’s suggestion, see Barag 1972.

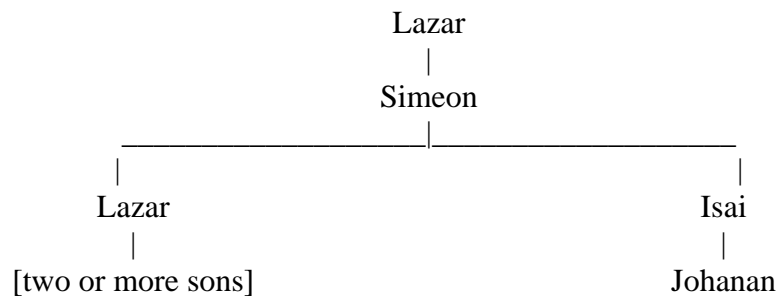
<sup>133</sup> See Sokoloff 2002: 477.

<sup>134</sup> Yeivin 1974: no. 19; Naveh 1978: no. 85.

The final inscription included here<sup>135</sup> is a single line that was inscribed over the top of a decorated panel of the chancel screen, measuring 142 by 90 cm (fig. 91).<sup>136</sup> The panel has a double-strand guilloche border, just below which runs an Aramaic dedicatory inscription:<sup>137</sup>

Remembered for good Lazar and Isai sons of Simeon son of Lazar	דכרין לטב לעזר ואיסי בנוי דשמעון בר לעזר	1
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The names here are repetitions of those mentioned above, but it is uncertain whether they refer to the same individuals. Rabbi Isai from the courtyard inscription perhaps has an uncommon enough name for us to suspect that this is the same person. “Lazar” is a fairly common name (as a shortened version of Eleazar), although the occurrence of *two* unrelated and honored individuals named “Lazar son of Simeon” in the same synagogue seems unlikely.<sup>138</sup> The result is a family of priests:<sup>139</sup>



<sup>135</sup> Five additional fragments were uncovered with only parts of words preserved; see Yeivin 1974: nos. 12-16; Naveh 1978: 124.

<sup>136</sup> The panel is treated in detail by Foerster 1989: 1816, 1819-20.

<sup>137</sup> Yeivin 1974: no. 18; Naveh 1978: no. 81.

<sup>138</sup> On the frequency of the name Lazar in rabbinic literature, see Yeivin 1974: 207, n. 14. See also the occurrences of rabbis named Eleazar or Eli‘azar in Schwartz 1986: 310.

<sup>139</sup> Priestly identification is hereditary, and since we know that Isai was a priest, we assume they all were.

An inscription mentioning “Lazar the priest” was also uncovered in the synagogue at Eshtemoa (see below, section 4.2.3 and Appendix B). Given the relative proximity of the two sites, it seems likely that the Lazar identified at Eshtemoa was a member of this family, if not one of the two Lazars identified above.

This inscription is also noteworthy in that the text appears complete but a section of the stone—where at least one word could have fit—is missing (see fig. 91). If the missing section had occurred just before the first “Lazar,” then we might expect it to have read “[Rabbi] Lazar” (see above). However, the missing section comes in the middle of a formulaic phrase—“Remembered for good”—suggesting that the damage was done *prior* to the carving of the inscription. To explain this, Yeivin writes:

It seems likely that the inscription was carved on an old chancel screen and that the break may indicate that a word was effaced or perhaps that the screen was accidentally damaged. In any case, the inscription was carved when the screen was reused in the *bema*, as it takes into account the defective place in the marble.<sup>140</sup>

It is unclear if there is other evidence that any parts of the chancel screen were in secondary use. Foerster dismisses Yeivin’s explanation, asserting that “the slab was probably dedicated by those mentioned in the inscription before it was defaced,”<sup>141</sup> but does not account for the gap in the formulaic phrase.

Yeivin is correct in that the epigrapher must have taken the broken section into account when carving the dedicatory inscription, although it seems unlikely that the panel was in secondary use in Bema A, that is, the inscription was carved while the panel stood in its place. This seems to be the case with all of the inscriptions of the chancel screen.

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<sup>140</sup> Yeivin 1974: 207.

<sup>141</sup> Foerster 1989: 1816, n. 17.

Unlike the mosaic inscriptions, there is no reason that the chancel screen inscriptions could not have been added after the posts, screens, and decorative pieces were erected. Moreover, most of the inscriptions appear to be squeezed into panel frames and posts, almost as after-thoughts. This should not come as a surprise, since the subject matter of these inscriptions—as with synagogue inscriptions in general—is dedicatory. Certainly, donations were not accepted and lauded by the community *only* at times of renovation. The inscriptions here could easily have been added over the years following the erection of the bema and chancel screens.<sup>142</sup> In the case of this latest panel, it seems that the screen was probably erected, subsequently damaged, and then inscribed at a later time.

The defacement to which Foerster refers is the extensive and deliberate destruction of a scene depicted on the chancel screen. The remains of this panel are fragmentary (fig. 91). Foerster identifies a hand extending down from a hemispherical object in the upper-right corner of the panel.<sup>143</sup> He is probably correct in identifying the ridge on the left side of the panel as the top of a head. His identification of an “easily discernible” scroll in the hand seems less certain. The poor state of preservation of this piece casts doubt on Foerster’s identification of the scene as Moses Receiving the Law from God (Ex. 24:12-18; Deut. 5:22; 9:9-11), although there are good parallels in

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<sup>142</sup> In many modern synagogues, donors are recognized on small plaques or decorative metal panels. It is not uncommon in such contexts to find blank spaces to be used for *future* donors. Whether or not this was done in antiquity—in either synagogues or churches—is difficult to determine since the medium of the donor inscriptions and contexts are quite different. To be sure though, it would have been easier to add inscriptions to stone furniture and architectural features than mosaic pavements. In the case of the former, the inscriptions often cannot be dated, and so we can only speculate as to whether the inscriptions were added at a later time or not. The inability to date these sorts of inscriptions has contributed, for example, to the debate surrounding the dating of the Nabratein synagogue; see Avigad 1960: 55, and Meyers and Meyers 2009.

<sup>143</sup> Foerster 1974: 1819-20.

Christian art.<sup>144</sup> Were we to consider parallels from contemporary Jewish art, we might just as easily utilize the surviving details to reconstruct the scene of the *'Aqedah*, particularly since the examples of the scenes from Beth Alpha and Dura Europos depict the hand of God extending downward from a spherical object.<sup>145</sup> In any case, both biblical scenes—Moses Receiving the Law and the *'Aqedah*—are common enough symbolic images in Jewish and Christian literature and art to make either one a strong candidate for the Susiya chancel screen.

What we *do* know about the panel here is that it was defaced where it stood. The lower portions, where Foerster reconstructed feet, show signs of rough working, indicating that the image had been hacked away in a manner that would leave behind an unworked surface. Such a seemingly minor detail might have gone unnoticed were it not for the extensive defacement of the chancel screen designs (see below). The execution of the iconoclasm here differs markedly from the damaged section of this panel between the first two words of the inscription. As a result, we may conclude that the chancel screen was erected, damaged (probably accidentally), inscribed, and then defaced. While it is possible that the defacement took place prior to the carving of the inscription, the former scenario is more likely for reasons which will become clear below.

In addition to the marble chancel screen panel discussed by Foerster, at least three other panels, one open-work plaque, and one decorated post were found to have evidence of deliberate defacement. This first two are narrow panels with shallowly-incised sunken

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<sup>144</sup> See the well-preserved Basilewsky pyxis (St. Claire 1984, and the examples discussed there).

<sup>145</sup> As a close Christian example, the depiction of the *'Aqedah* in the 9<sup>th</sup> c. manuscript, “Topographia Christiana” by Cosmas Indicopleustes depicts the hand of God similarly in the upper-right corner of the scene, extending out of a hemispherical object; see van Loon 1990: 44, pl. 3.4.



reliefs. One panel depicts a large date-palm flanked by two birds that have been defaced, set within a rectangular frame (fig. 92).<sup>146</sup> The tree is depicted schematically with eight stacked sections as the trunk and curved radiating lines with V-shapes as the palm-fronds. Immediately below the fronds on either side of the trunk are six large almond-shapes that are apparently meant to depict bunches of dates. The birds are barely identifiable by their claws at the bottom of the panel, and their upper feathers which are folded.<sup>147</sup> The bodies of the birds are turned away from the tree, but their heads appear to be turned back toward the tree. Both birds were defaced by means of a blunt tapered chisel. The iconoclast removed the incisions that outlined the birds but not the tree-trunk or sections beyond the frame. Additional iconoclasm appears above the tree. The figures here are less clear but presumably were birds. They were defaced in the same manner, with the chiseled area not extending beyond the frame of the scene. The defacement of this panel can be described as deliberate, careful, and comprehensive.<sup>148</sup>

A second panel depicts a similar scene, with two seated gazelles flanking a tree, framed within a single line (fig. 93).<sup>149</sup> The right side of the panel does not survive, though its size can be determined from the other panels of the chancel screen, and the symmetry of the scene allows for a fairly accurate reconstruction.<sup>150</sup> As with the

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<sup>146</sup> A photograph of this panel appears in Yeivin 1989: fig. 8.

<sup>147</sup> The excavators identify the birds as eagles, however, their reasoning is unclear and the identification seems unlikely; see Gutman et al. 1981: 125. On the more typical forms of eagles in Jewish relief sculpture, see Werlin 2006.

<sup>148</sup> Here I employ Schick's terminology in characterizing the iconoclasm; see Schick 1995: 191-92.

<sup>149</sup> A photograph of this panel appears in Yeivin 1989: fig. 9.

<sup>150</sup> This reconstruction was done by the conservation team under the direction of David Mevorach at the Israel Museum. It was apparently this panel that the excavators erroneously identified as a "tree-of-life surrounded by lions" (Gutman et al. 1981: 125).

previously described panel, the tree here is depicted schematically extending up through the center of the scene. Branches radiate out from the trunk about two-thirds up the panel, and long tapered leaves flare out from the branches. In the extant portion, a circular object with a trapezoidal end protrudes from under the branches on either side of the trunk, and a third protrudes from a higher branch; these represent pomegranates. On either side of the trunk sits a gazelle with hind-legs folded and forelegs extended. Each animal has its hind section abutting the trunk so as to turn the body away from the tree, but—like the birds in the panel above—their heads are turned back toward the tree, with the muzzles touching the pomegranates. The iconoclasm here, as with the previous panel, appears to have been carried out with a blunt tapered chisel, although in this case, the iconoclast defaced only the heads of the animals. In other words, the defacement is deliberate but not comprehensive.

The third panel is the same width as the panels described above, but only the top half survives (fig. 94).<sup>151</sup> Framed within a double line is a seven-branched menorah in bas-relief, surrounded by ritual objects.<sup>152</sup> The arms are formed by three concentric U-shapes that curve inward at the top, arranged over a central shaft of equal width, and topped with a slightly thicker crossbar. The design is highly schematic, without any reference to oil-containers on the top (see the examples from Jericho and the Na‘aran, above). Between the innermost arms are two hanging lamps shallowly-inscribed in sunken relief. The form of the lamps, with a trapezoidal shape on the bottom and a flared rim on the top, is similar to the lamps hanging from the menorahs in the main hall’s

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<sup>151</sup> A photograph appears in Israeli 1999. See also the drawing in Hachlili 1988: 269; 2001: fig. V-10.

<sup>152</sup> Catalogued in Hachlili 2001: IS5.6.

mosaic carpet at Na‘aran, although the placement is slightly different (see above). At the lower left of the outer arms of the menorah is a long, pointed object, presumably meant to represent a lulav or palm branch. Opposite the lulav, at the lower right, is a long narrow design with a circular end depicted in perspective, presumably meant to represent the mouthpiece of a shofar. Below the arms of the menorah, alongside the shaft, are haphazard chisel marks similar to those described above. Presumably some figural images were incised here, though the defacement and the broken edge of the piece make it impossible for us to determine what those images may have been. Parallels suggest lions—as at Ma‘on (in Judea) or Eshtemoa (see below)—or perhaps birds.<sup>153</sup>

An openwork plaque was also found to have iconoclastic damage (fig. 95). The plaque was broken along the right side, leaving only about two-thirds of the object preserved. Four incised lines forming concentric circles frame a depiction of a Torah shrine. Along the outer edges are a few small leaf-designs, perhaps meant to give the impression of a wreath. The depiction of the Torah shrine consists of two parallel rectangular doors with three small stacked squares representing door-panels on each, flanked by columns. Over the columns stretches a rounded gable, set into which (and above the doors) is a conch motif. The columns, door-panels, and conch motif are all recognizable as common features of the well-known Jewish symbol of the Torah shrine.<sup>154</sup>

Below the circular wreath-frame is a truncated band of marble, into which designs were incised and later defaced. The damage here similarly appears to have been done

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<sup>153</sup> On lions flanking menorahs, see Hachlili 2001: 230-32; on birds, see *ibid.*, 233.

<sup>154</sup> See Hachlili 1988: 273-78.

with a pointed chisel, although the iconoclast seems to have scratched lines across the face of the marble here rather than chiseling blunt marks as elsewhere. Semicircular lines appear through the middle of the defaced area, similar to those in the panel discussed by Foerster (see above); perhaps they are likewise meant to represent the heavens. To the left is a small circle with four long, radiating lines. The remainder of the object's surviving section is too badly damaged to describe.

The face of one of the chancel screen posts also displays evidence of defacement (fig. 96). The bas-relief design is framed in a thick solid border. The design appears as a single line of interlacing circles, where a small design was set into the gaps.<sup>155</sup> Five of these circles appear in all. The damage appears to have been carried out with a blunt tapered chisel, as opposed to the more pointed scratches in the plaque described above. Strangely though, the designs do not appear to have been figural images but rather lily motifs. While a hallmark of the iconoclasm phenomenon of late ancient Palestine is inconsistency (see below), it is unusual—if not unattested—for an iconoclast to target purely floral motifs *without* accompanying figural imagery.

A large number of additional fragments of the chancel screen panels, posts, and decorative fixtures were uncovered, as well, although the exact number has not been published. While the remains of the Susiya chancel screen deserve a fuller treatment than is possible here, two last fragments of a screen panel are worth noting (fig. 97). The entire bottom portion survives, up to about one-fifth of the total height of the reconstructed panel. The preserved portion includes the bas-relief depiction of two square column bases along the sides and a tripod just off-center. The outer feet of the

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<sup>155</sup> The pattern conforms to J1 of Avi-Yonah's typology; see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 206, 252.

tripod flare to either side, and the center foot flares to the left. A narrow stem extends upward but is promptly curtailed by the broken edge of the piece. Typically, such tripods in Jewish contexts form the base of a menorah.<sup>156</sup> In this case, the base does not support a seven-branched candelabrum but a single oil lamp; the crucial piece with the lamp and matching stem was uncovered among the debris.<sup>157</sup> Similar depictions and actual pedestaled lamps—or rather, lamps on pricket stands—have been uncovered in Coptic Egypt.<sup>158</sup> The remainder of the panel is missing, so it is impossible to know what other images and details accompanied the design.

The grandiose character of Bema A and its elaborate chancel screen probably overshadowed the more modest secondary bema—Bema B—immediately to the east along the north wall (fig. 98). Bema B consists of a raised platform built of large stones measuring about 5.9 by 1.7 m.<sup>159</sup> It appears that the feature was built over at least one tier of benches that had originally run the length of the north wall (fig. 98). A finely-carved and decorated stone on the platform's southeast corner suggested to the excavators that a canopy of some sort covered the feature, however, this does not appear in Yeivin's isometric reconstruction (fig. 99).<sup>160</sup> According to the excavators, Bema B existed

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<sup>156</sup> See the numerous examples in Hachlili 1988: 242-46; 2001: 122-46. An interesting comparison can be made to a chancel screen panel recently uncovered in the synagogue at Andriaca in southern Turkey, where the a bas-relief depiction is of a seven-branched menorah atop a tall stem with two feet, and flanked by a shofar (on the right) and a lulav (on the left). See Chevik and Eshel 2010: 42.

<sup>157</sup> The piece was matched and reconstructed by David Mevorach and his conservation staff at the Israel Museum, and I thank him for sharing his discovery with me.

<sup>158</sup> For examples, see the 6<sup>th</sup> c. lamp and cross on a stand from Egypt, today in the Brooklyn Museum (Cooney 1943: pl. 330); and a similarly dated lamp on a stand from Egypt in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (cat. no. 30.9a-b; see Badawy 1978: 327, no. 5.13).

<sup>159</sup> Yeivin 1989: 93.

<sup>160</sup> For the excavator's comments regarding a canopy, see Gutman et al. 1981: 125.

already in the building's initial phase, when a monochrome mosaic pavement covered the floor, a conclusion apparently reached because of their belief that Bema B pre-dates the hall's polychrome mosaic pavement.<sup>161</sup> This supposition is supported by the appearance of whitish plaster on the southern face of one of the ashlar blocks that form the platform (fig. 98). The plaster and much of the height of the blocks are sunk into the extant floor-surface. That said, it seems unlikely that the builders would have bothered to install benches along this portion of the wall in the building's initial phase only to cover them up immediately with the platform. Therefore, it seems that while Bema B predates the polychrome mosaic, it apparently belongs to a renovation *after* the building's initial construction (see below).

The presence of a secondary bema—while common in modern synagogues—is not well-attested in the archaeological record.<sup>162</sup> The excavators considered Bema B to be a platform for reading, similar to an ambo in churches. Considering the character of Bema A, it seems likely that a smaller, more modest bema would have been convenient for such a use.<sup>163</sup>

South of the main hall, two rooms ran the east-west length of the synagogue (see plan, fig. 58). According to the excavators, the partition dividing this southern wing into two separate rooms was erected after the initial phase of the building.<sup>164</sup> In addition to the eastern entrance leading from the narthex to the southeast room (see above), an

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<sup>161</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 125.

<sup>162</sup> See Milson 2007: 191-92, as well as the comments by the excavators in Gutman et al. 1981: 125.

<sup>163</sup> On the use of secondary bemas, see Milson 2007: 191-94.

<sup>164</sup> See Amit 2003: 72.

additional entrance in the northeast corner apparently led to the main hall (fig. 100). The southeast room was the larger of the two rooms, and apparently had a single bench lining the south wall and perhaps the north wall as well, the latter of which might have been installed at a later time.<sup>165</sup> An entrance to the southwest room led through the west wall of the southeast room. Another entrance led through the south wall of the southwest room and out of the entire complex. Along the north wall of the southwest room a flight of stairs ascended to the west (fig. 101). According to the excavators, the stairs were not part of the original construction of the building.<sup>166</sup>

The appearance of steps both in the southwest corner room and in the narthex suggests that the hall had a second story.<sup>167</sup> Second story balconies are often included in reconstructions of the Galilean-type synagogues, with their internal colonnade. The lack of an internal colonnade at Susiya precludes the possibility of a second story balcony looking into the main hall anywhere except over the southern rooms. Given the internal floor space and the possibility of a second story balcony on the south side of the synagogue, the maximum occupancy of the hall would have been between about 118 and 484 people in the best-attested phase of this building.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Yeivin's plan (fig. 58) shows remains of a bench on both sides, but only a bench on the south wall is visible at the site today. Amit 2003: 71 reports that a bench on the north wall was installed at a later time. Baruch 2005 suggests that the room served as a *bet-midrash*.

<sup>166</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 124. A subterranean cave was uncovered in 1996 beneath the south wall of the two southern rooms of the synagogue. The entrance was from a long, stepped corridor to the south of the rooms, opening onto a large rectangular room. Byzantine pottery found there suggests that the room was in use at the same time as the synagogue. The excavator proposed that it may have been used as a *miqveh* at some point in its history, although his evidence for this is unclear. For the most complete summary, see Baruch 1998.

<sup>167</sup> It is unclear as to whether or not the stairs—at least those in the southwest room—were part of the original construction; see Amit 2003: 72.

<sup>168</sup> Based on Spigel's coefficient of 66 cm for permanent stone benches less than 55 cm in depth (see Spigel 2008: 178, Table 3.1), I estimate that 118 people could have sat on the permanent benches. Based on

#### 4.1.4 Adjacent Settlement

Additional excavations and surveys at the site have been carried out since the completion of the work in the synagogue.<sup>169</sup> Unfortunately, none of these projects has produced a final publication, and very few details, plans, and drawings have been included in the preliminary reports. Our ability to evaluate the findings critically—particularly the proposed dates—is therefore limited. The preliminary reports give a general sense of the village's character, but any conclusions cannot be definitive.

In 1978, Yizhar Hirschfeld excavated a large multi-room complex built of ashlar masonry on the western arm of the hill, about 80 m south-southwest of the synagogue (see fig. 57).<sup>170</sup> The structure was interpreted as a domestic building with two shops facing the alley. The excavator dates the construction to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. on the basis of coins and pottery, and its abandonment to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>171</sup> Based on Hirschfeld's preliminary report and published drawings, Jodi Magness suggests a 7<sup>th</sup>-c. construction and an abandonment in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>172</sup> To support the revised dating, Magness identifies storage jars uncovered in a sounding below the floor level, dating to the late 6<sup>th</sup> to early

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Spigel's coefficient of 26.4 cm<sup>2</sup> for portable benches (see *ibid.*) and a projected 69.25 m<sup>2</sup> of interior floor space, I estimate that 262 people could have sat on portable benches. Based on the same coefficient for a projected 27.50 m<sup>2</sup> of balcony space, I estimate that an additional 100 people could have sat in the second story. Thus, if only the permanent stone benches were utilized for seating, the maximum occupancy would have only been 118 people. However, if the interior floor space were used—as either floor-seating or portable benches or chairs—along with second-story seating, the maximum occupancy could have reached as high as 484 people.

<sup>169</sup> For the most recent overview of work at the site, with attention to chronological issues, see Baruch 2005.

<sup>170</sup> See Hirschfeld 1984.

<sup>171</sup> Hirschfeld 1984: 169-70.

<sup>172</sup> Magness 2003: 102.



8<sup>th</sup> c.; that is to say, the construction could not have taken place prior to the late 6<sup>th</sup> c. and more likely in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>173</sup> Among the latest datable finds on top of the floor—representing the end of the structure’s occupation—were Mafjar-ware ceramics (buff ware), produced from the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. to the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>174</sup> The structure therefore could not have been abandoned prior to the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>175</sup> The lack of ceramics with ranges beyond the 10<sup>th</sup> c. suggests that the structure was abandoned by that time.

In one of the entrances of Hirschfeld’s excavated area, a diagonal niche or slot measuring about 30-cm long and 10-cm wide was found carved into the single-block doorpost.<sup>176</sup> In consideration of the date and the context, the excavator suggested that this slot was intended for a *mezuzah*, i.e., a small parchment scroll with biblical verses affixed to the doorpost of a Jewish home.<sup>177</sup> This practice is well-attested in rabbinic literature, however, its extent among Jews in antiquity is a matter of debate.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, the identification of this practice in archaeological context is difficult for several reasons. Small scroll fragments in Cave 4 at Qumran provide evidence of *mezuzot* dating to the late Second Temple period.<sup>179</sup> The extraordinary nature of the finds at Qumran, however,

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<sup>173</sup> The storage jars illustrated in Hirschfeld 1984: 169, fig. 2:3-4 conform to Magness’s Storage Jar Form 5A, dated late 6<sup>th</sup> to early 8<sup>th</sup> c.; see Magness 1993: 226. The earliest date of these types provides the earliest possible date of construction for the building.

<sup>174</sup> See Magness 2003: 102, n. 44 for the relevant ceramic finds found on top of the floors.

<sup>175</sup> Magness 2003: 102 prefers a 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> c. date for the abandonment, although the date-ranges of the pottery uncovered make it possible that the structure was abandoned prior to the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>176</sup> Hirschfeld 1984: 172. See photograph in Hirschfeld 1995: 153, fig. 184.

<sup>177</sup> On the practice and use of the *mezuzah*, see Rabinowitz 2007.

<sup>178</sup> Schiffman 1995: 306. On rabbinic testimonies, see references in Rabinowitz 2007: 157 and the brief discussion in Hirschfeld 1984: 172.

<sup>179</sup> See de Vaux and Milik 1977: 80-85.

should not be expected elsewhere in Palestine (nor should the community at Qumran be seen as representative of Jews in antiquity in general). Doorposts in village homes, often made of wood, are not typically preserved in the archaeological record. As a result, physical evidence contemporary with the finds at Susiya has not been identified elsewhere.

In lieu of any parchment, Hirschfeld supports his identification with the halakhic criteria found in rabbinic literature: for example, the placement on the right-hand doorpost (from the enterer's perspective) and the height of the niche.<sup>180</sup> That said, the apparent practice in the example at Susiya—in which a large niche was cut into the doorpost—is not known from biblical or rabbinic literature.

The dating of the building further confounds the verification of this would-be *mezuzah*-niche. As stated above, the building *could* have been built as early as the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.; in such a case we might expect the inhabitants to have been Jewish, thereby supporting Hirschfeld's identification. On the other hand, the building *could* have been built in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. (or later), thus allowing for the possibility that the inhabitants were Muslim (see below on the dates of the Islamic occupation at the site). In this case, Hirschfeld's suggestion is more questionable, although we should not rule out the possibility that the site was inhabited by Jews and Muslims contemporaneously.<sup>181</sup> A third possibility is that the house was built prior to the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c. by Jewish inhabitants and subsequently reoccupied by Muslims, although Hirschfeld does not report any evidence to suggest multiple phases of occupation. In any

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<sup>180</sup> See Hirschfeld 1984: 172 and the references there.

<sup>181</sup> Magness 2003: 102 allows for such a possibility while pointing out that the archaeological evidence does not lend support.

case, without contemporary parallels for this Jewish practice we must leave open all options and recognize the limits of the archaeological evidence in the interpretation of this feature.

In 1984-86, an oblong structure of ashlar masonry was excavated by Avraham Negev and Ze'ev Yeivin at the bend of the hill to the south (designated Areas C, F, and G).<sup>182</sup> The excavators also uncovered sections of the main road that appear to bisect the village. Among the architectural fragments uncovered was a lintel with two inscribed seven-branched menorahs, as well as a wall adjacent to a *miqveh* inscribed with a cross-like design.<sup>183</sup> Across the main road from the synagogue, Negev excavated a rock-cut cave with five steps and a doorpost and lintel at the entrance.<sup>184</sup> On the lintel is a *tabula ansata* enclosing a roughly-inscribed seven-branched menorah.

Yehuda Govrin excavated a large structure and several subterranean caves and cisterns just east of the main road (designated Area A) in 1992-93, excavations which were continued by Yuval Baruch in 1998.<sup>185</sup> The excavated area included a large square building constructed of ashlar masonry and an open courtyard surrounded by rooms.

As Negev noted, the most peculiar aspect of the site is the consistent use of ashlar masonry and other large stone architectural pieces.<sup>186</sup> Such construction is typically associated with more urban (and presumably more affluent) settings, and is surprising in

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<sup>182</sup> See Negev 1985a; 1985b; Yeivin 1993c.

<sup>183</sup> Negev 1985a: 235, Figs. 3.2-3. On the identification of the stepped pool as a *miqveh*, cf. Reich 1990: 338-39.

<sup>184</sup> Negev 1985a: 240-42.

<sup>185</sup> Govrin 1996; Baruch 2005: 163.

<sup>186</sup> Negev 1985a: 232.

a rural village such as Susiya. More typical is the fieldstone and plaster construction seen at En-Gedi. We should be cautious, however, in reading too much into the choice of construction materials at Susiya during the Byzantine period, since many of the ashlar blocks seem to be in secondary use.<sup>187</sup> The blocks may have been quarried during the Second Temple period from caves that continued in use during the Byzantine period.

With the exception of Hirschfeld's area (see above), no datable finds have been published by the excavators. Nevertheless, the preliminary conclusions of Baruch's overview of the site's finds suggest that the post-Second Temple occupation of Susiya was not established prior to the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c., on the basis of both ceramics and coins.<sup>188</sup> While large candlestick and channel-nozzle lamps of the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. and 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. respectively were found in abundance, Beit Nattif oil lamps of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. are almost unattested.<sup>189</sup> Little evidence for the Early Islamic period at the site has been published, although there appears to have been continuous occupation at least through the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>190</sup> Despite the chronological difficulties—including the methodological problems of dating the rock-cut installations and dwellings, and the lack of detailed publications—the general picture for the 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. seems to agree with Doron Sar-Avi's characterization:

The municipal organization comes out in the excavated finds: an arrangement of streets and alleys, separation between public and domestic buildings, private and public *miqva'ot*, a multitude of water cisterns, an arrangement of subterranean

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<sup>187</sup> See for example Negev 1985a: 234.

<sup>188</sup> Baruch 2005: 164-65.

<sup>189</sup> Baruch 164. On the candlestick and channel-nozzle lamps, see Magness 1993: 251-59. On Beit Nattif lamps, see Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: 104-10; Hadad 2002; Adler 2004: 81 and esp. Magness 2008: 129-30.

<sup>190</sup> Sar-Avi 2008: 209.

...<sup>191</sup>  
 dwellings, agricultural installations, and at the “height of a city,” a synagogue

Beyond the 8<sup>th</sup> c., the picture of the site becomes less clear, due in part to the project goals and interests of the excavators.<sup>192</sup> Ceramics from the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c. indicate some Crusader and Mamluk activity, although the nature of the occupation(s) is unclear. As we saw above, the synagogue was later converted into a mosque, so the evidence from adjacent structures of the site are not helpful in determining a date for the synagogue (unlike in the cases of En-Gedi and Na‘aran above).

#### 4.1.5 Phases and Dates

Based on the evidence reviewed above, we can reconstruct the phases of the synagogue as follows:<sup>193</sup>

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
0	Pre-synagogue: subterranean facilities northeast and south of the structure
1a	Construction of courtyard, narthex, and main hall, all of which were paved in a monochrome mosaic floor. The main hall’s walls were lined with benches; one or three niches were built into the north wall; no stone bema from this phase is evidenced.
1b	Construction of two stone bemas along the north wall
2a	Repaving of the narthex, main hall, and southern portico of the courtyard in decorative polychrome mosaics; probably the re-paving of the courtyard with flagstones.
2b	Renovation of the two bemas: Bema A was given a highly decorative marble chancel screen, curved steps, and marble facings.
2c	Iconoclastic event and repair of sections of the narthex and main hall mosaics. Bema B was given a chancel screen.
3	Use of the complex as a mosque and construction of walls in courtyard and main hall.

<sup>191</sup> Sar-Avi 2008: 209 (my translation).

<sup>192</sup> On the later periods at the site, see Sar-Avi 2008: 209-10.

<sup>193</sup> Since the walls of the structure do not seem to have undergone substantial changes over the course of the building’s history, “phases” here constitute a change in floor-level, while “renovations” and sub-phases constitute internal changes to the building, such as the addition of furniture or repairs.

The initial phase of the synagogue (1a) consisted of a building with long walls oriented east-west. Since the prayer hall was set back from the main road of the village, there is good reason to assume that the large courtyard alongside the road existed already in the initial phase, along with the broad set of stairs and narthex, and the southern wing as a single room.<sup>194</sup> The courtyard at this time apparently was paved in a coarse monochrome mosaic. While no pavement lower than the extant mosaic was reported within the narthex—indeed it is unclear as to whether or not excavation was conducted below the narthex mosaic—it seems that there was most likely an earlier pavement, since otherwise the level of the narthex floor would have been higher than that of the main hall.<sup>195</sup>

The main hall in phase 1 consisted of a long room in which all walls were lined with benches. The floor was paved in a white mosaic, the remains of which are only visible below Bema A. The existence of benches along the north wall—below and within both bemas—suggests that the bemas did not exist in the initial phase. While no evidence of a stone bema in phase 1 exists, we should not rule out the possibility that there was a wooden platform somewhere in the hall.

Considering the thickness of the north wall, it seems likely that the niche(s) were part of the original design of the building. While it has been suggested that the thickness of the wall had a structural purpose, the north wall may simply have been thicker than the others to provide for the installation of the niche(s).<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Chen 1992: 303 suggests that the courtyard was not part of the original construction.

<sup>195</sup> On this last point, the current reconstruction of phases differs from that of the excavators and Amit 2003: 72.

<sup>196</sup> Though cf. Eshtemoa below, as well as Govrin 1994.

Renovations took the form of the installation of the two bemas (phase 1b). Bema A—built over and abutting the benches along the north wall—apparently consisted of a broad stone platform and a few steps leading up to the niche(s). Bema B was constructed as a similar—though more modest in width and height—stone platform to the east, also over and abutting the benches. Both of these bemas apparently were built directly on top of the monochrome mosaic pavement.<sup>197</sup>

In the second phase of the synagogue (2a), the narthex and main hall were repaved with a highly decorative, polychrome mosaic floor. It was probably also at this time that the open-air section of the courtyard was repaved with flagstones, while its southern portico was repaved with a decorative polychrome mosaic including the Rabbi Isai inscription (contra Gutman et al., who assign the construction of the bemas to the same phase as the polychrome mosaic in the main hall, and the southern portico mosaic to a later phase<sup>198</sup>).

The subsequent renovation (phase 2b) consisted of the embellishment of the central bema. Bema A received its highly decorative marble chancel screen, as well as the curved steps on the east and west sides and the marble facings. In the period following this renovation, dedicatory inscriptions were carved into the chancel screen of Bema A, probably not all at once (see above).

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<sup>197</sup> According to the excavators (as reported in Amit 2003: 72), it was also during this renovation that support walls were constructed along the south side of the complex where the hill slopes dramatically, as well as along the west side. Their basis for not assigning the support structure here to the initial phase of the complex is unclear, but in any case such additions do not constitute a significant change for our purposes (although of course from an engineering perspective, such support structures are significant).

<sup>198</sup> See Amit 2003: 72.

An additional renovation to phase 2 took the form of the iconoclastic event (2c), in which nearly all figural imagery of the mosaic and chancel screens was defaced in some manner. In the case of the mosaic, it was presumably at this time that the repairs were carried out as well, since holes in the pavement would have rendered the floor difficult, if not impossible, to use (see above, section 2.1.3 and below). In addition, Bema B was given a chancel screen which cut through the Bema B mosaic.

At some point, the building went out of use as a synagogue. The nature of the synagogue's demise is unclear, although since there is no evidence of burning or deliberate destruction, we should not assume a violent or abrupt end. After some time, a third phase saw the building's use as a mosque. In phase 3, a north-south wall was constructed within the main hall, cutting through the eastern portion of the mosaic carpet's central panel, covering over part of Bema A, and utilizing pieces of the chancel screen.<sup>199</sup> Additional walls and two *mihrab* niches were built in the courtyard. Stones from both bemas probably were used in these structural changes.

Without a final excavation report, the dates of the phases of the synagogue are somewhat unclear. A coin found beneath the pavement of the narthex was dated to the reign of Honorius (r. 393-423), thus suggesting to the excavators that the building was constructed at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>200</sup> As we have seen though, the mosaic pavements underwent numerous repairs and renovations over the course of the building's

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<sup>199</sup> Following the excavators, Amit 1994a: 14 reports that this wall was part of the final phase of the synagogue and not part of the mosque, however, barring any archaeological support for such a conclusion, I believe it is less likely that these modifications were made by those who continued to use the building as a synagogue. See also Magness 2003: 101.

<sup>200</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 128. The excavators write that the building "seems to have been founded toward the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. C.E.," but the short window from the ascension of Honorius to the turn of the century makes a late 4<sup>th</sup> c. date less likely than a 5<sup>th</sup> c. date.



history, so there is no reason to assume that this coin represents the earliest phase.<sup>201</sup> Perhaps it is this point that prompted Ze'ev Yeivin to break from his co-directors and suggest a late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> c. date for the foundation of the synagogue.<sup>202</sup>

Yuval Baruch's analysis of the site's post-Second Temple period chronology concludes that Susiya was settled no earlier than the second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. (or slightly later).<sup>203</sup> It therefore seems that Yeivin's dating of the synagogue to the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. is too early and that a date closer to the mid-4<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. (or later) is more reasonable.

As for the dates of phase 2 or the renovations, we are left without any datable finds to establish an absolute chronology. The geometric designs of the main hall's central mosaic carpet include motifs that were popular from the mid-5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> c., so stylistic criteria are not helpful for the dating of phase 2. The iconoclastic damage to the central mosaic carpet, however, includes techniques that should be associated with the broader iconoclastic phenomenon of late antique Palestine (see below).<sup>204</sup> Robert Schick has suggested that the wave of iconoclasm in the churches of Palestine was connected

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<sup>201</sup> The excavators write that "this mosaic floor [of the narthex] is of the first phase of the flooring" of the building (Gutman et al. 1981: 128). In this case, any finds below the floor would be associated with the initial phase of the synagogue. However, they also indicate that the floor of the narthex "underwent many changes and only small fragments of it have survived" (Gutman et al. 1981: 124). Such conflicting statements call into question their chronological conclusions based on finds from the narthex.

<sup>202</sup> Yeivin 1993b: 1421. In addition, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. remains were purportedly uncovered from below the synagogue (Gutman et al. 1981: 128); however, considering Baruch's conclusions regarding the chronology of the site (see below), such dates may be disregarded barring the publication of supporting evidence.

<sup>203</sup> See Baruch 2005: 164-65.

<sup>204</sup> See Schick 1995: 189-203, esp. page 202 where he lists the synagogues with iconoclasm. Schick's list of synagogues is based on Chiat 1982, who did not include Susiya presumably because the preliminary reports make no mention of the iconoclastic damage.

with the official Byzantine policy under Leo III, in the second quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>205</sup> If so, then perhaps around this time the synagogue at Susiya experienced its iconoclastic event.

Regarding the end of phase 2, the preliminary reports of the excavation propose that the synagogue went out of use in the 9<sup>th</sup> c., based on the latest finds sealed within the caves below and to the northeast of the courtyard (see above).<sup>206</sup> However, it is not evident that the building's use as a synagogue was contingent upon access to this cave. More relevant evidence would come from the debris within the main hall, which—according to the excavators—was not re-used in the final phase of the building as a mosque (though see the comments above).

In fact, the best evidence for the end of phase two is the attestation for the beginning of phase 3, i.e., the mosque. An incised Arabic inscription in the plaster of the courtyard includes a date of 193 A.H. = 808-809 C.E.<sup>207</sup> Schick points out that the concave *mihrab*—two of which were installed in the courtyard at Susiya—was not a

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<sup>205</sup> See Schick 1995: 207-09, 210-13, who dates the iconoclasm to the last decades of the Umayyad period. Dr. Schick recently informed me that since the publication of his doctoral work (*ibid.*), he has come to suspect that the evidence of iconoclasm is associated with the *second* wave of official Byzantine Iconoclasm in the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> c. (personal communication, November 2009). The suggestion is based on an inscription in the Church of St. Constantine at Rihab. The inscription—consisting only of the letters “TM”—was included in a mosaic-patch of a section of pavement damaged during an iconoclastic event. Leah di Segni 2006: 578-79 reads the inscription as “340” and so understands it to mean “(6)340 (*anno mundi*)” or 832 C.E. Assuming that the inscription in the patch is associated with the repair (and is not a later addition), the date would provide a *terminus post quem* for the repair and presumably the damage, while pushing the regional phenomenon of iconoclasm up by a century. While such a date is an intriguing suggestion, it is not supported by the evidence at Susiya, where an Arabic inscription dates the mosque to 808-809 (see immediately below).

<sup>206</sup> Gutman et al. 1981: 128.

<sup>207</sup> See Sharon 1975.

regular feature of mosques until the time of al-Walid I (705-715).<sup>208</sup> Since the iconoclastic event (phase 2c) probably did not occur after the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c., the mosque (phase 3) probably was established some time in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. or in the early 9<sup>th</sup> c.

The excavators suggested that the synagogue had been abandoned for several decades prior to the establishment of the mosque.<sup>209</sup> While the gradual disrepair of the building is better evidenced than hasty abandonment and/or destruction (see above), there is no way to know how long the building remained vacant. We must therefore conclude that the building went out of use as a synagogue sometime in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. and certainly by 808-809.<sup>210</sup>

Considering the holes in our chronology, we can tentatively reconstruct the phases as follows:

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Dates</i>
1a	late 4 <sup>th</sup> / early 5 <sup>th</sup> c. or later (construction)
1b	??
2a	??
2b	??
2c	ca. 725-750 (ended ca. 750-800)
3	est. ca. 750-808/09

<sup>208</sup> Schick 1995: 142. See also Magness 2003: 101.

<sup>209</sup> See the comments in Baruch 2005: 161.

<sup>210</sup> Alternatively, it is conceivable that the synagogue continued to function side-by-side with the mosque, since the features of the latter appear to be limited to the courtyard. At the Kathisma Church in Jerusalem, for instance, the building continued to be used by Christians after the installation of a *miḥrab* on the south side of the ambulatory in the 8<sup>th</sup> c. See Avner 2008: 1832.

#### 4.1.6 Conclusion

There are several distinctive features of the Susiya synagogue. The broadhouse plan of the structure, with its east-west orientation, received the most attention. As we shall see, Susiya was not the only synagogue to employ this layout. In addition, Susiya provides the best evidence for the use of secondary bemas in synagogues, as well as for security concerns among the Jewish inhabitants of the southern Hebron Hills.<sup>211</sup>

Perhaps the most overlooked feature of the Susiya synagogue is the extensive and thorough iconoclasm. It is surprising that the excavators make no mention of the synagogue's iconoclastic event or the careful repairs in their preliminary reports, particularly since it is among the most distinct—and perhaps informative—aspects of the structure's religious character.<sup>212</sup> Not only were individual figures systematically removed, but nearly the entire Helios-and-zodiac panel was replaced with a geometric design, leaving only a small sliver of the motif along the southern edge, perhaps as part of an attestation to the act of iconoclasm itself, much like the scramble technique used to deface the other figural images. In addition, we are left with the mystery of the one figure *not* removed—the western ram of the Bema B mosaic—much like the Gazelle Mosaic from Na'aran (see above). But despite this similarity, the situation at Susiya differs dramatically from what we have seen at Na'aran, in which the mosaics were left unrepaired. These issues, along with those presented by the iconoclastic evidence from the synagogue at Eshtemoa, will be dealt with further below.

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<sup>211</sup> On the last point, see Pniel 1992.

<sup>212</sup> The only treatment of the iconoclastic damage at Susiya is in Amit 1994a; 2003: 80-83.

In any case, it seems that the iconoclastic event took place toward the end of the building's long history, the final years of which provide the biggest mysteries. The question of the synagogue's abandonment and subsequent reincarnation as a mosque gets at the very heart of the issues surrounding the transformation of Palestine in the Early Islamic period. Indeed, the positive evidence of Muslim presence at Susiya by the late 8<sup>th</sup> or early 9<sup>th</sup> c. is not negative evidence of Jewish presence.<sup>213</sup> That said, if Jews continued to inhabit Susiya after the synagogue had been converted into a mosque, we should assume that the population had shifted dramatically in favor of the Muslim inhabitants. As for the synagogue itself, it most likely ceased to function as a Jewish place of worship by this time.

## **4.2 Eshtemoa<sup>214</sup>**

### **4.2.1 Location and Identification**

The ancient village of Eshtemoa has long been identified with the Palestinian town of es-Samu', about 14.5 km south-southwest of Hebron and 3.3 km west-southwest of Susiya (NIG 206400/589600; 31°24'3"N, 35°4'4"E).<sup>215</sup> The extent of the village is

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<sup>213</sup> Magness rightly highlights this methodological point in the conclusion of her survey of the Byzantine to Early Islamic transition in Syria-Palestine: "[the evidence] reflects Muslim presence in at least some towns, villages, and farms of southern Palestine by the eighth to ninth centuries but does not indicate whether there were Christians (or Jews) as well" (Magness 2003: 216).

<sup>214</sup> See the following catalog entries on Eshtemoa: Saller 1972: no. 114; Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 117-121; Chiat 1982: 224-28; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: no. 78; Ilan 1991: 295-97; Dauphin 1998: 15-16/66; Milson 2007: 358-61. The modern Hebrew spelling, **אֶשְׁתֵּמוֹא**, is typically rendered Eshtemoa in English, although it is occasionally rendered Eshtemo'a erroneously. The proper transliteration is <sup>ʿ</sup>*Eštemôa'*; see Kautzsch 2006: § 22f.

<sup>215</sup> Robinson 1856: I, 494 was the first modern scholar to identify the town with the biblical site. For the most recent and thorough discussion of the research history, see Amit 2003: 24-28.

obscured by the modern town. The site seems to have been inhabited continuously at least since the 12<sup>th</sup> c. C.E., with evidence of occupation stretching back to the Iron Age.

Iron Age II finds from the excavation of the synagogue support the proposed identification of es-Samu‘ with biblical **הַשְּׁתֵמֹא** (Jos. 15:50; 21:14) and **עִירֵי הַשְּׁתֵמֹא** (1 Sam. 30:28; 1 Chr. 6:42).<sup>216</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> c., Eusebius refers to the site alternatively as *Ἀσθεμῶ* (*Onom.* 26:11), *Ἐσθεμῶ* (*Onom.* 86:20), and *Ἐσθαμά* (*Onom.* 90:2). In rabbinic literature, the site is known as **אִישְׁתֵּמוֹעַ** (y.Nedarim 7, 40a).<sup>217</sup> Although Second Temple period finds were uncovered at the site, there are no references to Eshtemoa in Hellenistic or Early Roman literature. Consequently, we cannot know whether the site is biblical Eshtemoa or if it simply was identified as such by Jews and/or Christians in the post-70 period. In any case, for our purposes it is sufficient to recognize that the village’s name utilized a biblical toponym during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.

Literary sources do not reveal much about Eshtemoa during the period of the synagogue. Eusebius refers to it as a “priestly city” (*πόλις ἱερατική*), although this presumably is a reference to Eshtemoa’s role as a Levitical city (Jos. 21:14).<sup>218</sup> The comment should not necessarily be taken to mean that the city retained any sort of

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<sup>216</sup> The Iron Age evidence from the site is meager in terms of structures, though an impressive silver hoard and inscriptions hint at the finds that lie below the modern town; see Yeivin 1972b; Balmuth 1976. On the different Hebrew spellings of the biblical toponym, see Elitzur 2004: 149-51.

<sup>217</sup> Schwartz 1986: 260.

<sup>218</sup> *Onom.* 86:20.

priestly character in the early 4<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>219</sup> Eusebius further indicates that like En-Gedi, Eshtemoa was a “very large village of Jews” (κώνη μεγίστη Ἰουδαίων) in the “Daroma.”<sup>220</sup> Rabbinic literature provides no information about the town, except to identify an *'amora'* named Rabbi Ḥasa' of Eshtemoa.<sup>221</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Research History

The synagogue of Eshtemoa was excavated by two separate projects. The first was conducted by L. A. Mayer and A. Reifenberg who, following a brief survey in 1934, conducted an excavation in the synagogue in the winter of 1935-36 on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>222</sup> A second project was directed by Ze'ev Yeivin in 1969-70 on behalf of the Israeli Staff Officer for Archaeology.<sup>223</sup> Following several preliminary publications of Yeivin's work, a final report appeared in 2004 that includes detailed plans, photographs, and the ceramic and glass finds.<sup>224</sup> The wall and locus numbers below refer to Yeivin's excavation report. Since the mid-1970s, conservation work has been carried out at the site, involving the partial reconstruction of the main hall's east wall and the clearing of later stone pavements from the area of the narthex and forecourt.

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<sup>219</sup> Though cf. the inscription below, as well as Grey 2011: 260, n. 63.

<sup>220</sup> *Onom.* 86:21.

<sup>221</sup> See Schwartz 1986: 260.

<sup>222</sup> See Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 316. See also Mayer and Reifenberg 1942-43.

<sup>223</sup> See Yeivin 2004.

<sup>224</sup> Yeivin 2004.

### 4.2.3 Description of the Synagogue

The synagogue sits at about 720 m asl, a few hundred meters from the wadi that curves around the northern and eastern edges of the modern town.<sup>225</sup> The local terrain is relatively flat. The synagogue may be on a slight high point, but it is unclear how conspicuous this would have been in antiquity.<sup>226</sup> The complex is not oriented precisely toward the cardinal directions (fig. 102). The “north wall” (W10) is oriented toward the north-northwest. For the sake of simplicity, we will here follow convention in referring to the walls with their closest cardinal direction, with W10 as the “north wall.”

The synagogue is bordered by later structures (modern and medieval; L6, L7) on all sides. The main hall and courtyard of the synagogue had been utilized by the local inhabitants as a dwelling, apparently before and after Mayer and Reifenberg’s excavation.<sup>227</sup> The walls of the synagogue, constructed of large ashlar blocks, were preserved to remarkable heights. The south wall was preserved to a height of 1 m in some areas, the north wall to a height of 3.32 m, the east wall to a height of 4 m (fig. 105), and the west wall to a height of 8.35 m (fig. 103).<sup>228</sup> The impressive preservation of the walls, as well as the continuous occupation of the village, probably encouraged the reuse of the building over the centuries, resulting in relatively poor remains of the floors and furniture.

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<sup>225</sup> For overview of the site, see Amit 2003: 23-28.

<sup>226</sup> The site’s position upon a high place is not as “conspicuous” as described by Mayer and Reifenberg (1939-40: 315-16), though it is a difficult point to determine in the modern congested town. No formal survey of the city has been published.

<sup>227</sup> Yeivin 2004: 62\*.

<sup>228</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 316-17; Yeivin 2004: 62\*. Despite the excavators’ descriptions of the levels of preservation, there can be little doubt that the eastern triportal façade has been rebuilt over the centuries.



As at Susiya, the synagogue complex consists of a main hall whose long-walls are oriented east-west. It was entered from the east via a triportal façade and an exedra or exo-narthex (fig. 102). East of the narthex is an open forecourt. Later structures obscure any exterior walls that may have enclosed the forecourt. However, the direction of the paving stones compared to those of the narthex (see below) suggested to the excavator that this court was not built as part of the present synagogue structure but instead belonged to an earlier paved court or street.<sup>229</sup>

Three steps lead up from the forecourt to the narthex, a difference of about 80 cm in height.<sup>230</sup> The internal space of the narthex measures about 15.1 m N-S by 4.75 m E-W.<sup>231</sup> The north and south sides of the narthex were enclosed by walls, while the east side was open, with four columns in antis.<sup>232</sup> The antae on the north and south ends extend inward along the colonnade. Presumably, the columns supported a roof over the narthex. The north side of the narthex does not survive; the south side preserves a single-tiered stone bench along the south wall. The bench was apparently installed in a later phase of the building, since it sits on top of the remnants of the mosaic pavement, including later repairs (see below).

In the southern section of the narthex, several small patches of the mosaic floor survive. Along the narthex's west wall (W11) is an irregularly-shaped patch that

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<sup>229</sup> Yeivin 2004: 63\*.

<sup>230</sup> Yeivin 2004: 63\*.

<sup>231</sup> Yeivin 2004: 61\*.

<sup>232</sup> Yeivin 2004: 64\*-65\*. Only three of these columns survive, leading Mayer and Reifenberg to presume that there were only three originally. Yeivin's reconstruction is more convincing.

preserves evidence of the floor's decorative scheme (fig. 104).<sup>233</sup> About 40 cm from the wall, a double-line border of single tesserae frames an inhabited scrolls motif.<sup>234</sup> A tree is depicted between the border and the wall, measuring about 60 cm in height and viewed upright from the south. Since the image of the tree is so close to the south wall of the narthex (see fig. 102), we may surmise that the motif adhered to the overall orientation of the mosaic carpet. In other words, the mosaic carpet was oriented so as to be viewed from the south and not from the east (where the congregants entered) or the west (where the congregants exited). This may suggest that the mosaist used a floor-pattern that limited his ability to reorient the images.<sup>235</sup>

The depiction of the tree consists of a wavy trunk with two nub-shapes extending to either side. The branches on the top point upward, and four round objects, presumably fruit of some sort (pomegranates?), hang downward below the branches.<sup>236</sup> North of the tree is a row of evenly-spaced diamond shapes.

Immediately to the east of the tree, within the frame, are curved lines that indicate the former presence of an inhabited-scrolls motif. Unlike the geometric version at Na'aran, the inhabited-scrolls are created by depictions of vine trellises, a style that first

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<sup>233</sup> The photograph appears in Yeivin 1993a: 425; Yeivin 2004: fig. 9. The current whereabouts of the piece are unknown, but since the excavation was carried out on behalf of the Staff Officer of Archaeology, the finds are presumably in their possession.

<sup>234</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 59; Yeivin 2004: 65\*. The precise measurements from the wall are not given by the excavator but can be estimated roughly from the photographs.

<sup>235</sup> On the use of mosaic patterns, see Hachlili 1988.

<sup>236</sup> The tree appears to be a simplified version of the trees in church mosaic art, such as the late 6<sup>th</sup> c. Church of the Apostles at Madaba (Picirillo 1992: 106-07), the mid-6<sup>th</sup> c. Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius at Kh. al-Mukhayyat near Mt. Nebo (Picirillo 1992: 165), and the 8<sup>th</sup> c. Church on the Acropolis at Ma'in in Transjordan (Picirillo 1992: 201).

became popular in Palestine in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> c. and continued.<sup>237</sup> Only the edges of the vines remain, but there are extensive parallels for this sort of pattern.<sup>238</sup> The state of preservation of the narthex mosaic does not allow us to determine the figures or designs that were once enclosed in the inhabited scrolls. Even if the mosaic carpet had survived, the deliberate destruction to and repairs of the mosaic likely would have obscured the images. As Yeivin notes, the extant patches indicate that the central portion was replaced with coarser, monochrome tesserae, although he does not speculate about the reason for these repairs.<sup>239</sup> Given the evidence from Na‘aran and the churches of southern Palestine and Transjordan, as well as the similarities between the synagogues of Susiya and Eshtemoa, it is reasonable to attribute the destruction to an act of iconoclasm.<sup>240</sup>

In the northeast corner of the narthex, Yeivin identified a water cistern.<sup>241</sup> The cistern was apparently in use prior to the construction of the narthex and probably predates the synagogue altogether (see below on phases and dating). From Yeivin’s report, it is unclear whether the excavator believed that the cistern was in use also after the construction of the synagogue. No finds from the cistern are reported.

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<sup>237</sup> Dauphin 1987: 184.

<sup>238</sup> See Dauphin 1987, as well as on Gaza and Ma‘on-Nirim, below.

<sup>239</sup> Yeivin 2004: 65\*.

<sup>240</sup> While no one to my knowledge has identified iconoclasm in this mosaic, Amit 1994: 13 raises the possibility that iconoclastic damage was done to the relief sculpture at Eshtemoa. For a similar example of iconoclasm and repair, see the Synagogue-Church and the Church of St. George at Jerash (Schick 1995: pls. 2, 8).

<sup>241</sup> Yeivin 2004: 64\*.

Along the eastern edge of the narthex mosaic, adjacent to one of the extant pillars (L9), is an Aramaic inscription, read from the west:<sup>242</sup>

Remember for good Lazar the priest	דכיר לטב לעזר כהנא	1
and his sons, who gave one <i>tre-</i>	ובנוי דיהב חד טר[י]	2
<i>missis</i> of his property.	[מ]יסין מן פעל[ה]	3

The name Lazar, a shortened version of Eleazar, has already been noted at Susiya (see above and Appendix B), where the individual likewise was identified as a priest.<sup>243</sup> Given the proximity and similarities between Susiya and Eshtemoa, we are probably dealing with the same person or same family. The inclusion of “his sons” is also paralleled at Susiya, although this is not specific to these two synagogues.<sup>244</sup>

As at Susiya, the doorways of the eastern façade were decorated in carved relief (fig. 105). Several decorated architectural fragments were uncovered from various locations in the village, as well as among the synagogue’s rubble. It is unclear which, if any, served as the lintels over the doorways of the triportal façade.<sup>245</sup> The lintel that has been erected over the central doorway as part of the reconstruction is badly worn but appears to include a wreath and rosettes. This lintel does not appear in Mayer and Reifenberg’s or Yeivin’s reports.

<sup>242</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 74. The inscription was published first in Yeivin 1972a: 45. The English translation here follows that of Yeivin 1993a: 425.

<sup>243</sup> Naveh 1978: 114.

<sup>244</sup> See Naveh 1978: 150.

<sup>245</sup> For the earlier surveyors and the collection of architectural fragments, see Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 322-26, pls. XXIX-XXX; Yeivin 2004: 75\*-81\*

Yeivin suggests that two architectural fragments found among the debris of the synagogue served as lintels over two of the three entrances (fig. 106).<sup>246</sup> At least one of the two pieces was uncovered by Mayer and Reifenberg.<sup>247</sup> Their shallow depth and broken faces suggest that they are fragments belonging to much larger blocks. Both pieces depict a menorah in bas-relief and preserve red paint. The first piece shows a seven-branched menorah framed within a column (to the left) and overlapping trapezoidal-shapes above. The upper section of the menorah (the arms) is equal in height to that of the lower section (the shaft and base). The base of the menorah is flat, instead of the typical tripod base.<sup>248</sup> The arms are sectioned in a bead-and-reel motif, with a trapezoidal object with three pointed crenellations at the end of each arm. The fragment is broken just to the left of the menorah; only 33 cm of the piece survive. Assuming that it served as a lintel, as Yeivin proposes, it would have been a meter or so in length. Yeivin suggests that the menorah was one of two, flanking a central image. According to this reconstruction, the column along the left side of the menorah would have been paralleled on the right, creating a similar frame as in the Bema A mosaic at Susiya (see above). The framing of menorahs between columns is known also from the Dura-Europos paintings and from a sarcophagus and the wall-carvings in the catacombs of the Beth She‘arim necropolis, although in those examples only a single menorah is enclosed

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<sup>246</sup> Yeivin 2004: 78\*-79\*, figs. 29:1, 2.

<sup>247</sup> See Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: Pl. XXIX.7. Both pieces are presently on display in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.

<sup>248</sup> On the frequency of the tripod based in depictions of menorahs, see Hachlili 2001: 131.

within columns.<sup>249</sup> The Eshtemoa fragment's state of preservation allows for a reconstruction of either a single menorah or two flanking menorahs. However, the geographic proximity of Eshtemoa to Susiya—as well as the similarity between the two synagogues—suggests there were two flanking menorahs, as proposed by Yeivin.

The other fragment depicting a seven-branched menorah uncovered within the synagogue is poorly preserved (fig. 107). It is broken on all edges and truncated on the decorated face.<sup>250</sup> The base is a short tripod, with all three feet pointed downward at a ninety-degree angle from the connecting-bar. The short shaft and broad arms are formed by a bead-and-leaf (or capital-and-flower) motif.<sup>251</sup> To the left of the staff is a rosette. Yeivin suggests that this piece would have depicted two menorahs flanking a central image, but, as with the previous fragment, the state of preservation makes this uncertain.

A third architectural fragment depicting a menorah was built into a wall of a modern structure in the village (fig. 108).<sup>252</sup> Its connection to the synagogue is tenuous but likely, given the size (apparently over 2 m in length) and decoration.<sup>253</sup> No drawing or precise measurements of the piece were published and the photograph is not ideal for analysis. The decorated block, which no doubt served as a lintel, depicts a central menorah flanked on the right by a long, tapered object representing a lulav and a small round object between the lulav and the menorah, presumably meant to be an etrog. To

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<sup>249</sup> For Dura-Europos, see Kraeling 1956: pl. LIX; for Beth She'arim, see Mazar 1973: pl. X.2, XXXI3; Avigad 1976: no. 122, pl. XLV2.

<sup>250</sup> See Yeivin 2004: 78\*-79\*, fig. 29.2.

<sup>251</sup> On the capital-and-flower motif used for branches of menorahs, see Hachlili 2001: 147-48.

<sup>252</sup> Yeivin 2004: 79\*, 29:3. The piece is not included in Hachlili's catalog and its current whereabouts are unknown.

<sup>253</sup> The measurement here is based on the scale accompanying the figure in Yeivin 2004: fig. 29.

the left of the menorah is a thin object bent at a ninety-degree angle, apparently representing a shofar. The base of the menorah is a tripod, with the outer feet flaring to either side and extending out into tendrils that curve along the bottom of the panel. The menorah is modest in size given the surface area of the lintel-face. The empty areas to either side of the menorah appear roughly worked, perhaps suggesting that designs were removed at some point. It is difficult to determine whether or not this is an instance of iconoclasm based on the available evidence. In examples of iconoclasm of relief-work elsewhere, the outlines of the figures are visible as rough patches of bare stone.<sup>254</sup> Even if it were possible to verify that this is a case of iconoclasm, we would not be able to determine whether it was carried out while the synagogue was still in use, since the piece was found in secondary context.<sup>255</sup> Nevertheless, this lintel shows the use of the menorah as a central image on an architectural fragment, recalling the mosaic depictions of menorahs in the narthex of the Na'aran synagogue, the main hall of the Jericho synagogue, and the chancel screen panel in the Susiya synagogue.

Among the modern buildings of the village, Mayer and Reifenberg uncovered two additional architectural fragments decorated with menorahs. Unlike the bas-relief carvings found in the synagogue, these pieces are carved in shallow, sunken-relief. The fragments are published only in the form of photographs (without scale references).

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<sup>254</sup> See above on Susiya, and below; see also the example from the Bar'am synagogue in Kohl and Watzinger 1916: 91.

<sup>255</sup> It is perhaps this architectural fragment, or possibly the following (see below), to which David Amit refers in his list of synagogues with evidence of Jewish iconoclasm in the form of stone reliefs; see Amit 1994: 13.

The first fragment (fig. 109) is roughly worn on the edges but mostly intact, at least along the decorated face, where three separate images are carved in sunken-relief.<sup>256</sup> All three designs are approximately the same size, that is, none appears more prominent than the other two. This arrangement is unusual in Jewish art, where a central image is typically flanked by smaller designs or two same/similar depictions. The menorah is in the center. Its upper section equals roughly that of the lower section. The base is a square tripod, and the arms consist of three deeply-carved, concentric semi-circles with two additional lines extending up within the innermost to create a nine-branched menorah. These additional branches are more shallowly-carved than the other arms, suggesting they might be a later addition. To the right of the menorah is a tree-like design, consisting of a long narrow trunk, textured with diagonal lines, and five branches radiating out from the top. The design probably is meant to represent a palm tree.<sup>257</sup> To the left of the menorah is a deeply-carved circle. The area within the circle is roughly worked. Given the state of preservation of the decorated face of the fragment, I propose that the roughly-worked area contained a design that was subsequently defaced. While the evidence of mosaic iconoclasm at Eshtemoa (see above) and the evidence of relief iconoclasm at Susiya suggest that the defacement of this architectural fragment was accomplished contemporaneously, we should bear in mind that this piece, like the previous fragment, was found in secondary use. The defacement could have taken place at any time. Although we will never know what the image depicted within the circle was,

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<sup>256</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: pl. XXIX.4; Hachlili 2001: IS4.3. The photograph in Hachlili 2001: pl. 61\* provides a better view and more detail.

<sup>257</sup> See Hachlili 2001: 294, who suggests that it is a lulav.



the fact that someone at some point felt a desire to blot it out may indicate that the design was figural.

The last architectural fragment depicting a menorah, also discovered in the village in secondary use by Mayer and Reifenberg, is very poorly preserved.<sup>258</sup> The block is broken on all sides. The surviving face clearly preserves a shallowly-carved, seven-branch menorah with a horizontal cross-bar running over the ends of the arms. The base does not survive.

Several other decorated architectural fragments were uncovered among the remains of the synagogue and in the village, some of which were published by Mayer and Reifenberg and some by Yeivin.<sup>259</sup> The designs include a range of geometric and floral motifs, such as rosettes, vine tendrils, and grape bunches. At least two fragments decorated with conch motifs were also uncovered. One of these, discovered within the synagogue's hall, might have decorated the Torah niche (see below).<sup>260</sup>

The north and south walls (the long walls) of the main hall were 3.0-3.5 m-thick, while the east and west walls (the short walls) were only 1.2-1.5 m thick. Yeivin suggests that the thickness of the long walls indicates that they supported broad, heavy wooden beams of a gabled roof, instead of an internal colonnade.<sup>261</sup> (An internal colonnade would distribute the weight of the roof more evenly over the beams.). Mayer

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<sup>258</sup> See Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40; pl. XXIX.1. The menorah does not appear in Hachlili's catalog.

<sup>259</sup> See Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40; 322-26, pl. XXIX; Yeivin 2004: 75\*-81\*.

<sup>260</sup> Yeivin 2004: 80\*. Although there is no direct evidence to support Yeivin's suggestion, a similar conch design was identified as an adornment for a Torah shrine at Nabratein (Meyers and Myers 2009: 84), and mosaic depictions of Torah shrines often include a conch motif above the doors and in the pediment.

<sup>261</sup> Yeivin 2004: 68\*.

and Reifenberg—writing prior to the excavation of the Susiya synagogue—apparently could not conceive of a gabled roof without internal structural support: “The columns on which the ceiling must have rested have disappeared entirely, only a few bases and drums having been found embedded in the modern masonry of some houses in the neighborhood.”<sup>262</sup> Indeed, drums and bases are still visible in the modern neighborhood houses today, seventy years later. That said, there is no reason to assume that those architectural fragments were taken from the synagogue’s main hall, as opposed to the narthex or some other ancient structure. Moreover, had an internal colonnade once existed to support the roof, we would expect to find evidence of foundations below the floor. In any case, Mayer and Reifenberg report the discovery of red roof tiles, so we can be reasonably sure that the roof of the Eshtemoa synagogue was gabled.<sup>263</sup>

The interior space of the main hall measures 21.0 m E-W by 10.8 m N-S.<sup>264</sup> Along the north wall, east of the bema (see below), and along the south wall were two tiers of benches, measuring on average about 1.2 m in depth per two tiers (see fig. 102).<sup>265</sup> Other than the bema, no other furniture or features were uncovered inside the main hall. Unlike the En-Gedi and Susiya synagogues, no stone stairs were found to suggest a second-story balcony. While wooden stairs would have been possible, without

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<sup>262</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 319.

<sup>263</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 319; contra Govrin 1994.

<sup>264</sup> Yeivin 2004: 68\*.

<sup>265</sup> Yeivin 1993: 425 indicates that excavation below the benches along the south wall and adjacent to the *mihrab* uncovered a repaired section of mosaic, similar to that seen in the narthex. This would indicate that the benches were installed later, probably when the building was used as a mosque (see below). Yeivin does not include this section in his final report (Yeivin 2004), and makes no mention of excavation along the south wall.

an internal colonnade there would have been no means of supporting an upper balcony.<sup>266</sup>

With a usable floor area of 169.2 m<sup>2</sup>, the maximum occupancy of the main hall would have been between 355 and 830 people.<sup>267</sup>

Several small patches of the main hall's mosaic pavement were uncovered.<sup>268</sup> Although no photographs of this pavement are published, Yeivin describes "meager remains" of polychrome geometric motifs, probably with some sort of central image, against a monochrome field.<sup>269</sup> In the northeast corner of the hall, Yeivin reports a section patched with larger tesserae, perhaps part of the same repairs of the iconoclastic event evident in the narthex. Mayer and Reifenberg report that they uncovered an earlier mosaic, represented by "only a few tesserae," at a level of 48.5 cm below the polychrome pavement. Yeivin, excavating over thirty years later, found no evidence of an earlier floor.<sup>270</sup> It is difficult to account for this discrepancy in the stratigraphy reported by the two excavation projects (but see below).

Set into the north wall is a large niche flanked by two smaller ones, about 2.08 m above the extant floor level (fig. 110).<sup>271</sup> In top-view, all three niches are semi-circular

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<sup>266</sup> An upper story balcony could have been constructed entirely of wood, but we would expect to find evidence of postholes or stone bases to support the wooden pillars.

<sup>267</sup> The internal floor area of 226.8 m<sup>2</sup> (21.0 × 10.8) is decreased by 57.6 m<sup>2</sup> to account for the bema, benches, and area in front of the doorways. The benches along the north wall could support 36 people (at 44 cm<sup>2</sup> per person) and the benches along the south wall could support 94 people (at 44 cm<sup>2</sup> per person). The usable floor space of 169.2 m<sup>2</sup> could support 14 portable benches, each 20 m in length, which could seat as many as 636 people (at 44 cm of width per person). The same floor space could conversely seat 225 people (with prostration, at 75 cm<sup>2</sup> per person). On methodology and coefficients, see Spigel 2008: 178.

<sup>268</sup> Yeivin 2004: 69\*.

<sup>269</sup> Yeivin 2004: 69\*.

<sup>270</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 318 refer to this as the "original" floor, evidenced by "only a few tesserae." See also Yeivin 2004: 69\*.

<sup>271</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 317.

and set back from the wall-face in rectangular recesses. The height of the tops of the niches is not preserved. Mayer and Reifenberg suggested that the central niche served as the Torah repository, presumably with a wooden frame and doors set into the rectangular recess, while the flanking niches displayed menorahs.<sup>272</sup> Their proposal found support in Yeivin's later discovery of two fragments of a three-dimensional, marble menorah (fig. 111).<sup>273</sup> One fragment is from the piece's central shaft; a second fragment is apparently from the intersection of the outermost branches and the shaft.<sup>274</sup> The latter piece preserves remnants of two flanking lions that clutch the staff with their forepaws. The left lion is only evidenced by its paws, but the lion to the right preserves its head, its arms, and part of its torso. While the sides, top, and back of the right lion's mane are preserved, the face of the animal has been wiped out.<sup>275</sup> The preservation of the individual strands of the lion's mane suggests that the loss of the facial details was deliberate. This sort of defacement, concentrated on the face of a figural image, is similar to one of the chancel screen panels of the Susiya synagogue (see above).<sup>276</sup> The damage to the lion was probably part of the same iconoclastic event that damaged and repaired sections of the mosaic.

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<sup>272</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 320.

<sup>273</sup> Yeivin 2004: 81\*-82\*. The menorah is catalogued as Hachlili 2001: IS2.6, who assigns it to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>274</sup> Yeivin 2004: 81\*.

<sup>275</sup> Yeivin 2004: 81\*.

<sup>276</sup> Similar defacements appear among the bronze vessel finds from Naḥal Hever; see Yadin 1971: 102.

Extending 1.48 m in front of the niches (to the south) and 4.3 m along the north wall are the remains of a bema (fig. 110).<sup>277</sup> The platform was a rubble-filled construction with ashlar facing, the lowest course of which preserved decorative molding (fig. 113). In a later phase of the bema, a large free-standing apsidal feature was constructed on top, directly in front of the central niche (fig. 112).<sup>278</sup> The feature was built of large, well-cut stones, including two molded courses, set on top of a bed of cement. Remnants of plaster were found over the molded courses in some places, suggesting to Mayer and Reifenberg that the apsidal feature underwent multiple phases of repair or reconstruction.<sup>279</sup> The excavators reported holes and cuts in the tops of the stones of the apsidal feature,<sup>280</sup> suggesting that a wooden structure was fastened to it, perhaps a wooden Torah shrine or platform.

One of the stones of the upper course of the apsidal feature bears a two-line, Aramaic inscription (fig. 114).<sup>281</sup> The stone is badly worn, making the inscription difficult to read. The stone apparently preserves only half of the inscription; an additional stone placed to the right of the surviving block presumably carried the rest. The extant portion reads as follows:<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> For dimensions, see Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 318.

<sup>278</sup> For description, see Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 318-19, pl. XXV. No part of this feature survived by the time of Yeivin's excavation, so the apse does not appear in Yeivin's plan (fig. 110). For photograph of the bema as it looked in 2009, see fig. 113.

<sup>279</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 318.

<sup>280</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 319.

<sup>281</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 72. For the fullest discussion of the inscription, see Yeivin 2004: 72\*-73\*.

<sup>282</sup> Yeivin 2004: 72\*-73\* provides the most complete transcription. He does not include a translation of the Aramaic, therefore the translation is my own. The words in brackets are my proposed reconstruction.

... Iulia/us [made (?)] this bema from	[... עבד] לוליא הדן במתה מן	1
[his own property. ... Samu]el (?) Isai. Amen and amen.	[פעלה... שמו] אל אסיי אמן ואמן.	2

The first preserved word of line 1, לוליא, is understood by Yeivin as a personal name.

His suggestion is supported by the lintel inscription at Nabratein, which includes the name לוליאנא, or, as Naveh understands it, a transliterated form of the Roman name,

Iulianus.<sup>283</sup> Thus the name here should be read as Iulia or Iulius.<sup>284</sup> The remainder of the line's extant portion, "this bema from," suggests that the donor provided funds for or built the bema. Comparable donor inscriptions—especially from Galilee, where the inscriptions are frequently found directly on the object being donated (usually a column, lintel, or mosaic)—suggest that the verb was עבד, or "made."<sup>285</sup> The addition of the word פעלה, or "his property," parallels the inscription from the narthex (see above).

The second line begins with a partial word, אל-, making the precise translation difficult. Since it precedes the personal name Isai, Yeivin suggests that the first word was the end of a theophoric name.<sup>286</sup> According to Naveh, "Samuel" is the only personal name attested for a donor ending in אל- known from Aramaic and Hebrew inscriptions in

<sup>283</sup> Naveh 1978: 33.

<sup>284</sup> The use of א at the end does not necessarily indicate that the Aramaic name was a transliteration of the feminine in Latin; see Naveh 1978: 33.

<sup>285</sup> See the numerous examples in Naveh 1978: 151.

<sup>286</sup> Yeivin 2004: 72\*.

Palestine (see above on Na‘aran).<sup>287</sup> As noted above, the name Isai is probably an Aramaicized version of Jesse (from the Hebrew ישי) or Yose, as attested also at Susiya and in Greek transliterations in the Gaza synagogue.

Mayer and Reifenberg suggested that the largest of the three niches set into the north wall served as the original Torah repository, while the stone platform and the apsidal feature were later additions that blocked off and replaced the central niche as the Torah shrine.<sup>288</sup> Their reconstruction would necessitate steps, probably of wood, to access the niches in the initial phase. Conversely, Yeivin proposes that the stone platform was part of the initial construction and included stone steps that led up to the central niche.<sup>289</sup>

The lack of evidence for the continuation of the benches along the north wall below the bema suggests that the bema was part of the original building plan. In addition, the cement base of the apsidal feature suggests that the architects needed a leveling and/or bonding agent for the blocks, so presumably the bema existed and was in use prior to the construction of the apsidal feature. The available evidence therefore supports Yeivin’s reconstruction as follows: The central niche was used as a Torah repository, probably with the side niches displaying three-dimensional menorahs. A wooden cabinet was likely set into the central niche to store the scrolls, and the stone bema was used to access the cabinet. At a later time, the apsidal feature was built over

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<sup>287</sup> See Naveh 1978: 152-53. Biblical names not used as personal names—such as Daniel, Mahalalel, and Mishael—also appear in Jewish inscriptions.

<sup>288</sup> Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: 318-19.

<sup>289</sup> Yeivin 2004: 71\*.

the bema (paid for wholly or in part by Isai), blocking off access to the central niche. A wooden cabinet was affixed over the apsidal feature and used as the Torah shrine. After some time, all or part of the bema and apsidal feature were covered in white plaster.

#### **4.2.4 Phases and Dates**

The changes to the bema and Torah shrines and the repairs to the mosaics suggest that the synagogue underwent multiple phases of repair and reconstruction. However, there is no clear evidence for multiple floor levels or any changes to the walls of the structure while it was used as a synagogue. Although Mayer and Reifenberg identified tesserae from an earlier floor, Yeivin's excavation found no evidence of multiple floors. The absence of substantial evidence for an earlier floor suggests that the few tesserae uncovered by Mayer and Reifenberg were either part of the polychrome mosaic floor that got mixed in with earlier material during excavation, or that the tesserae belonged to a floor of an earlier, pre-synagogue structure. Pre-synagogue activity in the vicinity is evidenced by the large amount of Early Roman pottery uncovered at the site.<sup>290</sup>

Despite his failure to identify an earlier floor, Yeivin posits two phases to the synagogue: a Late Roman period phase (end of 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> c.), when the synagogue was established, and a Byzantine period phase (4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> c.).<sup>291</sup> He apparently bases these phases on the ceramic evidence. However, it is not clear from the report how he correlates the pottery with building phases, since he does not identify more than one phase in his descriptions of the loci. The report suggests that the pottery was assigned to

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<sup>290</sup> Yeivin 2004: 83\*-90\*.

<sup>291</sup> Yeivin 2004: 83\*.



chronological groups without associating these groups with specific phases of the synagogue's construction history.

The difficulty in evaluating Yeivin's work rests also in his excavation methodology. According to the report, the units excavated in the narthex and main hall consisted of deep, unstratified loci. Although Yeivin published no section drawings of the stratigraphy, the tables describing the find-spots of the pottery indicate that some of these loci were as deep as 1.95 m.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, the report describes sections of heterogeneous matrices within single loci, in which the pottery was apparently treated as cohesive assemblages.<sup>293</sup> That is to say, the excavators did not distinguish loci within the vertical units in order to record the find-spots of the pottery. Instead, Yeivin apparently kept a rudimentary record of where each diagnostic sherd in his report was found, such as "on the surface," "below the pavement," "1.6 m below the surface," or "on bedrock."<sup>294</sup> This makes it difficult to group the pottery into datable assemblages associated with building phases.

If the ceramic assemblages represent the period up to the laying of the mosaic pavement, the latest datable objects within these loci will provide the earliest possible date for the mosaic or its repairs. For the area excavated below the inscription in the narthex (L9), Yeivin states:

Generally the pottery sherds that were found in the cut [L9] were from the Roman period, apparently the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. C.E. (see figs. 36:2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 19, 21-23, 27-29), however, some of the vessels continue until the beginning of the Byzantine period (for example, figs. 38:7, 12,

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<sup>292</sup> See for example, Yeivin 2004: fig. 36, nos. 18 and 28.

<sup>293</sup> For example, Yeivin 2004: 68\*-69\*.

<sup>294</sup> See the pottery lists in Yeivin 2004: 85\*-93\*.

15, 19, 20); in dating the inscription [and so the narthex pavement altogether], it seems to us that we must rely upon the earliest vessels that were found upon the floor, in other words, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. C.E.<sup>295</sup>

It is unclear from the report exactly what pottery was found “upon the floor,” since no distinct locus is assigned above the pavement here. But more to the point, the discovery of Byzantine pottery *below* the floor would indicate the earliest possible date of either the initial laying of the mosaic pavement or its repairs. Yeivin notes five Byzantine sherds from L9 (see above). Three of these sherds (nos. 38:15, 19, 20) were reportedly uncovered above the floor level or during the initial cleaning and so, for dating purposes, are irrelevant. Two of these five sherds, as well as two additional sherds, that were omitted in Yeivin’s description but included in his drawings and table (nos. 38:7-9, 12), were found below the pavement. Of these four sherds, one (no. 38:7) was reportedly found below the “white pavement,” presumably a reference to the larger, monochrome tesserae of the iconoclastic repairs, which means it is irrelevant for the dating of the initial laying of the mosaic. The three remaining sherds (nos. 38:8, 9, 12) were reportedly uncovered 1.3 m below the surface. At such a depth, it seems unlikely that these pieces should be associated with the repairs but instead pre-date the laying of the overall mosaic pavement (including the inscription). These three sherds include two cooking pots that Yeivin dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> c. and an unidentified storage jar rim.<sup>296</sup> Yeivin also found three fragments of glass vessels at a depth of 80 cm in L9; two of these were dated by the excavator to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. (nos. 40:5, 8), while the third was

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<sup>295</sup> Yeivin 2004: 66\* (my translation).

<sup>296</sup> Yeivin 2004: 91\*-93\*, fig. 38.

dated to the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. (no. 40:9).<sup>297</sup> If we are to accept these datings, the narthex pavement should certainly not be dated to before the 3<sup>rd</sup> c., and, given the ranges of the pottery and the latest of the glass vessels (no. 40:9), more likely to no earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup> c.

Two areas of excavation were opened in the main hall. In the west-central part, below a section of surviving mosaic pavement, Yeivin excavated to a depth of at least 80 cm (L10), although he reports only two diagnostic sherds—one from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. C.E. (no. 36:17) and one from the 8<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E. (no. 34:12).<sup>298</sup> He found no evidence of Mayer and Reifenberg's earlier floor, which should have been apparent at a depth of 45 cm or so.<sup>299</sup>

The second excavation area was in the northwest corner of the hall (L8, at the junction of W10 and W13). Unfortunately, Yeivin provides no description of the work conducted in this locus. The only diagnostic sherds reported from L8 were a basin (no. 39: 1) and a jar (no. 39:3), both assigned to the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> c. However, no comparanda were provided for either.<sup>300</sup> Although Yeivin does not say as much, presumably these were intrusive and should not be associated with the earliest phase of the synagogue.

The reports of both Yeivin and Mayer and Reifenberg seem to suggest that the narthex was part of the original construction of the synagogue. Not only does neither present any evidence to the contrary, but Yeivin assumes that the architectural plan is

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<sup>297</sup> Yeivin 2004: 94\*-95\*.

<sup>298</sup> The depth of at least 80 cm is based on the reported find-spots of the two sherds in the tables of Yeivin 2004: figs. 34 and 36. For a description of the excavation of L10, see Yeivin 2004: 69\*.

<sup>299</sup> Yeivin 2004: 69\*.

<sup>300</sup> See Yeivin 2004: 93\*. No drawings of these sherds have been published, and Yeivin's descriptions do not provide enough information to determine possible parallels.

similar to that of the Susiya synagogue. With the information provided by Yeivin, we have determined that the mosaic pavement in the narthex was probably not laid prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> c., and since no evidence of an earlier floor was uncovered, this appears to be the earliest possible date for the construction of the synagogue.

The bema and Torah shrine underwent multiple phases of repair and reconstruction. We have no reported finds with which to date of these activities, and since the later apsidal feature uncovered by Mayer and Reifenberg has been removed, this information is lost.

We are left similarly without criteria for determining the manner in which the synagogue came to an end. The *miḥrab* installed in the southern wall indicates that, like the Susiya synagogue, the building was later used as a mosque. As Jodi Magness points out, this feature provides a *terminus post quem* of 705-15 for the use of the building as a mosque.<sup>301</sup> However, the iconoclasm of the mosaics at Eshtemoa is similar to that at Susiya (see above, section 4.1) and so should be taken into account as indirect evidence for dating. The evidence from Susiya points to a mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. date for the iconoclasm there, which suggests that the Eshtemoa synagogue remained in use until that time as well. How long the synagogue was in use following the iconoclastic event we cannot determine. If the comparison with the Susiya synagogue can be stretched a little further we might conjecture that the mosque in the Eshtemoa synagogue was in use by the first decade of the 9<sup>th</sup> c.

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<sup>301</sup> Magness 2003: 103.

The phases and dates of the Eshtemoa synagogue can therefore be reconstructed as follows:<sup>302</sup>

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date</i>
0	Pre-synagogue	earlier than 5 <sup>th</sup> c.
1	Establishment of synagogue, with the three niches set into the north wall preceded by a broad, stone bema; mosaic pavements throughout	5 <sup>th</sup> c. or later
1b	Addition of the apsidal structure on the bema, blocking off and replacing the central niche	??
1c	Iconoclastic event and repairs to the mosaic	mid-8 <sup>th</sup> c.
2	Establishment of mosque	early 9 <sup>th</sup> c. (?)

Note that the order of phases 1b and 1c and the distinction between them is conjectural. There is no reason to assume that the apsidal structure was built before the iconoclasm or in a separate phase.

#### **4.2.5 Conclusion**

Despite the two separate excavation projects in the Eshtemoa synagogue, surprisingly little is known about it. While the walls survive to remarkable heights, the floors of the narthex and main hall barely survive at all, providing few, if any, sealed contexts. Unlike the synagogues at Na'aran and En-Gedi, where exhaustive excavations were completed, the synagogue of Eshtemoa may still provide us with important information, should future field-work be undertaken. The removal of large sections of the walls and excavation of the foundations may provide material to establish a more precise and secure *terminus post quem* for the initial construction of the building. Excavation below the bema would help to clarify that feature's phases and history.

We may tentatively conclude that the Eshtemoa synagogue was in use between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> c. The building has many features in common with its counterpart at

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<sup>302</sup> We do not include here the pre-synagogue and Iron Age phases discussed by Yeivin.

Susiya, namely the orientation, use of niches, decorative mosaic pavements, and the honors given to the family of Rabbi Isai. Toward the end of its history, the mosaics of the structure were subjected to iconoclasm, as at Susiya and elsewhere in the region.

### **4.3 Ma‘on (in Judea)<sup>303</sup>**

#### **4.3.1 Location and Identification**

The site of Ḥ. Ma‘on (Kh. Ma‘in, Tell Ma‘in) is located on a hill next to the modern Palestinian village of Ma‘in (fig. 115), about 13.5 km south-southeast of Hebron and 3.0 km east of Kh. Susiya (NIG 662700/590900; 31°24’34” N, 35°08’03” E).<sup>304</sup> In modern scholarship, Ḥ. Ma‘on (henceforth simply Ma‘on) is often referred to as Ma‘on-in-Judea to differentiate it from Beth Ma‘on in rabbinic literature and Ma‘on-Nirim in the southern coastal plain (see below, section 6.2).<sup>305</sup> At the base of the hill runs an ancient road connecting Hebron to Mampsis (Mamshit/Kurnub) in the northern Negev.<sup>306</sup>

Ma‘on has received scholarly attention since the first modern researchers visited in the early 19<sup>th</sup> c. The tell was identified with the biblical site early on (מַעֲוֹן; Jos. 15:55;

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<sup>303</sup> In addition to the references below, see the following catalog entries: Ilan 1991: 308-10; Dauphin 1998: 15-16/60; Milson 2007: 390-93.

<sup>304</sup> The site is typically rendered מַעֲוֹן in the secondary literature.

<sup>305</sup> The *NEAEHL* entry lists the site as “Maon [sic] (in Judea)” in volume 3 and “Ma‘on (in Judea)” and “Ma‘on; Maon, Ḥorvat (in Judea)” in the updated bibliography and index of volume 5. See also Avi-Yonah and Gibson 2007b: 495.

<sup>306</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 942; Amit 2003: 89.

1 Sam. 23:24-25; 25:2).<sup>307</sup> Eusebius describes Ma'on (Μαών) as located in the eastern "Daroma" (*Onom.* 683/130:12) but gives no further clues as to its character. In any case, the topography and local toponym suggest that the site is the same as that known by Eusebius.

#### **4.3.2 Research History**

Ma'on has been the subject of a number of surveys since 1968.<sup>308</sup> In that year Moshe Kochavi visited the site as part of his archaeological survey of the West Bank, during which he found evidence of nearly continuous occupation since the Early Bronze Age on the hill, covering an area of 10 dunam (about 2.5 acres).<sup>309</sup> Two additional, intensive surveys were conducted by Shemarya Gutman in 1969 and Yizhar Hirschfeld in 1976.<sup>310</sup> Hirschfeld excavated a Byzantine fort on the top of the hill and noted several ashlar buildings (see fig. 116), including one on the north slope that he identified as a church based on an apparent recess in the western wall.<sup>311</sup>

In 1987, Zvi Ilan and David Amit initiated a survey with the goal of identifying the Roman and Byzantine period remains at the site and investigating the "church" identified by Hirschfeld.<sup>312</sup> The survey team recorded the surface remains of olive and wine presses, a cemetery with rock-cut burials and possibly a mausoleum, a

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<sup>307</sup> See Amit 2003: 89-90.

<sup>308</sup> On the pre-1968 research on Ma'on, see the overview in Amit 2003: 89-90.

<sup>309</sup> Kochavi 1972: 77-78.

<sup>310</sup> See Hirschfeld 1979; Ilan and Amit 1993: 942; Amit 2003: 90.

<sup>311</sup> Hirschfeld 1979: 82. On the identification and dating of the fort, cf. Magness 1999: 204.

<sup>312</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 942; Amit 2003: 91-92.

columbarium-cave, and several ashlar edifices on the hill.<sup>313</sup> Only short preliminary notes have been published on the survey.

Ilan and Amit suspected that the “church” on the north slope was a synagogue already in June 1987, when they conducted initial excavations. Additional seasons were conducted in 1987-88 on behalf of the Staff Officer for Archaeology and with the participation of the Kfar Etzion Field School.<sup>314</sup> The findings of their excavation as they pertain to the Byzantine period synagogue—including detailed plans, photographs, and finds—were reported in Amit’s 2003 doctoral dissertation.<sup>315</sup> For all locus and wall numbers below, refer to Amit.

### **4.3.3 Description of the Synagogue**

The synagogue is situated on the north side of the mound, where the bedrock slopes up sharply to the north (fig. 116). The slope required the architects of the synagogue to level the bedrock and create a step up at the southern end of the building. The building is poorly preserved (fig. 117), due in large part to stone-robbing and agricultural activities into the 20<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>316</sup> The eastern side of the structure and the narthex (see below) were damaged most severely. The agricultural activity obscures the last phase of the synagogue (see below).

The remains of the Ma’on synagogue consist of a rectangular structure with internal dimensions of 12.97 m N-S by 8.65 m E-W, and a 60-cm recess stretching 4.1 m

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<sup>313</sup> Amit 2003: 91-92.

<sup>314</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 942; Amit 2003: 92.

<sup>315</sup> Amit 2003: 89-115. According to the excavators, evidence for pre-synagogue occupation in the immediate vicinity was uncovered (Amit 2003: 91), but it has not been published in detail.

<sup>316</sup> Amit 2003: 98.



along the center of the north wall (W3; see figs. 118 and 119).<sup>317</sup> The long-walls were oriented north-south. The walls are 90-100 cm in thickness and are constructed of ashlar on the exterior and rubble-and-mortar on the interior (see figs. 118 and 120).<sup>318</sup> The interior faces of the walls were plastered and at least in the second phase of the building were painted. Remains of red, green, yellow, and white paint were uncovered during excavation.<sup>319</sup> Some of the ashlar had drafted margins and raised bosses, suggesting that they were in secondary use.<sup>320</sup> The majority of the ashlar were robbed out, presumably for use in the modern structures of the adjacent village of Ma'in (see below). The roof of the building appears to have been a gabled wooden frame covered in tiles—several of which were found in excavation—that sat directly on the walls in the initial phase of the building.<sup>321</sup>

The excavators identify two phases of the synagogue. Both phases employed the same exterior walls and floor levels, however, significant changes were made to the doorways, internal walls, furniture, and upper support structure.

#### **4.3.3.1 Phase 1**

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<sup>317</sup> For the internal dimensions, see Milson 2007: 390. Amit 2003: 92 reports the external dimensions as 15.5 m N-S by 10.85 m E-W. Milson 2007:390 suggests that the recess measures only 3.3 m, but the plan published by Amit (see fig. 118) indicates that while the full extent of the north wall does not survive, the recess probably measured about 4.1 m E-W. There is no evidence of the recess in the west wall that may have prompted Hirschfeld's identification of the building as a church.

<sup>318</sup> Amit 2003: 92.

<sup>319</sup> Amit 2003: 93.

<sup>320</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 942; Amit 2003: 92. Drafted margins and raised bosses typically are considered to be of a masonry style characteristic of the late Second Temple period.

<sup>321</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 942; Amit 2003: 93. Amit mentions that a number of roof tiles was uncovered.

In the initial phase, the building was founded directly on bedrock, with no clear evidence of pre-synagogue construction in the immediate vicinity (but see below regarding the subterranean features).<sup>322</sup> The steeply sloping bedrock was cut back to level the synagogue's floor. However, the southernmost portion (extending about 2 m from the south wall) could not be quarried on account of a subterranean *miqveh* (see below). As a result, a section in the southwest corner of the building was about 1 m higher than the rest of the floor.

The excavators reconstruct the east wall (W2) as a triportal façade.<sup>323</sup> The central entrance was located directly in the middle of the east wall, as evidenced by the southern doorjamb.<sup>324</sup> The threshold of the southern entrance was directly on bedrock, about 1 m higher than the floor of the synagogue's interior.<sup>325</sup> Three steps, the lowest of which was cut into the bedrock, led from the interior of the southern entrance westward and northward into the hall (see fig. 119).

It is unclear from Amit's report what evidence exists for the northern entrance of the east wall. The plan (fig. 118) suggests a gap in the remains of the east wall where a third, northern entrance might be expected, but the east wall is so poorly preserved that it is difficult to identify a doorway without a stone threshold or doorjamb. Perhaps it was the comparative evidence from the synagogues at Kh. Susiya and Eshtemoa, both of which have eastern triportal façades (see above), that convinced the excavators of a third

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<sup>322</sup> Amit 2003: 94.

<sup>323</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; Amit 2003: 92.

<sup>324</sup> Amit 2003: 92. According to the excavators, the width of the central doorway was 1.5 m.

<sup>325</sup> Amit 2003: 92.

northern entrance along the east wall. On the other hand, comparative evidence from H. 'Anim (see below, section 4.4) suggests only two entrances on the east wall.

There is evidence for two tiers of benches built of ashlar blocks along the west wall (W1). On average the benches were 40-50 cm in depth and about 30 cm in height.<sup>326</sup> The excavators propose that benches were also built into the bedrock in the southwest corner in order to account for the 1-m discrepancy in height (see above and fig. 119). The later collapse of the ceiling of the *miqveh* obscures any evidence of benches (see below). Given the extant evidence, the estimated maximum occupancy of the synagogue in phase 1 would have been between 121 and 264 people.<sup>327</sup>

The floor of the synagogue in phase 1 consisted of a polychrome mosaic pavement, little of which survives. A small patch in the southwest corner of the hall suggests that a polychrome border enclosed motifs within the center of the hall, set against a monochrome background.<sup>328</sup> Different sections of the pavement included variably sized tesserae: 40 tesserae per dm<sup>2</sup>, 100 tesserae per dm<sup>2</sup>, and 400 tesserae per

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<sup>326</sup> Amit 2003: 94.

<sup>327</sup> There is no evidence of a second-story balcony, such as stairs or an internal colonnade. In estimating the usable internal floor space, I subtract a 4.5-by-4.5-m area in front of the southernmost entrance of the east wall (W2) to allow for movement along the steps there, and a 1.5-by-1.5-m area in front of the central entrance of the east wall to allow for the opening and closing of a door. I have not accounted for the area in front of Amit's northernmost door because I do not believe that the door's existence has been established. After subtracting for the benches along the west and south walls, I estimate a floor area of about 71.55 m<sup>2</sup>. Using Spigel's coefficient for permanent benches of less than 55 cm in depth (see Spigel 2008: 178, Table 3.1), I conclude that 46 people could have fit on the benches. If the remaining members of the congregation sat on portable benches, I estimate that the hall could have supported 10 wooden benches (subtracting an area of 2 m from the north end to allow space for liturgical leadership), 3 of which could be about 7 m across and 7 of which could be about 5.5 m across; such an arrangement could support a total of 218 people. With the permanent stone bench seating, this yields a maximum occupancy of 264 people. Conversely, if the congregants sat on the floor and required space for prostration, each individual would need 75 cm<sup>2</sup> (see Spigel 2008: 178, Table 3.1), allowing for a total of about 75 people. With the permanent stone bench seating, this yields a maximum occupancy of only 121 people.

<sup>328</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 942; Amit 2003: 93.

dm<sup>2</sup>.<sup>329</sup> The excavators hypothesize that the smallest tesserae were used for the depiction of decorative motifs in the center of the pavement.<sup>330</sup> Although larger tesserae often were used as patches (see above on Susiya and Eshtemoa), the regular and orderly laying of the larger tesserae in the Ma'on mosaic (fig. 121) suggest they were part of the original conception.

At some point in the building's history, the mosaic pavement was badly damaged and repaired with small flagstones. The flagstones are rectangular and of various sizes, some measuring about 25 by 25 cm, others 10 by 55 cm.<sup>331</sup> An area southwest of the central doorway (L22) used smaller, irregular stones as patches. The means and circumstances of the damage and repair are unclear; the cause may have been intentional or natural (such as an earthquake). Repairs to iconoclastic damage in churches occasionally took the form of small stone pavers or broken pieces of chancel screen.<sup>332</sup>

Although preliminary reports assign the repairs to phase 2, Amit suggests that the damage occurred and the repairs were carried out during phase 1.<sup>333</sup> Indeed, because the same floor was in use during both phases, it is difficult to assign the damage and repairs to one or the other. That said, the top plan of the synagogue (fig. 118) shows several small flagstones just west of the east wall (W2) whose edges appear to respect a square pillar that was installed in phase 2 (see below). While it is possible that the stones were

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<sup>329</sup> Amit 2003: 93.

<sup>330</sup> Amit 2003: 93.

<sup>331</sup> Amit 2003: 93.

<sup>332</sup> See Schick 1995: 193.

<sup>333</sup> For a preliminary report, see Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; for Amit's revised suggestion, see Amit 2003: 93.

moved when the pillar was erected, the (admittedly meager) evidence suggests that the pillar was already in place when the flagstone was laid, i.e., the repairs to the pavement were part of phase 2.

In the center of the hall (L10), a large flagstone measuring 90 by 55 cm was uncovered.<sup>334</sup> Its exceptional size led the excavators to suggest that this flagstone was not part of the repair but rather a stone base for a wooden podium or table.<sup>335</sup> The flagstone—while providing a larger surface than the other flagstones—could have supported only a very modest table or platform, particularly since there are not any grooves or holes for affixing furniture. The excavators also uncovered two rectangular stone bases of small columns, which Amit suggests were used for a large stone table.<sup>336</sup> However, there is no definitive link between the columns and flagstone. While medieval and traditional modern synagogues often include a central bema for the Torah-reading and the leading of liturgy, archaeological evidence of this practice does not exist in Byzantine Palestine. That said, a description of the Great Synagogue of Alexandria, which stood until the 2<sup>nd</sup> c., mentions a wooden bema that stood in the center of the hall.<sup>337</sup> Also, remains in the center of the synagogue at Sardis may indicate a central platform or canopy.<sup>338</sup> It seems then that the only contemporary comparanda for a central table or podium in a synagogue comes from the Diaspora.

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<sup>334</sup> Amit 2003: 93.

<sup>335</sup> Amit 2003: 93.

<sup>336</sup> Amit 2003: 101, architectural fragment no. 1.

<sup>337</sup> See *t.Sukkah* 4:6 and Levine 2000a: 84-88.

<sup>338</sup> See Seager and Kraabel 1983: 170.

The lack of any permanent stone bema or Torah shrine—such as we saw at Susiya and Eshtemoa—is not surprising considering the modest size and poor state of preservation of the hall at Ma'on. The recess in the north wall (W3) is the most likely place for these liturgical features, which were presumably constructed of wood. (See Amit's reconstruction, fig. 122.) Amit mentions two stone architectural fragments which may have adorned the Torah shrine, though it seems unlikely that the feature would have included such large stone elements in its superstructure without any sort of stone base or foundation.<sup>339</sup>

#### **4.3.3.2 Phase 2**

As the result of some sort of structural damage, perhaps caused by an earthquake, the synagogue underwent a fairly extensive renovation, adopting a basilical form with two rows of pillars and a narthex.<sup>340</sup> An interior partition wall (W5) was constructed to section off the main hall (to the north) from the newly-created narthex (to the south), the latter accessed via the southern entrance of the eastern façade.<sup>341</sup> The partition wall was about 86-cm thick and was constructed directly on top of the phase 1 floor. Along the south side of the wall, a line of ashlar was laid, which is interpreted as a bench by the excavators. Alternatively, this “bench” may have served as a broad step up to the threshold of the two entrances through the partition wall (W5). On the basis of this identification, the excavators propose that the narthex was used as a classroom.<sup>342</sup> Some

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<sup>339</sup> For the stone architectural fragments, see Amit 2003: 94 (piece found by Governanti in 1944) and *ibid.* 101, no. 3.

<sup>340</sup> Amit 2003: 95-96.

<sup>341</sup> Amit 2003: 96.

<sup>342</sup> See Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; Amit 2003: 96.

time after the creation of the phase 2 narthex, the bedrock ceiling of the subterranean *miqveh* below the building's southwest corner partially collapsed, necessitating the construction of a short north-south wall (W8) to block off the western half of the narthex.<sup>343</sup> According to the excavators, the western half was used only for storage from then on.<sup>344</sup>

Two entrances led to the main hall via the narthex: one in the center of the partition wall (W5) and one to the east.<sup>345</sup> The thresholds of both entrances, found in situ, indicate that the doors opened into the main hall. Because the thresholds were about 40 cm higher than the floor of the synagogue, stone steps were placed on the north side in the main hall.<sup>346</sup> The construction of the partition wall (W5) decreased the size of the main hall to 8.65 by 8.65 m.<sup>347</sup> The new basilical form of the building forced congregants to make a ninety-degree turn after entering the narthex to approach the main hall. As Amit notes, this layout is paralleled (or rather, mirrored) in the Sepphoris synagogue.<sup>348</sup> However, the local topography at Ma'on would have made a southern entrance to the narthex very difficult, if not impossible, and so it is more likely that this layout was determined by practicalities instead of ideological concerns.

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<sup>343</sup> Amit 2003: 96.

<sup>344</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 943. Amit 2003 does not include this suggestion.

<sup>345</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; Amit 2003: 96.

<sup>346</sup> Amit 2003: 96.

<sup>347</sup> Milson 2007: 392.

<sup>348</sup> Amit 2003: 97, who adds that this situation may be echoed in a midrashic comment that instructs those who are in the entrance room (the narthex?) of a synagogue to turn as if entering to pray (*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1:7). On Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005: 11-17.

North of the partition wall, two rows of three pillars were installed along with piers against the north wall (W3) and the partition wall (W5). The square pillars each measure 65 cm<sup>2</sup> and would have supported four arches, which in turn would have supported the roof.<sup>349</sup> Several carved blocks of the arches were uncovered in the excavations, while others were found among the modern structures of the village.<sup>350</sup>

The two tiers of stone benches from phase 1 remained in use during phase 2 of the synagogue.<sup>351</sup> Given the narrow 45 cm between the front bench and the west row of columns, movement through this aisle would have been awkward, as it would have been for the unlucky congregant sitting behind the pillar. Amit indicates that the excavations uncovered no evidence of adjacent stone benches in the east aisle, and therefore presumes that this aisle was used for traversing the length of the hall.<sup>352</sup> Of course, the nave would have provided similar access between the south and north ends of the hall. In addition, it is unclear as to whether the entrance through the center of the east wall (W2) was blocked up or left open during phase 2. Amit's general plan (fig. 119) shows that the central entrance of the east wall was not in use in phase 2, but the stone-by-stone top-plan indicates (fig. 118) that this reconstruction is conjectural.

In addition to blocking the view of those seated on the benches, the pillars would have reduced the maximum occupancy of the hall. It is unclear whether or not the pillars were meant to support a second-story balcony, although the extra space would have made

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<sup>349</sup> Amit 2003: 97.

<sup>350</sup> Amit 2003: 97.

<sup>351</sup> Amit 2003: 97.

<sup>352</sup> Amit 2003: 97.



up for the loss of floor space on the first story.<sup>353</sup> The lack of evidence of stairs leading to a second story does not necessarily negate the possibility, since the site has suffered from significant stone-robbing and the stairs could have been constructed of wood.

Twelve fragments of a three-dimensional, marble, seven-branched menorah were discovered, five from the fill of the *miqveh*.<sup>354</sup> The finds from the *miqveh* cover the entire course of the synagogue's history (see below), so it is impossible to determine to which phase the menorah belongs. The extant fragments—weighing an impressive 25 kg—represent only a small percentage of the whole. The excavators estimate that the menorah would have originally stood to a height of 1.6 m.<sup>355</sup> The arms and staff are formed by “rounded drums” that decrease in size toward the ends.<sup>356</sup> As in the marble menorah fragment from Eshtemoa, the fragments found at Ma'on preserve flanking lions. The extant portions of the lions show the mane, body, legs, and paws.<sup>357</sup> In light of the similarities in form and style with the Eshtemoa menorah, Amit proposes that the menorah in the Ma'on synagogue was paralleled by a second menorah and was displayed

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<sup>353</sup> Amit 2003: 97.

<sup>354</sup> For the most complete and detailed description of the pieces, see Amit 2003: 154-59. The menorah is catalogued in Hachlili 2001: 54, IS2.4, Pl. II-5, fig. II-11. See also the discussions in Amit 1990; Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; and Amit 1997; and see the reconstruction (on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem) in Israeli 1998: 92. In addition to the five pieces found in the *miqveh* (L33), one piece was found in L11, four pieces were found in L8, one piece was found in L15, one piece was found in L5, one piece was found L10, and the remaining three pieces were surface finds. None of these loci is described by Amit as sealed or critical loci for the purposes of dating. The strewn nature of the fragments suggests that the menorah was in use at the end of the building's history.

<sup>355</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; Amit 2003: 159.

<sup>356</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 943. Hachlili 2001: 54 describes them as “globular balls and bands.” As the excavators note, *b.Menahot*. 28b refers to menorahs constructed of “apples.”

<sup>357</sup> See description in Amit 2003: 156.

in the main hall against the Jerusalem-oriented wall.<sup>358</sup> It is a plausible suggestion, though as we saw above, the case for two menorahs set into the flanking niches of the north wall is conjectural. While there was no evidence of soot found on the fragments, Amit extends the comparison with the Eshtemoa menorah to suggest that this piece was used as a lamp in the synagogue.<sup>359</sup>

#### 4.3.3.3 Subterranean Features

Two subterranean features directly below the synagogue warrant mention here. Below the southwest corner of the building (the western section of the narthex) was a rock-cut *miqveh* which consisted of a deep immersion pool (L33) and a smaller, “dressing room” (L32).<sup>360</sup> The entrance, located west of the synagogue, led into a smaller room (L32) measuring 4-m long, 2-m wide, and 2-m high, which apparently had a channel running along the side to direct rainwater into the immersion pool.<sup>361</sup> The large size of the immersion pool (L33)—measuring 9 m<sup>3</sup>—and the type of plaster used are characteristic of the public *miqva’ot* of the late Second Temple period in the Hebron Hills.<sup>362</sup> Although the finds from the *miqveh* suggested to the excavators that it was re-

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<sup>358</sup> Amit 2003: 156.

<sup>359</sup> Amit 2003: 156.

<sup>360</sup> Amit 2003: 98-99. The *miqveh* and “dressing room” were each excavated as large single loci. Apparently no stratification of the fill could be discerned.

<sup>361</sup> Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; Amit 2003: 99.

<sup>362</sup> Amit 2003: 99. On public *miqva’ot* in the Hebron Hills during the Second Temple period, see Amit 1994b. See also Reich 1990: 87-93. Amit employs the typology for hydraulic plaster established by Porat 2002.

employed after the construction of the synagogue, the collapsed ceiling (see above) would have impeded its use toward the end of the synagogue's history.<sup>363</sup>

Just north of the entrance to the *miqveh* and about 1 m west of the west wall of the synagogue (W1) is a narrow, vertical entrance leading to a large subterranean complex, referred to by the excavators as the “refuge and escape cave” (L34).<sup>364</sup> The initial room measures 8 by 3 m. It extends to the southwest before turning a ninety-degree angle into a tunnel. The tunnel leads to stairs, descending 2.5 m, and then to another tunnel that curves to the east and north. The total length of the complex is about 20 m.<sup>365</sup> The date of the “refuge and escape cave” is unclear. Amit's suggestion that the complex is indicative of security concerns under non-Jewish rule—as with the subterranean complex at Susiya—seems to presume that the tunnels were cut or in use in the Late Roman or Byzantine period.<sup>366</sup> The date is a matter of conjecture, since no finds are reported from L34.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> On the other hand, perhaps the construction of the north-south partition wall in the narthex (W8) was intended to create some privacy for those utilizing the *miqveh*. It should also be noted that only one sherd is reported from L32 (the fore-room), while fifteen sherds are reported from L33 (the *miqveh*). Amit does not date half of the pieces from L33 nor the single sherd from L32. Those for which he provides parallels date to the late 4<sup>th</sup> through mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. No finds from the Second Temple period were uncovered, perhaps suggesting (*pace* Amit) that the installation was cleared of any debris at the outset of its re-employment with the construction of the synagogue.

<sup>364</sup> See Ilan and Amit 1993: 943; Amit 2003: 100.

<sup>365</sup> Amit 2003: 100; fig. 4.24.

<sup>366</sup> Amit 2003: 100.

<sup>367</sup> Although Amit indicates that the site had been occupied during the Second Temple period, none of the published pottery antedates the 4<sup>th</sup> c. With the exception of a few coins (see Amit 2003: 113), it seems that Amit reported only those finds that he believed were associated with the period of occupation of the synagogue, i.e., the Byzantine period (see below on date). It is unclear whether the “refuge and escape cave” (L34) was void of datable finds or the finds all dated to the Second Temple period. If the latter is the case, we would presume that the subterranean complex was built during the Second Temple period and not utilized during the Byzantine period, and so (*contra* Amit), not indicative of security concerns during the period of the synagogue.

#### 4.3.4 Phases and Dates

The site's state of preservation makes a definitive dating of the synagogue's phases difficult. Very few areas of the floor preserved sections of the mosaic pavement, below which would have been sealed loci associated with the beginning of phase 1. Amit assigns a 4<sup>th</sup> c. date for the foundation of the synagogue based on an exploratory trench opened below an intact section of mosaic in the northwest corner of the hall (L35).<sup>368</sup> Excavating 25-85 cm below the floor,<sup>369</sup> the excavators uncovered a matrix described as compressed fill of red and dark brown earth. In L35, seventeen diagnostic sherds were recovered, five of which date to the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>370</sup> Amit therefore assigns a 4<sup>th</sup> c. *terminus post quem* to the construction of the synagogue.<sup>371</sup>

According to the excavators, the majority of the diagnostic pottery sherds date to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c., suggesting that this period represents the height of activity at the site and the second phase of the synagogue.<sup>372</sup> Since no sealed loci were associated with either the end of phase 1 or beginning of phase 2, it seems impossible to assign any date to the

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<sup>368</sup> Amit 2003: 95.

<sup>369</sup> The variable depth was due to the stepped bedrock.

<sup>370</sup> Amit 2003: 95. For the diagnostic sherds reported by Amit, see Amit 2003: 102-108, tables 1-2. One piece from L35, a perforated stopper, appears in Table 1 (no. 37), although this piece could not be dated (see Amit 2003: 104).

<sup>371</sup> Amit 2003: 113 also points to a coin of Valentinian dated 364-75 as evidence that the site was founded in the third quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. Such an argument is untenable, since (a) the coin was found among the fill over the entire site and (b) the coin could have been deposited at any time after 364. No excavation seems to have been carried out below the large ashlar blocks that formed the base of the walls.

<sup>372</sup> Amit 2003: 95.

transition on the basis of stratigraphy. Nevertheless, Amit posits a late 5<sup>th</sup>- or early 6<sup>th</sup>-c. date for the beginning of phase 2.<sup>373</sup>

Agricultural activity has obscured evidence of the manner of the synagogue's end. Based on the latest finds found in the building, Amit suggests a 7<sup>th</sup> c. destruction date.<sup>374</sup> However, several of the ceramic and glass finds include forms that continued into the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>375</sup> One additional diagnostic sherd—a jug base—was dated to the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. onward.<sup>376</sup> Amit assigns this last piece to the latest period of the site, though he does not believe that it indicates that the occupation at Ma'on continued beyond the 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>377</sup> The overall absence of distinctly 8<sup>th</sup>-c. types suggests that the synagogue did not continue in use much beyond the early 8<sup>th</sup> c., if at all. As a result, we should consider the general occupation of the synagogue to have been from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> c. to the 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> c.

#### **4.3.5 Conclusion**

From the above evidence, one might be left with the impression that the synagogue of Ma'on is the least impressive of the ten extant synagogues in southern Palestine. The building is modest in size and without the sorts of lavish decoration seen

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<sup>373</sup> Amit 2003: 95.

<sup>374</sup> Amit 2003: 97, 102.

<sup>375</sup> These include the following: Bowl no. 5 (Amit 2003: 103, table 1:11), FBW bowl, Form 2C, dated to the late 7<sup>th</sup> to mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. (Magness 1993: 193-200); two cooking pots (Amit 2003: 103, table 1:16-17), Cooking Pot Form 4B-4C, dated 6<sup>th</sup> to mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. (Magness 1993: 219-21); Jar no. 3 (Amit 2003: 104, table 1:24-26), Bag-Shaped Storage Jar Form 4B-4C and 5A, dated 5<sup>th</sup> to early 8<sup>th</sup> c. (Magness 1993: 224-26); Jug and Juglet no. 2 (Amit 2003: 104; table 1:31-33), FBW Juglets, dated 6<sup>th</sup> to early 8<sup>th</sup> c. (Magness 1993: 236-41); two Candlestick lamps (Amit 2003: 105, table 2:11-12), dated mid-6<sup>th</sup> to late 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> c. (Magness 1993: 250-52); Glass lamp no. 2 (Amit 2003: 110, table 4:1-8), dated to Byzantine and Umayyad periods at Beth-Shean (Hadad 1998: 69-72).

<sup>376</sup> Amit 2003: 104, table 1:36. For a parallel, Amit points to an example from Yoqne'am, Avissar 1996: 160, Fine Buff Ware Jug Type 9, fig. XII135. This type of Early Islamic buff ware appears in the Umayyad period and does not continue into the Crusader period; see Avissar 1996: 155-56.

<sup>377</sup> Amit 2003: 104.

elsewhere. That said, the lack of inscriptions, decorative mosaics, sculpted architectural fragments, and internal furniture are a result of the site's poor state of preservation. The few fragments of mosaic pavement and small pieces of the marble menorah hint at a more elaborate character, unfortunately lost to the archaeological record. Amit's plausible reconstruction of the building (fig. 122), based on extrapolation from the building's surviving details and comparative examples, underscores the importance of critical evaluation of even the least impressive sites. And so it is here where we should point out not the limits of the archaeological evidence but rather the remarkable strength of the material remains as they pertain to our ability to determine the character of an ancient edifice.

Regarding the excavators' work and Amit's report, I have differed in conclusions on a few matters. In particular, in my opinion, the case made by Amit for a triportal eastern façade—similar to Susiya and Eshtemoa—is not convincing, since no evidence for a northern entrance along the east wall seems to exist. While the existence of a northern doorway along the east wall may seem trivial, the lack of evidence problematizes the possible architectural connections between the Ma'on synagogue and its neighbors and undermines attempts to characterize the synagogues of southern Judea as a regional type.

#### **4.4 H. 'Anim<sup>378</sup>**

##### **4.4.1 Location and Identification**

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<sup>378</sup> In addition to the references below, see the following catalog entries: Ilan 1991: 302-04; Dauphin 1998: 15-16/60; Milson 2007: 386-87.

The site of H. ‘Anim (henceforth ‘Anim) is the southernmost synagogue in the Hebron Hills, located within the Yatir Forest just south of the Green Line. The ruins are situated along the lower slopes of the Hebron Hills, at about 660 m asl and 19 km south of Hebron (NIG 206200/584600; 31°21’10” N, 35°03’49” E).<sup>379</sup> The site, known in Arabic as Kh. Ghuwein et-Tahta, consists of a low hill surrounded by wadis on the northeast, east, and south sides (fig. 123).<sup>380</sup>

‘Anim was first identified with the biblical toponym (אָנִים; Jos. 15:50) by Edward Robinson when he visited in the 1830s, and Yohanan Aharoni noted that the place name appears among the Iron Age Arad ostraca (no. 25).<sup>381</sup> Eusebius associated the biblical site with the Christian village of Anaea (Ἀναία; *Onom.* 86/26:13-14). He also identified a Jewish village called Anaea (Ἀναία), located nine Roman miles (13.7 km) south of Hebron and west of Christian Anaea (*Onom.* 84/26:10; 86/26:14), both within the city territory of Eleutheropolis.<sup>382</sup> The Christian village has been identified with Ghuwein al-Fauqa, about 1.5 km northeast of Kh. Ghuwein et-Tahta (H. ‘Anim).<sup>383</sup> Eusebius characterized a village as Christian only one other time (Yattir) in his *Onomasticon*.

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<sup>379</sup> Amit states that the hill is at 685 m asl (Amit 1993: 62; 2003: 114), but his top-plan of the Stratum III remains indicate that the elevation of the synagogue was at about 660 m asl (Amit 2003: fig. 5.1). Perhaps the figure of 685 m asl refers to the elevation of the higher hill southeast of the synagogue.

<sup>380</sup> Amit 1993: 62.

<sup>381</sup> Robinson 1856; Amit 1993: 62. For Aharoni’s reading of the Arad ostracon, no. 25, see Aharoni et al. 1981. Kochavi’s survey (see below) uncovered Iron Age pottery, supporting Aharoni’s interpretation.

<sup>382</sup> Avi-Yonah 2002: 161.

<sup>383</sup> Amit 1993: 62; Notley and Safrai 2005: 28-29.

Notley and Safrai suggest that Eusebius placed a special importance on the village's religious character since Anaea was the home of the Christian martyr Absalom (Peter).<sup>384</sup> On the other hand, the author's specificity may have been intended to highlight the distinct religious communities of two geographically proximate villages which were otherwise so closely related in the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. as to be known by the same name. In any case, as we have noted already, Eusebius' testimonies should be approached with caution.

#### 4.4.2 Research History

'Anim was surveyed by M. Kochavi in 1968 and again by Ze'ev Meshel in 1976-77.<sup>385</sup> A more intensive survey of the synagogue and Roman-Byzantine remains was carried out by Zvi Ilan in 1986-87, leading to the excavation of a burial cave by Yehuda Govrin in 1987.<sup>386</sup> The excavation of the synagogue was directed by Ilan and David Amit on behalf of the IAA with support from the Jewish National Fund and the Kfar Etzion Field School in four seasons in 1988-89.<sup>387</sup> Further study of the buildings, caves, burial chambers, and agricultural installations surrounding the site, undertaken in the course of excavation, identified four main periods of occupation at 'Anim: Iron II, Byzantine, Early Islamic, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. The results of this survey have not been published in full.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Notley and Safrai 2005: xvii, 29.

<sup>385</sup> Kochavi 1972: 30, 82; Meshel et al. 1987: 61-62. For overview of surveys, including those conducted in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., see Amit 2003: 114-16. Meshel's survey noted a large lintel with a *tabula ansata* carved into it, found on the eastern slope of the hill.

<sup>386</sup> Ilan 1987. The results of Govrin's excavation have not been published.

<sup>387</sup> Amit 1993: 62; Amit 2003: 115.

<sup>388</sup> See Amit 2003: 116-17. Excavation was carried out in the Iron Age fort by Rudolph Cohen, as well as in an Iron II burial cave by Y. Lender in 1989. See Amit 2003: 116.



#### 4.4.3 Description of the Synagogue

The 'Anim synagogue complex is located on the highest spot of a gently-sloping hill. The complex consists of a main hall, an exo-narthex (portico), and a courtyard (atrium), constructed of ashlar and large fieldstones with rubble fill (fig. 124-125).<sup>389</sup> The main hall is a rectangular building, with the long walls oriented north-south and two portals through the eastern façade. The main hall's outer walls were preserved to a height of up to 3.5 m in some places, due to their reuse in the Early Islamic and Ottoman periods. In the later periods, the synagogue complex was modified to include a number of interior walls, as well as additional rooms alongside the exterior walls.<sup>390</sup> Many of the ashlar blocks and architectural fragments were reused in later periods to construct these walls.

Because of the later additions and modifications, the excavators found it difficult to delineate the precise outline of the courtyard.<sup>391</sup> The southern wall in particular was poorly preserved, and much of the eastern wall had to be assumed based on the lines of later walls. The excavators estimated that the courtyard measured 7.5 m N-S by 4 m E-W and was set approximately in the center of the east wall of the main hall and narthex.<sup>392</sup> The courtyard was probably entered from the east, but the remains of the east wall (W29) did not preserve a threshold or opening for a door. The floor of the courtyard was paved

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<sup>389</sup> The most comprehensive description of the 'Anim synagogue comes from Amit 2003; for English summaries, see Amit 1993 and 1995. All wall and locus numbers below refer to Amit's report; see also fig. 124.

<sup>390</sup> Since Amit's report appears in his dissertation, which is focused on the synagogues of the southern Hebron Hills, he does not include a description or discussion of the post-synagogue periods.

<sup>391</sup> Amit 2003: 125-26.

<sup>392</sup> Amit 2003: 125.

in irregularly-shaped flagstones (fig. 125).<sup>393</sup> A cistern in the center of the courtyard suggests that the courtyard was unroofed. The cistern (L13A) was accessed via a narrow shaft, about 1.8-m deep, leading down to a bell-shaped tank, about 4-m deep.<sup>394</sup> The interior of the rock-cut cistern was covered in gray plaster. The thin layer of dust at the bottom of the cistern was almost entirely devoid of finds. The discovery of a few pieces of a small, marble basin in the cistern suggested to the excavators that the installation was used for some sort of ritual -washing.<sup>395</sup> As mentioned above, the presence of water installations—whether *miqva'ot* or large, permanent basins—is attested in ancient synagogues but is not a ubiquitous feature (see Appendix A). The bell-shaped form of the cistern in the 'Anim courtyard makes full immersion unlikely if not impossible. The best parallel comes from the courtyard of the Susiya synagogue. In both cases, while the cistern may have been used to fill nearby basins for ritual hand- or foot-washing, the large size suggests that it was also used for drinking water. Unlike *miqva'ot* or wash-basins, where the form limits the uses of the installation, cisterns lend themselves to multiple uses of the water collected therein.

All that said, there is no apparent reason to assume that the cistern was part of the original design of the synagogue. Subterranean, rock-cut features are notoriously difficult to date. Given the available information, it seems equally as possible that the cistern predates the synagogue or was added in the Early Islamic or Ottoman phase.

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<sup>393</sup> Amit 1993: 62; see also fig. 124.

<sup>394</sup> Amit 2003: 125.

<sup>395</sup> Amit 1993: 62; 2003: 125.

Flanking the courtyard to the north and south were auxiliary rooms, the precise uses of which are unclear. The outline of the north room is fairly well-preserved, while the walls of the south room can only be reconstructed on the basis of later walls and the apparent extension of the east wall (W29) to the south (see fig. 124).<sup>396</sup>

The north room measures about 4 m E-W by 2 m N-S.<sup>397</sup> The south wall (W44) is the most poorly preserved, although a stone threshold found abutting the west wall preserves the line. The threshold demonstrates that the doors opened into the room and the room was roofed. The west wall was constructed directly on top of the stylobate of the narthex's colonnade (see below), suggesting that the north room and the courtyard were built after the main hall and narthex. This does not necessarily mean that the north room was part of a distinct phase of construction though. It is unclear from the excavation report whether the foundations of the north wall (W43) of the north room were bonded to the stylobate or simply abutted it, which would help determine the sequence of construction. (Evidence for this may have been apparent in L12 and L25.) Barring further evidence, we should assume that the auxiliary rooms and courtyard were part of the original construction of the synagogue complex. Based on the discovery of a small marble basin in the north room, Amit suggests that the north room was used for ritual washing prior to entering the synagogue.<sup>398</sup>

The roofed exo-narthex or portico runs along the eastern façade of the main hall, west of the courtyard. The stylobate on which the row of columns on the east side was

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<sup>396</sup> For a description of both rooms and the criteria for reconstructing the south room, see Amit 2003: 126-28.

<sup>397</sup> Amit 2003: 126.

<sup>398</sup> Amit 2003: 128, fig. 5.34.

set is not precisely parallel to the wall of the main hall, resulting in a varying east-west width of the narthex between 1.8 m in the north and 2.1 m in the south.<sup>399</sup> Five or six square pillars would have been set on the stylobate. Only three bases remained in situ at the time of excavation. The remainder of the pillars and bases were robbed out for reuse in the immediate vicinity during the Early Islamic and Ottoman periods.

Excavation in the narthex (L12) revealed an earlier floor of gray plaster at an elevation of roughly 660.85 m asl.<sup>400</sup> About 20 cm above was the later, polychrome mosaic pavement, evidenced by only a few small patches. The red, black, and white tesserae are relatively large, about 32 tesserae per dm<sup>2</sup>.<sup>401</sup> A very fragmentary mosaic inscription was found in front of the northern entrance through the east wall of the main hall (W1). Too little of the inscription survives to decipher even a single word (fig. 126). Moreover, the two or three letters that survive are incomprehensible. The extant portion does not seem to accord with any recognizable letters in Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek (the two scripts we would expect to find in a synagogue), or the less likely scripts of Paleo-Hebrew/Samaritan, Syriac, or Latin. It is possible that the writing is simply gibberish. As discussed below, the inscription in the Ma'on-Nirim synagogue includes several nonsensical characters. In that case, Naveh (following Shmuel Yeivin) suggests that the strange style of the script and the incomprehensible final letters are the result of a mosaicist who could not read or write in Aramaic.<sup>402</sup> While the suggestion is not beyond

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<sup>399</sup> Amit 2003: 123.

<sup>400</sup> The elevations appears on Amit's plans.

<sup>401</sup> Amit 2003: 123.

<sup>402</sup> Naveh 1978: 93. See also Yeivin 1960.

criticism, it is a scenario worth considering for the ‘Anim inscription, as well. Alternatively, the mosaic may have been damaged at some point and carelessly repaired.

Two entrances lead from the narthex westward into the main hall (fig. 125). Both entrances survive to their entire height.<sup>403</sup> The north entrance is 1.7 m in width and 2.6 m in height. The south entrance is 0.9 m in width and 2.1 m in height. The doorjambs and lintel of the north entrance are not decorated. The doorjambs of the south entrance are decorated with a rectangular pillar in bas-relief, and the lintel has a rectangular frame in bas-relief (fig. 127). The lintel was found broken in two—though apparently still in situ—and recently repaired with gray cement. It is unclear what, if any, image was depicted within the frame. The face of the block is badly worn, and although much of the wear appears to have been caused by natural weathering (particularly near the upper part of the face), some sections may have been deliberately defaced.<sup>404</sup> (Since the lintel apparently did not fall from its place over the entrance, we can discount the possibility of accidental damage.) Whether such damage was the act of religiously-motivated iconoclasts or vandals is unclear. Moreover, the fact that the lintel stood until the 20<sup>th</sup> c. means that the damage could have done at any time (see below).<sup>405</sup>

The interior of the main hall measures 12.85 m N-S by 6.45 m E-W.<sup>406</sup> Like the synagogues at Susiya, Eshtemoa, and Ma‘on (phase 1), the ‘Anim synagogue’s hall did not have an internal colonnade. The beams of the gabled roof rested directly on the

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<sup>403</sup> Amit 1993: 62.

<sup>404</sup> Amit 2003: 118 suggests that all damage to the lintel was due to natural weathering.

<sup>405</sup> Amit does not include ‘Anim in his list of synagogues bearing evidence of iconoclasm; see Amit 1994: 13, tab. 1.

<sup>406</sup> Milson 2007: 386.

lateral walls.<sup>407</sup> The walls were plastered, although no evidence of paint on the plaster was reported. A large, arched window, 1.5 m in height and almost 3 m in length opened through the south wall (W2), presumably to allow daylight into the room.<sup>408</sup> In the final phase of the synagogue, the floor of the main hall was paved with flagstones. Excavation below the floor uncovered small, polychrome tesserae in the fill immediately below the flagstones, as well as a layer of smooth, irregular flagstones below the fill. The excavators believe the lower flagstones served as a bedding or leveling course for a mosaic pavement.<sup>409</sup> No patches of this earlier mosaic pavement were uncovered. The flagstones of the later floor—which continued in use during the Early Islamic phase of the building—vary in size, averaging about 120 by 75 cm.<sup>410</sup> In the southwest corner of the main hall, an area of exposed bedrock protrudes from the later flagstone pavement by about 20 cm. Amit suggests that this aesthetic decision to leave exposed rather than level the bedrock was meant to recall the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, as it was in the Chorazin synagogue.<sup>411</sup>

A single-tier bench runs along the west wall (W3). The length of the bench does not continue to the north wall (W4) of the hall because of the presence of the raised bema at that end (see below). A section excavated through part of the bench and below it demonstrated that the bench was built at the same time as the later, flagstone

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<sup>407</sup> Amit 2003: 122-23.

<sup>408</sup> Amit 2003: 118-19.

<sup>409</sup> Amit 2003: 119.

<sup>410</sup> Amit 2003: 119.

<sup>411</sup> Amit 2003: 119. For Chorazin, see Yeivin 2000: 21.

pavement.<sup>412</sup> No other evidence for seating was uncovered. In addition, the lack of an internal colonnade (such as in the earlier phase at H. Ma'on; see above) or stairs along the exterior walls (such as at Susiya and En-Gedi) indicate that there was no second story seating. Based on the dimensions and the presence of the bema at the north end of the hall (see below), the estimated maximum occupancy would have been between 87 and 328 people.<sup>413</sup>

The excavators identified two stages of the bema at the north end of the hall. In the earlier stage, the bema consisted of a platform about 40 cm in height, extending 1.9 m from the north wall (W4) and about 3.5 m E-W, and accessed by two plastered steps.<sup>414</sup> The later stage, which obscured any additional details of the earlier bema, extended about 3 m from the north wall (W4) and encompassed the entire east-west width of the hall. Considering the modest size of the main hall, the relative size of the bema—encompassing about one-quarter of the hall—is noteworthy.<sup>415</sup>

The surviving portions of the stone bema were plastered with decorative moldings. A narrow protrusion extending out from the center of the north wall on top of

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<sup>412</sup> Amit 2003: 121-22, fig. 5.28.

<sup>413</sup> In estimating the usable internal floor space, I subtract 3 m<sup>2</sup> in front of the north entrance through the east wall (W1) and 1 m<sup>2</sup> in front of the south entrance, as well as the area of the bema along the north wall (W4) and the bench along the west wall (W3). The total usable floor space is estimated at 55 m<sup>2</sup>. The permanent stone bench, at 9.85 m in length, could support as many as 14 people. The usable floor space could allow for as many as 12 benches at 6 m in length, 2 benches at 4.3 m in length, and 1 bench at 5 m in length. These benches could support as many as 314 people, which gives an upper limit of the maximum occupancy estimate (combined with the permanent stone bench) of 328 congregants. Alternatively, the 55 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space could support 73 people with space for prostration. With the permanent stone bench, the synagogue could therefore support as many as 87 people. For the methodology and coefficients used here, see Spiegel 2008.

<sup>414</sup> Amit 2003: 120.

<sup>415</sup> Amit 2003: 120.

the platform was interpreted by Amit as the base for a Torah shrine, presumably of wood.<sup>416</sup> Several fragments of small columns found during excavation may have adorned the Torah shrine. Among the small columns were two that were left unworked on one side, found in a later wall (W12) immediately adjacent to the bema. Amit suggests that these half-columns were placed on either side of the bema to frame the whole structure, similar to several Torah shrine depictions in synagogue mosaics, such as at Susiya (Bema B mosaic; see above).<sup>417</sup> His suggestion is supported by the discovery of glass lamp fragments in the areas alongside the east and west wall adjacent to the bema (L4 and L34).<sup>418</sup>

Several pieces of marble slabs were found in the excavation, which probably were part of the chancel screen in front of the bema.<sup>419</sup> One piece preserves bas-relief decoration in the form of a frame and a semicircular shape (fig. 128). As Amit notes, the curved shape is part of a well-known motif of “three hills,” which, in Christian contexts, is meant to represent the Rock of Golgotha.<sup>420</sup> Although in most cases, the design extending upward from the semicircles was a cross, in a Jewish context this seems highly unlikely. In fact, we have seen this motif already in the narthex of the Na‘aran synagogue, where the mosaic pavement included a depiction of “three hills” serving as

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<sup>416</sup> Amit 2003: 120. On the general plan of the site, it is unclear which are the protruding stones; see Amit 2003: fig. 5.1.

<sup>417</sup> Amit 2003: 121.

<sup>418</sup> The picture reconstructed by Amit may lend support to Yeivin’s reconstruction of Bema A at Susiya; see Yeivin 1989 and above, section 4.1.3. In a sense, Amit’s reconstruction of the ‘Anim bema provides the link between the Torah shrine depiction in the Bema B mosaic and Bema A at Susiya.

<sup>419</sup> Amit 2003: 120, 129.

<sup>420</sup> Amit 2003: 129.



the base for a stylized menorah (see above, section 2.1, and Appendix C). Given the precedent of substituting the Jewish menorah for the Christian cross, it is probable that this chancel screen depicted a menorah set above the “three hills.”

#### **4.4.4 Phases and Dates**

The earliest structures identified at ‘Anim date to the Iron II period (Stratum IV). Unlike the neighboring Jewish sites at Susiya and Ma‘on, there apparently was no Second Temple or Late Roman period occupation at ‘Anim.

The excavators assign the use of the building as a synagogue to Stratum III. In the first phase of Stratum III (here referred to as IIIb), the walls of the synagogue were founded on bedrock, the floor of the main hall was paved in mosaic, and the narthex floor was paved in gray plaster. Subsequently (here referred to as Stratum IIIa), the main hall’s floor was raised by an earthen fill and repaved with flagstones, and the bench along the west wall (W3) was installed.<sup>421</sup> Probably as part of the same renovation (Stratum IIIa), the floor of the narthex also was raised by a fill and repaved with a polychrome mosaic that included the inscription.

The lack of a destruction layer and the apparently natural accumulation suggest that Stratum III came to an end through abandonment.<sup>422</sup> In Stratum II, interior walls were constructed in the main hall, including an east-west wall that blocked off the area of the bema (W12). The northern entrance through the east wall was also blocked at this

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<sup>421</sup> Excavation within and below a section of the bench (L303) showed that the base of the bench sat directly on a fill, the top of which was at the same height as the top of the flagstones of Stratum IIIa. As the excavators conclude, the bench was installed at the same time as the new, flagstone floor; see Amit 2003: 121-22.

<sup>422</sup> Amit does not suggest any means by which the synagogue came to an end, although he mentions the accumulation over the area prior to the construction of Stratum II; see Amit 2003: 116. No mention is made of a destruction level.

time. Additional walls were constructed in the narthex and courtyard. The southern section of the main hall was repaved with less regular stone pavers than the rectangular flagstones of Stratum IIIa.<sup>423</sup> Amit suggests that the tiled, gabled roof of Stratum III was replaced with a vaulted structure that sat on top of the exterior walls of the main hall and the newly-constructed W12. It seems unlikely that the building continued to serve as a synagogue in this phase, given the reorganization of the interior and the intervening period of abandonment.

The excavation report does not include a locus list to assist in the dating of these levels, although Amit refers to several critical loci associated with the renovations of Stratum IIIa.<sup>424</sup> However, almost no pottery sherds or glass vessels from these loci are included in the pottery report.<sup>425</sup> On the basis of two coins excavated from the upper fill of L300, Amit dates the construction of the later phase of the synagogue (Stratum IIIa) to no earlier than the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>426</sup> Because no sealed contexts were associated with the earlier phase of the synagogue, the date can only be hinted at by the earliest finds found at the site. Sherds with ranges from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c. suggested to Amit that

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<sup>423</sup> It is unclear from the report why the irregular flagstones were assigned to Stratum II. Perhaps it is on the basis of the Early Islamic weights found in L301 below these pavers (Amit 2003: 119).

<sup>424</sup> L300 and L302 are located below the Stratum IIIa pavement in the eastern section and the center of the main hall, respectively (Amit 2003: 119). See the profile plan in Amit 2003: fig. 5.13. L12 was excavated below the floor of the Stratum IIIa renovation of the narthex, and L53 below the floor of the northern auxiliary room. In L4 and L34, on either side of the bema, the excavators found fragments of hanging glass lamps, presumably associated with the use of the later bema. L303 was excavated below the bench along the east wall of the main hall and is probably associated with the renovation of Stratum IIIa. Although the excavators identified a bedding or leveling course of flagstones associated with the earlier phase in the main hall, as well as a contemporaneous plaster floor in the narthex (see above), the areas below these were not excavated as separate loci and so it is not possible to date the earliest phase of the synagogue based on the available information.

<sup>425</sup> Amit 2003: 132-37. The exception is a Beit Nattif oil lamp found in L300. See *ibid.*, 134, Tab. 3:1.

<sup>426</sup> Amit 2003: 120. The excavation report does not include a full numismatic report or catalog of coins.

the synagogue was in use as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> c., though the early 5<sup>th</sup> c. may be just as likely.<sup>427</sup> Finds from within the east-west partition wall of Stratum II (W12) indicate that the wall was constructed sometime after the 8<sup>th</sup> c., by which time the synagogue presumably had gone out of use.<sup>428</sup> Amit therefore suggests that the synagogue was abandoned in the 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>429</sup>

#### **4.4.5 Conclusion**

As with the synagogue at Eshtemoa, the later occupation of the 'Anim synagogue enabled impressive preservation of the walls while obscuring many of the features and artistic details preserved at other sites, such as Susiya and En-Gedi. Among the more interesting aspects that survive in the 'Anim synagogue are the eastern entrances through one of the lateral walls, the three-hills motif as the sole example of symbolic decoration preserved, and the layout of the courtyard, narthex, and hall. All of these features can be found among the other nine synagogues of southern Palestine.

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<sup>427</sup> See Amit 2003: 132. Most of the pottery dates to no earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup> c. Sherds with ranges as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> c. include a rouletted bowl (Amit 2003: 135, no. 1:4), two arched-rim basins (Amit 2003: 135, nos. 10-11), and a Beit Nattif oil lamp (Amit 2003: 137, no. 3:1). It should be noted that arched-rim basins continued into the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. See Magness 1993: 204-09.

<sup>428</sup> Amit 2003: 134, Tab. 3:1.

<sup>429</sup> Amit 2003: 132.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE JUDEAN SHEPHELAH

#### 5.0.1 Introduction

The region known biblically as the Judean Shephelah (שְׁפֵלַת יְהוּדָה) is a 10-15 km strip of land running north-south between the Judean hill country to the east and the coastal plain to the west.<sup>1</sup> The elevation of the Judean Shephelah is 100-150 m lower than that of the Hebron Hills to the east. The Hebron Hills are separated from the Judean Shephelah by the fertile Yaval valley (Biq‘at Yaval).<sup>2</sup> Despite the biblical distinction, the climate and topography are similar to the southern Hebron Hills. The natural similarity is underscored by the Late Roman and Byzantine political map, according to which the sites of the Judean Shephelah belonged to the same city-territory—Eleutheropolis—as those of the southern Hebron Hills.<sup>3</sup>

#### 5.1 Ḥ. Rimmon<sup>4</sup>

##### 5.1.1 Location and Identification

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<sup>1</sup> Orni and Efrat 1973: 54; Kloner 1989: 43; 1993: 1284; Aharoni et al. 1993: 14.

<sup>2</sup> Kloner 1989: 43.

<sup>3</sup> On the extent of the territory of Eleutheropolis, see Avi-Yonah 2002: 159-62.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the references below, see the following catalog entries: Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 376-77; Chiat 1982: 228-30; Ilan 1991: 178-79; Dauphin 1998: 14/24; Milson 2007: 395-99.

The site of Ḥ. Rimmon (henceforth simply Rimmon) is located in the southern Judean Shephelah, about 28 km southwest of Hebron and 54 km south-southwest of Jerusalem (NIG 187000/586000; 31°22'19"N; 34°51'55"). As with the synagogue sites in the southern Hebron Hills (see above), Rimmon was in the city-territory of Eleutheropolis (Beth Guvrin) to the north.<sup>5</sup> The modern Arabic name for the site is Kh. Umm er-Ramamin ("the Mother of Pomegranates").<sup>6</sup> It was first identified with the biblical site of En-Rimmon (Neh. 11:20) and Rimmon (Jos. 15:32) by the Survey of Western Palestine.<sup>7</sup> Since no Iron Age or Persian period remains have been found at the site, Kloner and others have suggested that biblical Rimmon should be identified with Tel Ḥalif, about 500 m to the north, and that the site's name was transferred to Kh. Umm er-Ramamin sometime during the Second Temple period.<sup>8</sup>

Eusebius' entry for En-Rimmon (עֵינַן רִמְמוֹן; Jos. 19:7) locates the village of Ἐρεμμῶν sixteen Roman miles (about 24 km) from Eleutheropolis (*Ono.* 440/88:17-18). Like En-Gedi, the site is characterized as a "very large village of Jews ... in the Daroma." Eusebius' entry for Hormah (חֹרְמָה; Jos. 19:4; 15:30) has also been identified with Ḥ. Rimmon, however, it is unclear what connection exists between the biblical site and the

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<sup>5</sup> Avi-Yonah 2002: 161-62.

<sup>6</sup> Kloner 1989: 43. Kloner notes that the site was misidentified as Kh. Umm er-Ramali on some of the maps of early explorers. Also, Ḥ. Rimmon should not be confused with the site of er-Rimmon north of Jerusalem. The latter is a contemporary site known from rabbinic literature; see Schwartz 1986: 46.

<sup>7</sup> Condor et al. 1882-89: III, 392.

<sup>8</sup> Kloner 1989: 47; Seger and Borowski 1993: 558.

later village.<sup>9</sup> In addition to Eusebius, Rimmon is fairly well-known from rabbinic literature, and the site is mentioned once in the Bar-Kokhba documents.<sup>10</sup>

In the Byzantine period Rimmon was located in proximity to several Christian villages (fig. 129). About one kilometer to the north is Tel Ḥalif, on the slope of which was the village of Thella (Ḥ. Tilla), where Byzantine period remains have been found by the Lahav Research Project.<sup>11</sup> Excavations at Kh. Abu Hoff to the southwest have uncovered two churches and domestic structures.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.1.2 Research History

Excavations at Rimmon were first carried out by Amos Kloner over three seasons in 1978-1981 under the auspices of the IDAM. Although no final report of the work has been published, several short preliminary reports have appeared.<sup>13</sup>

Several smaller projects have been carried out at the site as well. In two seasons of salvage excavation in 1976 and 1984, David Alon excavated seven burial caves southwest of the synagogue on the slope of the hill.<sup>14</sup> More recent examinations of the finds suggest that the cemetery was used intermittently from the late Second Temple

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<sup>9</sup> Notley and Safrai 2005: 85; Milson 2007: 396.

<sup>10</sup> Rabbinic references to Rimmon include: *t. Ahilot* 16, 13; *t. Miqva'ot* 6, 2; *Lamentations Rabbah* I; *Genesis Rabbah* 64; *p. Haggigah* 3, 13, 2. For the Bar-Kokhba document, see Benoit et al. 1961: 139-40.

<sup>11</sup> On Thella, see Avi-Yonah 2002: 161-62. Thella was considered a Jewish site by Eusebius in the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. (see Schwartz 1986: 98), however, the discovery of Byzantine period churches there complicates the picture. On the cemetery at Ḥ. Tilla, see Kloner 1993b.

<sup>12</sup> I thank Dr. Oded Borowski for bringing these finds to my attention.

<sup>13</sup> See Kloner 1980; 1981b; 1982; 1989; 1993a; and Kloner and Mindel 1981. According to the excavator (personal communication, January and April 2009), the final report has been completed and is awaiting publication. At the time, Prof. Kloner was not at liberty to share the unpublished work.

<sup>14</sup> Fabian and Godlfus 2004.

period to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. Among the finds was an ossuary inscribed with the unusual name “Jacob son of Rabbi” (יעקב בן רבי).<sup>15</sup> The precise date of the ossuary’s deposition is unclear.<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1990s, Pau Figueras excavated a subterranean complex 55 m from the hilltop. Although pottery sherds from the Hellenistic through Islamic periods were uncovered, the caves and tunnels were dated to the Bar-Kokhba revolt on the basis of structural comparison with similar caves in the Hebron Hills and Judean Desert.<sup>17</sup>

In the mid-2000s, limited excavation was carried out in two areas on the hill by representatives of the IAA and with the support of the Jewish National Fund. In Area A, a *miqveh* and a domestic building were excavated.<sup>18</sup> About 20 m to the south, in Area B, walls of an additional building were uncovered, although the function of the structure is unclear (domestic?).<sup>19</sup> While the excavators suggested that the *miqveh* typologically belongs to the late Second Temple period, the finds indicate that these areas were used in the Byzantine period and later.

### 5.1.3 Description of the Synagogue

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<sup>15</sup> Fabian and Goldfus 2004: 89\*-90\*.

<sup>16</sup> The excavators indicate that the form is characteristic of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c., however, finds within the associated burial chamber (Cave 2) date to as late as the 5<sup>th</sup> c.; see Fabian and Goldfus 2004: 97\*.

<sup>17</sup> See Figueras 1994: 122-23.

<sup>18</sup> Abadi-Reiss and Paran 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Paran and Talis 2009.

The synagogue complex is located on the highest point of the natural hill, at about 470 m asl.<sup>20</sup> The walls of the rectangular complex were oriented roughly along the cardinal axes.<sup>21</sup> The outer walls of the complex—the upper courses of which were visible at the outset of excavation—enclose an area of about 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>22</sup> Also visible were several looters' trenches. In some places, ashlar blocks were removed down to the foundations of the walls. Several finely-dressed stones are visible in 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-c. structures in the vicinity and probably came from the Rimmon synagogue.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the numerous architectural changes made over the centuries, the excavator had difficulty discerning the precise construction history of the building.<sup>24</sup> Three separate phases to the complex were identified based on superimposed floors. The phases of the synagogue correspond to strata of the site stretching over the entire hill.<sup>25</sup> Synagogue I is part of Stratum IV, Synagogue II belongs to Stratum V (Va-Vb), and Synagogue III is part of Strata VI-VII. Structures below Synagogue I were assigned to

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<sup>20</sup> Kloner 1989: 43.

<sup>21</sup> The orientation is not precise. The lateral walls of the later phase are oriented north-northeast to south-southwest, perhaps suggesting a more direct line pointing toward Jerusalem. In any case, for the sake of simplicity, the north-northeast wall will simply be referred to as the “north” wall (following the precedent of the excavator).

<sup>22</sup> Kloner 1989: 43.

<sup>23</sup> The trenches seem to have been dug in order to retrieve architectural materials rather than for antiquities.

<sup>24</sup> This is evidenced in part by the occasional conflicting details in the reconstructions presented in the preliminary reports.

<sup>25</sup> Kloner's excavations included additional areas beyond the limits of the synagogue. Nothing has been published on the areas outside the synagogue.



Strata I-III and dated to the Second Temple period, with possible pre-synagogue occupation continuing to the Bar-Kokhba revolt.<sup>26</sup>

Strata I-III	pre-Synagogue
Stratum IV	Synagogue I
Stratum V (a-b)	Synagogue II
Strata VI-VII	Synagogue III

We will deal with each phase of the synagogue as presented by the excavator and in order of deposition, and we will refer to the synagogue phases rather than the assigned strata.

### 5.1.3.1 Synagogue I

The later phases of the synagogue obscure several of the walls and the outline of Synagogue I. Portions of the north wall of the main hall can be reconstructed partially on the basis of later walls and small sections. The south wall of Synagogue I does not survive at all.<sup>27</sup> The west wall, built directly on top of and reusing stones from the Second Temple period structures, is the best preserved.<sup>28</sup> A few pieces of painted plaster belonging to Synagogue I indicate that the interior walls were painted.<sup>29</sup> Given the poor preservation of the walls, the existence of Synagogue I is best-attested by the floor level. In this phase, the interior of the main hall was paved with a crushed-limestone floor on a pebble and cobble foundation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The excavator designated the strata at Rimmon based on the order of deposition rather than order of discovery.

<sup>27</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>28</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>29</sup> Kloner 1981b: 242.

<sup>30</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

Along the north wall of the main hall, the excavator discovered the northeast corner of a rectangular, plastered niche, the top of which stood about 2.5 m above the floor.<sup>31</sup> The preliminary reports do not elaborate on the shape and precise location of the niche and no plans of this phase have been published. As discussed above, rectangular niches set into the wall like this are relatively rare in synagogues. Usually, niches were semi-circular in shape, such as at Susiya and Eshtemoa, or projected outward from the walls' exterior, as at Jericho and Ma'on (in Judea). One possible exception is from Stratum IIIA of the En-Gedi synagogue, where the excavators proposed that a rectangular, plastered niche was created by the blocking of a doorway to serve as a Torah repository (but cf. the analysis above, section 2.2).

Several architectural fragments were found built into the walls and rubble fill of the later phases. The fragments included carved floral and geometric decorations. Kloner suggests that these fragments came from the Synagogue I structure, although the pieces could just as easily have come from other buildings in the vicinity.<sup>32</sup>

To the east of the main hall, Kloner uncovered a stylobate (W50) with the pedestals of three columns running north-south (fig. 130).<sup>33</sup> The excavator hypothesizes—presumably on the basis of the stylobate—that the long-walls of the hall ran east-west, that is, he suggests the building was a “broadhouse” style synagogue with a portico or exo-narthex on the east, similar to the plans of Eshtemoa and Susiya.<sup>34</sup> David

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<sup>31</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>32</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>33</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>34</sup> Kloner 1989: 44; Milson 2007: 395.

Milson suggests a triportal, eastern façade.<sup>35</sup> This is an attractive, albeit speculative, suggestion in light of the geographical proximity to the synagogues of the Hebron Hills (see above).

Milson points out that the identification of Synagogue I is questionable, as it is based on circumstantial evidence. Because the later phases of the structure destroyed most of the evidence for Synagogue I, the building's identification as a synagogue is determined by the context—a large, communal structure in an apparently Jewish village—and the later use of the site as a synagogue.<sup>36</sup>

### **5.1.3.2 Synagogue II**

The second phase of the building, Synagogue II, consists of a basilical hall with a nave and two aisles created by two rows of columns (fig. 131). The southern triportal façade is preceded by a narthex, and a long room runs north-south to the west of the main hall. Walls surviving to as high as 3 m in some places enclose the hall and narthex within a rectangular complex. The complex measures 34 m N-S by 29.5 m E-W, with the synagogue situated in the northwest corner, similar to the layout of the Na'aran synagogue complex.<sup>37</sup>

Little has been published on the narthex and enclosed area of the complex. The discovery of a cistern to the southeast of the narthex suggests that the area outside the main hall was an unroofed courtyard, while the narthex was roofed and probably

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<sup>35</sup> Milson 2007: 395.

<sup>36</sup> Kloner 1989: 44; Milson 2008: 395.

<sup>37</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.

enclosed on four sides.<sup>38</sup> The narthex was about 1.5 m N-S and 16 m E-W, extending beyond the east and west boundaries of the main hall (fig. 132).<sup>39</sup> Kloner does not indicate the location of the door into the narthex, though it appears to have been on the east. The ashlar of the south wall of the main hall (north wall of the narthex) were mostly robbed out. Parts of the thresholds of the doorways that remained in situ at the time of excavation allowed the excavator to reconstruct the line of the façade.<sup>40</sup>

The main hall of Synagogue II reused the west wall of the previous structure, while the north, south, and east walls were purpose-built for this phase (fig. 133).<sup>41</sup> The dimensions of the main hall are 13.5 m N-S by 9.5 m E-W.<sup>42</sup> Two rows of three free-standing pillars and two piers create two aisles and a nave whose dimensions are not reported. According to the excavator, the plaster floor of the main hall was cut through to install the pillars, suggesting that they were not part of the original design of Synagogue II but were added during a renovation.<sup>43</sup> Such a design is unusual but not unattested. While most synagogues with a triportal façade have a basilical layout, some synagogues, such as Susiya and Eshtemoa, employ a triportal façade but not a basilical layout (see above, sections 4.1 and 4.2). Although the presence of pillars and piers would have enabled second story galleries, no evidence of stairs were uncovered (though admittedly,

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<sup>38</sup> Kloner 1981b: 242.

<sup>39</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.

<sup>40</sup> Kloner 1993a: 1285.

<sup>41</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>42</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>43</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

there could have been wooden steps that do not survive). No evidence of an apse or niche for the Torah repository was uncovered in Synagogue II.

To the west of the west wall of the main hall is a long, narrow room running the length of the hall (L148).<sup>44</sup> The walls of the west room utilized the west wall of the main hall and the west wall of the entire complex (fig. 134).<sup>45</sup> Although the long walls were constructed directly on top of remains of the Second Temple period structures, the room seems to have been an addition during the Synagogue II phase.<sup>46</sup> During the Synagogue III phase (see below), the west room was used as a “dump.”<sup>47</sup> Two separate strata were identified (although apparently excavated as a single locus): an upper 80 cm of debris with finds dating generally to the Byzantine period, and a lower 20 cm with sherds from the Second Temple period to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c.<sup>48</sup> Kloner does not mention any sort of surface dividing these two strata, and he does not speculate as to the reason for the differentiation.

The upper debris of the west room appears to have been deposited at the beginning of Synagogue III (see below), so any materials found therein presumably relate to the Synagogue II phase of the synagogue. Distributed throughout the upper 80 cm of fill were numerous artifacts, including a bronze candelabrum, glass lamps, cast bronze leaves, chains and pieces of various vessels, a gold pendant, glass and stone beads, bone

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<sup>44</sup> For a cursory description, see Naveh and Shaked 1985: 87.

<sup>45</sup> Kloner 1989:44.

<sup>46</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

<sup>47</sup> Kloner 1989: 44. Alternatively, Kloner also suggests that the room was used for the deposition of sacred objects (see below).

<sup>48</sup> See Naveh and Shaked 1985: 87. The finds are described generally, but no pottery has been published to verify the excavator’s dating.

and ivory objects, a glass plate, numerous fragments of jars and cooking pots, oil lamps, roof ties, glass objects, iron nails, an axe-like object, and fragments of a chancel screen and post.<sup>49</sup> These finds will provide valuable insight and dating criteria for this phase. The chancel screen fragments suggest a division of space within the hall similar to other synagogues in southern Palestine (see Appendix A).

Kloner does not indicate the location of a door to this room, although presumably it was entered from the main hall (to the east) or from the short end at the south. No materials were reportedly found on top of a floor of the west room that can be associated with the room's use. Whether or not the lower 20 cm of debris should be associated with the use of the west room is also unclear. The excavator does not describe any floor separating the two strata.

The long, narrow form of the room is similar to the "western corridor" in the Gush Ḥalav synagogue, where the upper 20-50 cm of accumulation included a broad range of finds.<sup>50</sup> At Gush Ḥalav, the excavators concluded that the room was used for storage and the upper matrix of the debris accumulated naturally over a century of use, based on the nature of the matrix.<sup>51</sup> The discovery of roof tiles and various lamps may suggest that the Gush Ḥalav room was used to store tools and items for repair of the building (like a utility closet).<sup>52</sup> Given the available information, it is tempting to suggest

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<sup>49</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 87; Kloner 1989: 45. None of these objects has been published in full; photographs of the bronze candelabrum pieces were published in Kloner 1989: pl. XXV, fig. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Meyers et al. 1990: 48, 94-95.

<sup>51</sup> Meyers et al. 1990: 43-48. The soil in the upper fill is described as "air- and water-laid debris" (ibid. 48).

<sup>52</sup> Meyers et al. 1990: 43-48, 94.

that the west room at Rimmon was used for similar purposes. However, Kloner's description of the debris indicates that the finds were found at various levels throughout the matrix. It is therefore unlikely that the debris at Rimmon was a natural accumulation, as suggested for Gush Ḥalav.<sup>53</sup> The strewn fragments of the amulet (see below) further suggest that the debris in the west room at Rimmon was a single deposit. So, while the construction of a long, narrow side-room within the synagogue complex is similar to the Gush Ḥalav synagogue as well as the Susiya synagogue (see above), the usage of the space after construction seems to have differed.

### **5.1.3.3 Synagogue III**

The third phase of the synagogue utilized the same walls as Synagogue II.<sup>54</sup> The main criterion for differentiating Synagogues II and III seems to be the flagstone pavement of the main hall that replaced the earlier plaster floor.<sup>55</sup> The rectangular limestone slabs were laid in straight rows parallel to the exterior walls and set into a gray cement bedding (see fig. 133). In the center of the floor, the rows of flagstones were interrupted by a 3-by-3 m “carpet” of pavers (fig. 135).<sup>56</sup> Incised into the pavers were five six-petalled rosettes and a seven-branched menorah in the center of the nave (fig.

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<sup>53</sup> Kloner suggests that the debris in the 80 cm of fill accumulated naturally (Naveh and Shaked 1985: 87). However, if the soil accumulated naturally it would have filled in around the finds, and the finds would have been uncovered at the same level. That said, it is possible that a naturally-accumulated fill was disturbed later by natural activities (such as surface wash) or human activity, though one would expect some evidence of these.

<sup>54</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.

<sup>55</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.

<sup>56</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.

136).<sup>57</sup> The menorah is described by Hachlili as “crudely carved ... in a linear shape.”<sup>58</sup> Of course, the medium and placement—incised stone on a well-trafficked floor—might have dictated the form and style (cf. the incised menorah at Jericho, fig. 39). Kloner suggests that the menorah was added at a later time, but he does not indicate how much later or the basis for the suggestion.<sup>59</sup> The post-synagogue occupation at the site apparently was on top of accumulated debris over the floor of the synagogue, that is to say, the pavement of the main hall would have been covered at the time of later use. The available evidence suggests (contra Kloner) that the menorah was carved during the building’s use as a synagogue, rather than in a post-synagogue phase.

A platform along the north wall, measuring 5 m E-W and 1.7 m N-S, provides evidence for liturgical orientation (fig. 137).<sup>60</sup> It is unclear from the preliminary reports to which phase the bema should be assigned. On the one hand, the excavator treats the bema as part of Synagogue III; on the other hand, the bema is believed to have been integrated into the construction of the north wall, suggesting that it was part of Synagogue II (if not Synagogue I).<sup>61</sup> Assuming that the bema was part of Synagogue II, the maximum occupancy for the building in its later phases (II and III) would have been between 146 and 342 people.<sup>62</sup> Most likely, a wooden Torah shrine was erected on top of

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<sup>57</sup> Kloner 1989: 46; Milson 2007: 398. The menorah is catalogued as Hachlili 2001: IS8.19.

<sup>58</sup> Hachlili 2001: 152.

<sup>59</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.

<sup>60</sup> Kloner 1989: 44, 46. Milson (2007: 396) indicates that a bema existed also during the Synagogue II phase.

<sup>61</sup> Kloner 1989:44, 46; Milson 2007: 396.

<sup>62</sup> In estimating the usable internal floor space, I subtract an area of 9.5 m<sup>2</sup> in front of the south façade to allow for access in and out of the main hall and 8.5 m<sup>2</sup> for the area of the bema. The total usable floor



the bema, although there are no physical remains. Had the synagogue been destroyed by fire (see below), we would expect to find a similar pattern of ash as we saw along the north wall of the En-Gedi synagogue. The existence of a wooden Torah shrine remains speculative.

Among the upper layers of the west-room debris (L33), the excavator uncovered three coin hoards, all contained within vessels that were sealed by stones and buried upside down.<sup>63</sup> The three hoards were apparently buried after the fill was deposited in the west room, that is, during the Synagogue III phase. However, it is unclear when the coins were collected.<sup>64</sup> Hoard A consists of 12 gold coins and hoard B consists of 35 gold coins. The hoards were found about 1 m away from each other and have roughly the same ranges in dates: from Valentinian I (364-375) to Anastasius I (491-518). As a result, the hoards could not have been deposited before the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> c. A third hoard of 64 bronze coins was found in the west room, dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>65</sup> A similar coin hoard was found in the “western corridor” at Gush Halav.<sup>66</sup>

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space is estimated at 110.25 m<sup>2</sup>. No permanent stone benches were reported by Kloner, and we assume that no second-story seating was available. The usable floor space could allow for as many as 18 benches at 8.5 m in length (facing toward the north). These benches could support as many as 342 congregants. Alternatively, the 110.25 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space could support 146 people with space for prostration. For methodology and coefficients used here, see Spigel 2008: 178, Table 3.4 and *passim*.

<sup>63</sup> See Kloner and Mindel 1981.

<sup>64</sup> Milson (2007: 396) indicates that 160 silver coins were found among the debris in the west room but does not provide the source of this information. See Bijovsky 2011: 105-07.

<sup>65</sup> Kloner 1989: 44-45. This hoard has not been published, so we cannot comment on the denominations. Kloner suggests that the range of dates in the bronze hoard indicates that it was added to over the years. However, since coins remained in circulation for long periods, these could represent a single collection and deposit.

<sup>66</sup> Meyers et al. 1990: 94-95.

### 5.1.4 The Amulet

Of particular note among the finds from the west room is a potsherd bearing an eight-line amuletic inscription (fig. 138).<sup>67</sup> The ceramic amulet was broken into five fragments. When reconstructed, the trapezoidal sherd measures about 9.5 cm in height by 7.5 cm at the base and 11 cm at the top.<sup>68</sup> The pieces were found strewn in various spots in the upper debris of the west room (L148).<sup>69</sup> Given the context, it seems most likely that the amulet was among the debris at the time of the fill's deposition in the west room, rather than being a purposeful deposit (as was likely the case with the coin hoards). The text of the amulet reads as follows:<sup>70</sup>

Hera'ot, 'Etba'ot, Qolhon	הראות אתבאות קולהון	1
Sephaton, Sosgar, [ ]	ספתון סוסגר [ ]	2
You ho[ly and mighty(?)] angels	אתון מלאכיה קד[ישיה ותקיפיה(?)]	3
[I adjure] you, just as [this sherd]	[משבע אנה] יתכון במ[ה דיקד הספה]	4
[burns, so shall] burn the heart of R[... son (daughter?)]	[הדין כן] יקוד לבה דר[... ברה [ברתה(?)]	5
[of Mar]ian after me, I ..[. ... and you should turn]	[דמר]ין בתרי אנה יו[... תהפכו]	6
[his/her heart and mi]nd (?) and kidney, so [that he/she will do]	[לבה והו]נה (?) [ו]כוליתה ו[י/תעבר]	7
my desire in this [ ]	ציבירוני בהד[ ] מוד[ ] [ ]	8

<sup>67</sup> For the most complete discussion of this amulet, see Naveh and Shaked 1985: 82-89, Amulet 10, pl. 9, fig. 12. The piece is registered with the IAA as no. 80.880.

<sup>68</sup> Kloner 1989: 47.

<sup>69</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 87. Kloner 1989: 47 states that the amulet came from the "lower fill," but this seems to be an error.

<sup>70</sup> The transliteration and translation here are slightly modified from Naveh and Shaked 1985: 84-86. For the translation, vowels have been added to the personal names of angels. However, the vocalization of these Aramaic names cannot be known based on the extant evidence.

(?????) [	]	[	]	(?????)	9
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The text of the amulet—familiar from the extant corpus of late antique amulets and incantation bowls—is characterized as a “love charm” or “erotic incantation.”<sup>71</sup> It was inscribed on a potsherd that was designed specifically for use as an amulet, unlike ostraca.<sup>72</sup> As Naveh and Shaked note, instructions to use new, purpose-made sherds for amulets can be found in late antique and medieval Jewish “magic recipe” books, such as *Sepher ha-Razim* (*Book of the Mysteries*) and *Harba de-Moshe* (*Sword of Moses*).<sup>73</sup> The inscription was incised into the clay, not applied with ink. The depth of the incisions indicates that the inscription was made before the clay was fired.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the text itself attests to the method of production. Lines 4 and 5, reconstructed on the basis of textual sources, suggest that the firing of the sherd was part of the ritual inscribing of the incantation: “just as this sherd burns.”<sup>75</sup>

The last line of the amulet includes four or five characters that bear a vague resemblance to a sloppy form of paleo-Hebrew or Greek. These are likely “magic signs or symbols,” of the sort known from the late ancient and medieval manuscripts found in the Cairo Geniza.<sup>76</sup> A variety of secret signs was used in Greco-Egyptian traditions and

<sup>71</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 84; Bohak 2008: 156-58.

<sup>72</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 84.

<sup>73</sup> See Naveh and Shaked 1985: 84. On *Sepher ha-Razim*, see Margalioth 1966 and Morgan 1983. On the *Sword of Moses*, see Gaster 1896; Harari 1997; 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 84-85; Kloner 1989: 47.

<sup>75</sup> On the comparanda, see Naveh and Shaked 1985: 85.

<sup>76</sup> Bohak 2008: 270-74. See also Morgan 1983.

can even be found in late ancient Christian documents.<sup>77</sup> The use of such characters here, together with the inscription at Ma'on-Nirim (see below) and perhaps also 'Anim (see above), attests to the prevalence of such "magic" practices among the Jews of southern Palestine. The form and style of the amulet are evidence of Jewish participation in the broader religious traditions of the region.

The five extant names of angels in lines 1-2 are each enclosed in irregularly inscribed circular frames. This detail is unusual but not unattested.<sup>78</sup> Listing angels in this manner is typical on amulets of late antique Palestine and Egypt, and the names probably were spoken as part of the ritual of adjuration.<sup>79</sup> The list of angels is reminiscent of the lists in the En-Gedi inscription (see above), where the proper names are followed by a malediction. Of the five extant names, none is attested in Jewish amulets elsewhere, although variants of Qolhon (קולהון), Sephaton (ספתון), and Sosgar (סוסגר) may appear in the literary sources.<sup>80</sup>

### 5.1.5 Phases and Dates

According to the excavator, the earliest strata at the site, strata I-III, consist of various structures and hiding complexes from the late Second Temple period to the Bar-

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<sup>77</sup> Bohak 2008: 270-78.

<sup>78</sup> For the singular example in Naveh and Shaked's corpus, see Naveh and Shaked 1985: 40-44, no. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Recipes and instruction manuals for the adjuration of angels, including which angels to call upon in various circumstances, appear in a variety of Jewish texts but are best-attested in *Sepher ha-Razim*. For a comprehensive discussion, see Bohak 2008: 170-75.

<sup>80</sup> See the index of angel names in Naveh and Shaked 1985. For possible variants in the textual sources, see Naveh and Shaked 1985: 89.

Kokhba revolt.<sup>81</sup> Numismatic and ceramic finds from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. attest to occupation throughout the Late Roman period.<sup>82</sup> These finds, along with coins and sherds dated to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c., were uncovered below the plaster floor of Synagogue I (Stratum IV). As a result, Kloner dates the construction of the earliest synagogue to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the excavator's assertion that the area was used as a synagogue as early as the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. (Stratum IV / "Synagogue I"), the evidence for the building's layout and use are tenuous. During this phase, the building had none of those features that would help us to identify it as a synagogue, such as a bema, benches, Torah niche, or decorative, symbolic markings. Even the layout of the building is unclear. While there may be good evidence for the continuous occupation of the site from the Second Temple to the Byzantine period—albeit with a brief interlude following the Bar-Kokhba revolt—no evidence to support a mid-3<sup>rd</sup> c. date of construction has been published. The evidence to support the proposed dates of the other phases of the Rimmon synagogue has likewise not been published. The issue is particularly significant for the earliest phase because no other synagogues in southern Palestine examined in the present study have been shown to antedate the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. (see below, section 7.2).

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<sup>81</sup> Kloner 1989: 43-44. These remains have not been published.

<sup>82</sup> Kloner 1989: 44. Coins dating to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. do not alone attest to occupation at the site during that time, since coins often remained in circulation for years after minting. The pottery has not been published and so cannot be evaluated.

<sup>83</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

Dates for the end of Synagogue I or beginning of Synagogue II have not been proposed.<sup>84</sup> According to Kloner, two distinct plaster floors were visible below the flagstone pavement of Synagogue III. The lower plaster floor was associated with the colonnade to the east of the hall and assigned to Synagogue I (Stratum IV). The upper plaster floor was associated with the construction of the narthex on the south and walls on the north, south, and east sides of the main hall and was assigned to Synagogue II (Stratum V [a-b]). Evidence for the construction date of Synagogue II should be sought below the upper plaster floor or in the construction trenches associated with the narthex and north, south, and east walls of the main hall. Kloner does not indicate what, if any, datable finds were retrieved from these areas, so the construction date for Synagogue II is unknown.

According to the excavator, when the pillars in the main hall were installed, the foundation trenches cut through the upper plaster floor and were “carefully repaired.”<sup>85</sup> Kloner considers this renovation, along with the construction of the outer walls of the synagogue complex, to be a sub-phase of Synagogue II. He dates these “repairs” to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> c., though dated finds are not published.

The end of the Synagogue II occupation is similarly unclear from the preliminary reports. According to the excavator, the “dump” in the west room was created as part of the construction of Synagogue III and the objects therein were used in Synagogue II. The jumbled nature of the debris may suggest that Synagogue II ended in destruction, in which case the remaining debris was dumped in the side room before the reconstruction

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<sup>84</sup> Milson (2007: 395) speculates that Synagogue I went out of use ca. 400. If we accept a mid- to late 5<sup>th</sup>-c. date for the construction of Synagogue II, Milson’s date would create a gap in occupation.

<sup>85</sup> Kloner 1989: 44.

as Synagogue III. Evidence of ash among the debris would favor such an explanation. The latest object found in the debris should provide a *terminus post quem* for the end of Synagogue II. While most of the finds were strewn among the debris in a haphazard manner, the coin hoards appear to have been purposeful deposits within a pre-existing matrix. That is to say, the coin hoards were deposited in the west room after the deposition of the 80 cm of debris during the Synagogue III phase. The latest coins indicate that the hoards were deposited no earlier than the late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> c., thereby providing a *terminus ante quem* for the end of Synagogue II phase. No other dated finds were reported from the west room. Milson suggests a late 6<sup>th</sup> c., presumably on the basis of Kloner's suggested dating for the construction of Synagogue III.<sup>86</sup>

Kloner dates the construction of Synagogue III to the late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> c. on the basis of coins from the reign of Phocas (602-610) found in the gray cement bedding for the flagstone pavement of the main hall.<sup>87</sup> Despite Kloner's suggestion, the floor could not have been laid prior to 602, so the construction of Synagogue III should be dated more precisely to no earlier than the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.

If Synagogue III was not constructed before the 7<sup>th</sup> c. and the coin hoards were deposited during that phase, why were there no coins dated later than the early 6<sup>th</sup> c. in the hoards? Within the bounds of the stratigraphy as described above, there are two possibilities: (a) The coins may have been collected during the Synagogue II phase but not deposited until phase III; or (b) the coins were collected during the Synagogue III phase in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. but were chosen specifically because of their earlier dates. Neither of

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<sup>86</sup> Milson 2007: 396.

<sup>87</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.

these suggestions is satisfactory. More likely, the stratigraphy has been misinterpreted. Kloner's conclusions that the "dump" in the west room was deposited during the Synagogue III phase and the coins were later deposits should be reconsidered. Indeed, the nature of the west room and the lack of superimposed walls in the building pose several problems for the interpretation of the building's phases of construction and stratigraphy.

Kloner suggests that Synagogue III was abandoned some time after the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>88</sup> Post-synagogue occupation is apparent in the construction of a tabun and a surrounding layer of ash in the west room, though no finds were cited to support a date beyond the mid-7<sup>th</sup> for these features.<sup>89</sup>

#### **5.1.6 Conclusion**

As the above summary of the preliminary reports shows, the picture of the Rimmon synagogue—including its layout, phases, dates, and finds—is somewhat muddled. We may conclude that the synagogue at Rimmon was a large, communal building constructed on the highest point of a settlement continuously occupied from the late Second Temple period. Although the date of the earliest phase of this synagogue is unclear, the building seems to have continued in use at least until the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c.

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<sup>88</sup> Kloner 1981b: 242; 1989: 46.

<sup>89</sup> Kloner 1989: 46.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SOUTHERN COASTAL PLAIN

#### 6.0.1 Introduction

During the Roman and Byzantine periods, the traffic through the coastal cities cultivated an international urban landscape. Jewish communities of these urban centers lived as minority groups in proximity to their non-Jewish, Christian, and “pagan” neighbors.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, the coastal cities differ markedly from the Jewish—or predominantly Jewish—villages discussed above.

#### 6.1 Gaza-Maiumas<sup>2</sup>

##### 6.1.1 Location and Identification

The ancient city of Gaza is by far the largest discussed in the present study.<sup>3</sup> Gaza’s role as a trade center from the Iron Age onward is reflected in its cosmopolitan character throughout antiquity.<sup>4</sup> The ruins typically referred to as the “Gaza synagogue” are more properly located in Maiumas, that is, the port of Gaza, located west and southwest of the Rimal neighborhood in the modern city (NIG 145650/600000;

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<sup>1</sup> Schwartz 1986: 134.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the references below, see the following catalog entries: Saller 1972; Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 130-37; Chiat 1982: 183-86; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: no. 83; Ilan 1991: 288-90; Dauphin 1998: 10/331; Milson 2007: 362-63.

<sup>3</sup> See Schwartz 1986: 147 and the literature cited there.

<sup>4</sup> See Ovadiah 1993.

31°31'13.92"N, 34 25'57.17"E). From the Hellenistic period onward, Maiumas was closely connected with inland Gaza (about 4 km to the east), and at various points in its history the port was part of Gaza's city administration.<sup>5</sup> By the 4<sup>th</sup> c., Maiumas had become the home of the local Christian community, whereas Gaza proper had a reputation for catering to the more traditional "pagan" institutions.<sup>6</sup> Constantine's sympathy toward the Christians of Gaza and Maiumas led him to refound maritime Gaza with its own administrative body, renaming it Constantia Neapolis.<sup>7</sup> Under Julian, the "New City" was reconnected administratively to Gaza, though it retained its ecclesiastical see.<sup>8</sup> The physical distance between the maritime city and Gaza proper as well as the municipal distinctions are reflected in the 6<sup>th</sup>-c. Madaba Map, where the port is referred to as Μαιουμας ἢ καὶ Νεάπολις.<sup>9</sup> For the sake of consistency, we will use "Gaza synagogue," though this is not a precise title.

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see Meyer 1907: 59-69, which is dated but still relevant for its collection of primary literary sources on Gaza during the Byzantine period.

<sup>6</sup> Sivan (2008: 29-30) suggests that the inhabitants of Maiumas "collectively opted to convert to Christianity" around 325 and the city was rewarded by Constantine, who bestowed upon it the status of *polis* and self-administration detached from inland Gaza. It is unclear, however, how she determines this seemingly remarkable swing in religious affiliation since such wholesale conversion seems historically unlikely, even under Constantine (though cf. *ibid.*, 53, n. 6). In any case, the fact that Maiumas received such honors suggests that the Christian community there was particularly strong. The later development of Gaza as a center for Christian theologians and writers—such as Porphyry, Procopius, Choricus, and Sozomen, among others—may lend support to the argument regarding the early spread of Christianity among the population of Maiumas.

<sup>7</sup> Eus, *Life of Const.* 4.38; Sozomen, *Ecc. Hist.* 2.5; see Ovadiah 1975: 553, n. 5. See also Sivan 2008: 29.

<sup>8</sup> Di Segni 2004: 45.

<sup>9</sup> See Donner 1992: 76, no. 119; and also Ovadiah 1975: 553; 1981: 132. The 6<sup>th</sup>-c. reference to Constantine's "Neapolis" is peculiar and could reflect several circumstances, including the continued dichotomy and perhaps hostility between Christians and "pagans" in the Gaza area, or the distinction between this "Maiumas" and other cities of the same name (such as the ones near Ashkelon and east of Caesarea, as well as Betomarsea near al-Karak in Transjordan). See Avi-Yonah and Gibson 2007a.

The extent and size of Maiumas in the Byzantine period are unclear. The Madaba Map depicts several buildings, including a gate flanked by towers and at least three red-roofed structures (presumably churches) and two streets (see fig. 139).<sup>10</sup> It is hardly surprising that the synagogue was omitted in the mosaic.<sup>11</sup> Christian sources indicate that Gaza was home to several large, communal churches, but they are not explicit regarding Maiumas.<sup>12</sup> The modern buildings and the political situation in the area have made a comprehensive archaeological survey of the port impossible. However, archaeological work conducted in the 1970s (see below) uncovered evidence of a church about 30 m north-northeast of and contemporary with the synagogue.<sup>13</sup> Additional excavation has suggested that Byzantine Maiumas did not extend beyond an 80-m strip along the coast.<sup>14</sup> A massive section of the 4<sup>th</sup>- or early 5<sup>th</sup>-c. city-wall was uncovered about 650 m north of the synagogue, though Byzantine finds beyond the wall suggest that the city expanded northward during the late 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> c., that is, during the period of the synagogue (see below).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Donner 1992: 76.

<sup>11</sup> Sivan 2008: 156. Although the buildings depicted in the mosaic are unidentified, it is unlikely that either represents the synagogue, since (a) this would be the only instance in the map where a specifically non-Christian site or edifice is depicted (see *ibid.*), and (b) both buildings are along a street running perpendicular to the coastline, whereas the synagogue was along a street that ran parallel (see below).

<sup>12</sup> Ovadiah 1975: 553-54. Mark the Deacon in his *Life of Porphyry* and Choricus of Gaza refer to the construction of churches in Gaza during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c., including the Eudoxiana, the Church of St. Sergius, and the Church of St. Stephen. Excavations at Mukheitem al-Jabliya about 3 km inland have uncovered a Byzantine church; see Humbert et al. 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Ovadiah 1977: 177.

<sup>14</sup> Ovadiah 1977: 177.

<sup>15</sup> Ovadiah 1977: 178.

Rabbinic sources refer to a community of Jews in Gaza from at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. onward.<sup>16</sup> During the tannaitic period, many rabbis of both Galilee and southern Palestine considered Gaza to be part of the Land of Israel from a halakhic perspective, though its predominantly non-Jewish population made this a matter of debate.<sup>17</sup> The Jews of the city were also implicated in the destruction of a church during the short reign of Julian, but the historicity of this claim is doubtful.<sup>18</sup> Centuries later, Gaza was still remembered in Jewish sources as the port at which Jews from all over the Mediterranean arrived upon making pilgrimage to Palestine.<sup>19</sup>

### **6.1.2 Research History**

The Gaza synagogue was discovered by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities in 1965.<sup>20</sup> At that time much of the mosaic was cleared, including the longest inscription and the David mosaic (see below). The building was identified initially as a 5<sup>th</sup>-c. church. There is no indication that the site was explored beyond these mosaics or that the material above the mosaic was excavated stratigraphically. No substantial information regarding this salvage work has been published. On the basis of three photographs published in 1966, Avi-Yonah and M. Philonenko independently identified the building as a 6<sup>th</sup>-c. synagogue.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For brief overview, see Roth-Gerson 1987: 103-04.

<sup>17</sup> Schwartz 1986: 147-48, 263. See also y. 'Avodah Zarah 81, 39d.

<sup>18</sup> Ambrosius, *Letter XL* ("To Theodosius regarding the Burning of a Jewish Synagogue"), paragraph 15. Roth-Gerson 1987: 104 accepts this highly polemical claim uncritically.

<sup>19</sup> Sahl ben Matzliah, *Book of Precepts*; see Mann 1920: I, 43, n. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Lectant 1966; see also Ovadiah 1969: 193.

<sup>21</sup> See Ovadiah 1969: 195 and the literature cited there.

In August and September of 1967, immediately following the Six-Day War, additional salvage excavations were carried out by Asher Ovadiah on behalf of the IDAM. The mosaics had been vandalized between the time of their initial discovery by the Egyptians and the Israeli salvage work in 1967 (see further below). As a result, all mosaics were removed to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where they are currently in curation. Ovadiah directed a second season of excavation in November and December of 1976 on behalf of the Staff Officer of Archaeology and Tel Aviv University. Although there were several preliminary publications, no final report was published.<sup>22</sup> Very few of the finds or other details pertaining to the excavator's reconstruction of the layout have appeared in print. The majority of information published on the synagogue concerns the inscriptions and the David mosaic (see below). The current whereabouts of the finds (other than the mosaics) and excavation records are unknown.

### **6.1.3 Description of the Synagogue**

The synagogue at Maiumas was situated to the west of a 3-m wide street running north-south along the coastline (figs. 140 and 141).<sup>23</sup> The synagogue building (Areas A and D) was evidenced primarily by the mosaic pavement that originally covered the whole of the main hall. No remains of the superstructure are reported.<sup>24</sup> The extent of the finds and fragments of the mosaic floor suggest that the building consisted of a single, basilical hall, with a nave flanked by double-aisles on either side, separated by four rows

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<sup>22</sup> For preliminary reports, see Ovadiah 1968, 1969, 1977, and 1981.

<sup>23</sup> Ovadiah 1969: 197. A photograph published in a preliminary report (*ibid.*, pl. 18), shows the sea not far from the excavation, perhaps no more than 30 m away, though the coastline has shifted since antiquity.

<sup>24</sup> Ovadiah 1981: 129.

of ten columns (fig. 142).<sup>25</sup> The dimensions of the hall appear to have been about 30 by 26 m, with the longer walls oriented east-west, though tilting slightly to the south. The excavator noted that the nearly square layout is unusual.<sup>26</sup> While that may be true for basilical synagogues, there are a number of examples of synagogues with square or nearly square building plans.<sup>27</sup>

More remarkable than the form of the building is the size. Although the synagogue at Maiumas did not include any forecourts, anterooms, or auxiliary rooms (it seems), the internal space of the hall is more than double that of any of the other nine synagogues discussed in the present work (see Appendix A), and, to my knowledge, larger than any other in Palestine.<sup>28</sup> In the Diaspora of late antiquity, only the 6<sup>th</sup>-c. Sardis synagogue exceeds the internal space of the Gaza synagogue.<sup>29</sup> However, it should be noted that the Sardis synagogue was not purpose-built but originally was part of the Roman bath-gymnasium complex.<sup>30</sup> Therefore the Gaza synagogue is the largest purpose-built synagogue of the Byzantine period for which there is archaeological evidence.

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<sup>25</sup> Ovadiah 1969: 195.

<sup>26</sup> Ovadiah 1969: 195.

<sup>27</sup> Examples of late ancient synagogues with square or nearly square layouts include 'En Nashut, Gush Ḥalav, Hammat Gader, Hammath-Tiberias (North), Ḥusifa, and Tiberias, among others.

<sup>28</sup> See the most recent corpus compiled by Milson 2007.

<sup>29</sup> See Seager and Kraabel 1983: 169. On the date of the synagogue, see Magness 2005a.

<sup>30</sup> Seager and Kraabel 1983: 171-72. On the phases and dates, cf. Magness 2005a. Substantial renovations and changes to the internal structure at Sardis were carried out when the building became a synagogue, however, such circumstances should be differentiated from a purpose-built structure that alters the urban landscape significantly, as was the case with the Gaza synagogue. It should also be noted that the excavator reports no evidence of an earlier synagogue below the extant phase at Maiumas.

Ovadiah postulated a triportal façade on the west side of the building opening on to the street (fig. 142).<sup>31</sup> Although no evidence of the portals was uncovered, the probable location of the bema on the east wall (see below), as well as the orientation of the mosaic pavements and their inscriptions lend support to the suggestion.<sup>32</sup> Due to the slight southerly slant to the building's layout, the synagogue did not face precisely toward Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup> The plan of the building seems to have followed the pre-existing street to the west. According to a published plan, the excavator found evidence of an entrance through the south wall as well.

Based on the measurements of the intercolumniation mosaics at the west end of the synagogue, Ovadiah postulated ten columns in each of the four rows running the length of the structure (see fig. 142). The excavator makes no mention of a staircase leading up to second-story galleries. However, the size of the structure and parallels suggest that there were galleries over the outer aisles.<sup>34</sup> Taking into account the columns and the doorways, we can estimate that the maximum occupancy was somewhere between 1,014 and 3,324 people, significantly higher than any of the other synagogues discussed above.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ovadiah 1981.

<sup>32</sup> More often than not, the directionality of the mosaics indicate the probable location of the main entrance(s). In the synagogues at En-Gedi and Susiya, the mosaics apparently indicate the direction of the bema and liturgical focus. In a basilica such as the Gaza synagogue, the direction of the mosaics indicates both the liturgical focus and the entrances.

<sup>33</sup> Milson 2007: 362.

<sup>34</sup> See Milburn 1988: 87-88.

<sup>35</sup> The internal floor space is estimated at 780 m<sup>2</sup>. In determining the usable internal floor space, I subtract an area of 1 m<sup>2</sup> in front of each of the four entrances and 15 m<sup>2</sup> in and around the bema (see below). This gives us a usable internal floor space of 761 m<sup>2</sup>. No permanent stone benches were reported by Ovadiah. On the lower floor, the usable floor space could allow for as many as 43 portable, wooden benches at 23 m

Near the center of the east wall of the building (Area D), the excavator reconstructed an apse about 3 m in depth (fig. 142).<sup>36</sup> Ovadiah does not indicate whether the reconstructed apse was based on evidence uncovered at the site or comparanda such as the basilical Byzantine period synagogue at Beth Alpha.<sup>37</sup> No evidence of a bema was reportedly found in this area. However, hundreds of marble fragments were recovered from Area D, indicating the presence of a chancel screen, so a raised platform seems probable.<sup>38</sup> Also found among the marble fragments were two large marble basins—one bearing an inscription (see below)—which originally stood on tall, narrow stands, as well as decorated bone inlay, probably used to cover wooden boxes.<sup>39</sup>

The presence of marble basins at the end of the hall opposite the doorways is unusual for synagogues. As we have seen above, the water installations at Na‘aran, En-Gedi, Ma‘on (in Judea), and Rimmon were all located near the doorway of the synagogue, usually outside the main hall. Marble basins are dissimilar in form to the sort of permanent installations at the other sites, so these features might suggest that they

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in length (facing toward the east end). These benches could support as many as 2,236 congregants. Upper-story galleries running the length of the outer aisles (30-m long by 5-m wide, according to Ovadiah’s plan) could allow for an additional 16 benches that are 30 m in length, enough space for another 1,088 people. Thus, the upper limit of the maximum occupancy estimate is calculated at 3,324 people. Alternatively, if there was no second-story seating, and the congregants sat on the floor and required room for prostration, the 761 m<sup>2</sup> of usable floor space could support 1,014 people with space for prostration. For methodology and coefficients used here, see Spigel 2008: 178, Table 3.4 and *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> In the published plan (Ovadiah 1981; 1993), the excavator sets the apse slightly to the south of center along the east wall.

<sup>37</sup> Milson 2007: 362. On reconstructed apses based on comparanda, see above on Na‘aran.

<sup>38</sup> Ovadiah 1969: 196; 1981: 130.

<sup>39</sup> Ovadiah 1969: 196.



served a different function or that ritual washing was practiced differently in the community at Maiumas.<sup>40</sup>

The marble fragments discovered near the east end were decorated with drilled carvings forming various designs including grapes, pomegranates, rosettes, birds, and a ram.<sup>41</sup> Several chancel screen fragments of openwork (or stone lattice) were found during excavation. Only two sections are published in preliminary reports.<sup>42</sup> One section is decorated with a stylized crisscross grill-pattern with various rosettes and bird's-foot designs (fig. 143). Ovadiah noted that similar patterns can be found among the openwork stone screens at Kh. el-Mafjar.<sup>43</sup> The other published section consists of intertwining tendrils arranged in an inhabited scrolls motif with ivy leaves set between the vines (fig. 144). The images enclosed within the three extant medallions do not survive, but the surrounding imagery suggests they were floral. Sections of chancel screens found in Ashkelon (removed from context) and dated by an inscription to 604 are similarly decorated with an inhabited scrolls motif, though the designs are executed in bas-relief rather than openwork (fig. 145).<sup>44</sup> The form of the intertwining tendrils in the Ashkelon examples is similar to those from the Gaza synagogue in that both are double-lines separated by a deep groove. These similarities should not be taken as evidence that the

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<sup>40</sup> Yonatan Adler suggests that, while the practice of ritual ablution in daily life continued to play an important role in post-Second Temple Judaism (contra Reich 1990; 1995), the practice of immersion or washing prior to prayer and Torah study was abandoned by the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> c.; see Adler 2008. See also Amit and Adler 2010: 137-38.

<sup>41</sup> See Ovadiah 1969: 196; 1981: 130. No photographs or drawings of these chancel screen fragments have been published, but see the discussion of the additional fragments below.

<sup>42</sup> See Ovadiah 1969: pl. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ovadiah 1981: 130.

<sup>44</sup> See Sukenik 1935: pl. 15; the photographs are reproduced in Goodenough 1953-65: III, nos. 575-76.

two chancel screens were necessarily carved at the same time (see below on the phases and date). The style of the Gaza examples is similar to the more floral representations of the motif in the portico mosaic at Eshtemoa and at Ma'on-Nirim (see below), and contrasts the geometric style of the motif in the nave mosaic at Na'aran and at Susiya (see above).

An additional chancel screen fragment was known prior to the discovery of the synagogue.<sup>45</sup> It depicts a menorah, shofar, and lulav arranged in a row along the top frame of the screen (fig. 146). The two curved sections below the designs indicate that this fragment almost certainly came from a section decorated with the inhabited scrolls motif (see above). The three symbols are small and schematic. As we have seen in the synagogues at Jericho, Eshtemoa, and Susiya, the grouping of these three symbols was well-known in southern Palestine as well in Galilee and the Golan (see below, Appendix C).<sup>46</sup> Another example of this grouping decorates the Ashkelon chancel screen (see above and fig. 145), on which the symbols are more prominently displayed.<sup>47</sup> The symbols on the piece from Gaza would have been inconspicuous when the screen was viewed in its entirety. To the left of the shofar is a Greek letter, apparently an *upsilon*, indicating that the three symbols were preceded by an inscription, probably dedicatory. The menorah, shofar, and lulav are roughly the same size as the *upsilon*. The unimposing size and placement of the images, as well as the lack of any stylization in the symbols

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<sup>45</sup> The piece was first discussed in Sukenik 1935: 62, pl. 17b, though its origin is unclear. It was subsequently included in Goodenough 1953-65: I, 223; III, no. 583. The fragment is catalogued in Hachlili 2001: IS5.8. The sketch in Hachlili 2001: 67, fig. II-17e is inverted. Goodenough's reprinting of the photograph is oriented properly, as is its reproduction in Roth-Gerson 1987: 104, fig. 50.

<sup>46</sup> See Hachlili 1988: 236-71; 2009: 29-33; on the synagogues of the Golan, see Ma'oz 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Hachlili 2001: 66; no. IS5.9. See also Goodenough 1953-65: I, 220; III, nos. 575-76.

perhaps emphasizes their use as meaningful markers—like stamps of Jewishness—as opposed to adornments for the sake of embellishment.

The floral designs of the chancel screen complement the style of the mosaic pavements. According to Ovadiah's reconstruction, the mosaics of the nave and aisles stretched the length of the hall (figs. 142 and 147). Substantial evidence of the images depicted was preserved only in the westernmost sections.<sup>48</sup> The mosaics have not been published in full, although some photographs from the nave and southernmost aisle and cursory descriptions have appeared in preliminary reports and in Ovadiah and Ovadiah's catalog of mosaics.<sup>49</sup>

The nave mosaic apparently was divided into rectangular sub-panels, each occupying the area between the colonnades. The only panel published from the nave is the David mosaic. Originally uncovered by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities in 1965, the piece was defaced before it was removed to the Israel Museum in 1967. Fig. 148 shows the state of preservation when the piece was uncovered; fig. 149 shows the damage inflicted by unknown perpetrators.<sup>50</sup>

The image depicts a figure in three-quarters view, seated on a throne, with the head turned toward the viewer.<sup>51</sup> A Hebrew inscription to the right of the figure's head

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<sup>48</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61.

<sup>49</sup> See Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 60-62, no. 83, pls. 52-61, 178.

<sup>50</sup> The face of the figure in the mosaic was restored in the early 1990s at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where it is currently in curation; see Green 1993.

<sup>51</sup> For the fullest recent discussion of the David mosaic including a detailed description, see Hachlili 2009: 72-76. See also Finney 1977; Barasch 1971; 1980. Barasch 1980: 6-8 observes that the seat is a throne or ceremonial chair, not a rock.

reads דָּוִד, identifying him as the biblical King David.<sup>52</sup> To the right of the figure is a large stringed instrument, presumably a *kithara* or lyre, one of the attributes of David frequently included in depictions of the Israelite king in Byzantine and early medieval art.<sup>53</sup> The instrument has thirteen or fourteen strings.<sup>54</sup> David's left hand is behind (that is, on the far side of) the instrument. In his left hand he grasps a small, dumbbell-shaped utensil, probably meant to be a plectrum or "hammer" for plucking or striking the strings.<sup>55</sup> The diadem and clothing are characteristic of a Byzantine emperor, perhaps meant to locate him within the biblical narrative after his accession.<sup>56</sup> The lyre, on the other hand, is typically associated with David as a young man, who would soothe the ailing King Saul with his music (e.g., 1 Sam. 15: 14-23), and the beardless face likewise suggests youth. The artist apparently felt no compulsion to adhere literally to the biblical narrative.<sup>57</sup> To the right of the figure is a snake, a lioness or lion cub, and a giraffe.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> On the inscription, see Naveh 1978: no. 55.

<sup>53</sup> For example, see the hoard of silver dishes discovered in Cyprus, now in the Museum of Antiquities in Nicosia (Grabar 1966: 303-306, fig. 353, as well as the references below).

<sup>54</sup> There are several ancient traditions and *midrashim* concerning the number of strings of David's lyre. Some indicate that the instrument had seven strings during his lifetime but would include an eighth in the messianic days. Other sources, including Josephus, mention ten strings. See *inter alia* Jos. *Ant.* 7.306; *t. 'Arakhin* 2.7; *Midrash Tehillim* 81, 366; 92, 406; and see Ginzberg 1909-38: VI, n. 81. The artist here apparently had no knowledge of these traditions or no interest in including them in his work.

<sup>55</sup> Plectra (or picks) were used for the lyre and the larger *kithara*, and they appear frequently on Greek vase paintings; see Bundrick 2005: 17-21. Among stringed instruments, hammers were used to play the dulcimer, an instrument in which the strings are stretched over a trapezoidal piece of wood. The dulcimer is attested only from the medieval period, although there must have been antecedents (Kettlewell 1977). A 12<sup>th</sup>-c. ivory Psalter cover thought to have been owned by the daughter of Baldwin II of Jerusalem depicts David playing a dulcimer with hammers instead of a lyre; see Dalton 1909:22-24, no.28, pl. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Ovadia 1969: 195; 1981: 130; Barasch 1980: 20-24; Hachlili 2009: 73-74. Finney 1977: 6 speculates on the place of the scene in the biblical narrative.

<sup>57</sup> Barasch 1980: 9 suggests that the seemingly iconographic contradiction posed by the lyre and the royal attributes is intentional. That said, Josephus and later rabbinic commentaries on David take for granted that

The panel is bordered by a polychrome double-guilloche and bichrome wave pattern enclosing a broad meander design.<sup>59</sup>

The figure of David is not a common subject in ancient Jewish art.<sup>60</sup> One example might be a soldier depicted in the 5<sup>th</sup>-c. mosaic pavement in the Meroth synagogue, as first proposed by Yigael Yadin.<sup>61</sup> Although the Meroth mosaic similarly depicts a beardless youth, seated and at a three-quarters turn as in the Gaza synagogue, the surrounding details in the scene—including a helmet, sword, and shield—suggest that the image is of David as a warrior. Similar depictions of David following his battle with Goliath or battling an animal are known from late ancient Christian art.<sup>62</sup>

The version of David in the Gaza mosaic utilizes the image-type of Orpheus, which was well known in the artistic repertoire of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>63</sup> In the

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he composed the Psalms with the aid of his lyre after he had become king; see *Ant.* 7.305; *Midrash Teshillim* 24, 204. So the ancient viewer might not have observed any contradiction in the iconography of David here.

<sup>58</sup> Finney (1977: 7) identifies the lion cub as a lioness.

<sup>59</sup> The outer part of the border conforms to Avi-Yonah's pattern B7-8+B12+B7-8, and the inner part conforms to pattern A19 (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 61). The latter has been noted already in the synagogue at Susiya (see above, section 4.1). Unlike at Susiya, there are no faunal images set within the meander pattern in the Gaza mosaic.

<sup>60</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of David in Jewish art and the various interpretations of the David mosaic in the Gaza synagogue, see Hachlili 2009: 72-78.

<sup>61</sup> See Ilan and Damati 1987; Talgam 1987: 149-51; Ilan 1993. On Yadin's suggestion, see Talgam 1987: 149; and Ilan and Damati 1989. It has also been suggested that the figure is a depiction of the individual mentioned in the panel's inscription, Yudan bar Shimon Mani. As Talgam notes, the depiction of a donor in this fashion would be unparalleled in Jewish art (Talgam 1987: 149).

<sup>62</sup> For examples, see the hoard of silver dishes from Cyprus (Grabar 1966: 303-306, fig. 353). Uzi Leibner identifies a scene depicting a giant in the mosaic pavement of the Kh. Wadi el-Hammam synagogue as part of the David and Goliath narrative (Leibner 2010: 38).

<sup>63</sup> For the fullest discussion of the affinity between depictions (and meanings) of Orpheus and David, see Barasch 1971; 1980. See also Finney 1977; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: no. 83; Elsner 2009. For a full treatment of Orpheus imagery, see Jesnick 1997. For a typical and oft-cited example, see the 3<sup>rd</sup>-c. "Mosaic from Tarsus" from Antioch (Cimok 2000: 147).

Dura-Europos synagogue, an Orpheus-type figure should probably be identified as David.<sup>64</sup> Here, the musician appears with the lyre to the right and seated on a throne. The Phrygian cap, common in depictions of Orpheus, was otherwise used in the Dura-Europos synagogue paintings only with the figures of Ahasuerus and Mordechai, suggesting along with his draped chlamys a regal figure.<sup>65</sup> Although the David-Orpheus does not have any particular prominence among the dozens of scenes depicted in the Dura-Europos synagogue, the detail provides evidence that the tradition of depicting David as Orpheus predates the synagogue at Maiumas by at least 250 years.<sup>66</sup>

Another Orpheus-type figure in mosaic was uncovered in 1901 to the northwest of the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem (fig. 150).<sup>67</sup> In the Jerusalem Orpheus mosaic, the context has usually been treated as Christian based on the suggested 5<sup>th</sup>- or 6<sup>th</sup>-c. date, a time when modern scholarship assumes that the population of Jerusalem was predominantly Christian.<sup>68</sup> As such, the figure of Orpheus has been interpreted as Christ.<sup>69</sup> However, Jaś Elsner has argued that even at such a late date there is no reason

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<sup>64</sup> See Kraeling 1956: 223-25. Goodenough's suggestion (1953-65: IX, 89) that the figure is meant to be understood as Orpheus is unwarranted, especially in light of the epigraphically-identified example from the Gaza synagogue.

<sup>65</sup> Kraeling 1956: 223.

<sup>66</sup> Another possible example of David-Orpheus has been noted in the Jewish catacomb of the Vigna Randanini in Rome, although this identification is doubtful. See Finney 1977 and Barasch 1980: 13-14.

<sup>67</sup> Vincent 1901.

<sup>68</sup> See Vincent 1901; Bagatti 1952; Grabar 1962; 1966: 112; and Stern 1974. For an alternative dating suggestion, see Ovadiah and Mucznik 1981.

<sup>69</sup> Images of Orpheus have been interpreted as Christ elsewhere, including paintings from the 4<sup>th</sup>-c. catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter and the catacomb of Domitilla in Rome; see Stern 1974; Milburn 1988: 32. Interestingly, the beardless version of Christ, common among the earliest depictions, is thought to emphasize his Davidic origins by recalling the youthfulness of the king, so art historians often refer to the beardless Christ as the David-type; see Milburn 1988: 12, 47, 78.

to assume a Christian character for the mosaic, and that other depictions of Orpheus interpreted as Christ should be reconsidered.<sup>70</sup> According to Elsner, the figure of Orpheus in Jerusalem is not an adopted motif or an iconographic appropriation by Christians but Orpheus himself. Although he is no doubt correct in that the context should be established as Christian before delving into the syncretistic implications of image-type appropriation, there is likewise no reason to assume that the mosaic was non-Christian, especially considering the Christian character of Jerusalem during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>71</sup> Although we cannot be sure, contextual probability and circumstance favor the assumption that the Jerusalem mosaic is an appropriation of the Orpheus-type meant to depict Christ or an attribute of Christ.<sup>72</sup>

The David mosaic in the Gaza synagogue has often been cited as evidence to support the Christ-Orpheus interpretation of the Jerusalem Orpheus.<sup>73</sup> The assumption behind such evidence is that Christians appropriated the Orpheus image-type for Christ by following the lead of their Jewish neighbors, a view that presumes an unproven set of circumstances regarding the relationship between Jews and Christians in 6<sup>th</sup>-c.

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<sup>70</sup> Elsner 2009: 45.

<sup>71</sup> See Sivan 2008: 40-42.

<sup>72</sup> The Christ-Orpheus typically is understood as representing Christ as the Good Shepherd; see Barasch 1980: 14-15; Hachlili 2009: 78. Alternatively, one should consider that the image in the Jerusalem mosaic is meant to represent Orpheus regardless of whether or not the context is Christian. Examples of Orpheus that have been discovered in Christian contexts are not always interpreted by modern scholars as an appropriated depiction of Christ; for example, see Milburn 1988: 151, 239, who discusses the appearance of Orpheus in paintings at Bawit and on ivory pyxides. Conversely, see Ovadiah and Mucznik 1981, who suggest that the mosaic in fact dates to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> c. and was initially meant to depict Orpheus but later co-opted by Christians and interpreted as Christ.

<sup>73</sup> See, *inter alia*, Stern 1974. Cf. Elsner 2009: 40-44.

Palestine.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, the Jerusalem Orpheus mosaic provides an important parallel. If the Jerusalem Orpheus was indeed laid by Christians, we might suppose that the image-type provided a common symbolic reference for both Jews and Christians who appropriated the image.<sup>75</sup> Christ and David have a natural connection as messiahs, or anointed ones, and the Gospel tradition explicitly links the two (Matt. 1:1-17).<sup>76</sup> David and Orpheus are connected by the latter's most readily identifiable attribute, the lyre (see above), and the powers these figures derived through their music.<sup>77</sup>

A symbolic reference to eschatological redemption is common to David, Orpheus, and Christ. Moshe Barasch first suggested the connection, though few scholars have pursued this line of inquiry.<sup>78</sup> Barasch supports his eschatological interpretation of David in the Gaza synagogue by pointing to the variety of animals depicted, as opposed to just sheep which would suggest the role of David as a shepherd. Barasch notes the

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<sup>74</sup> Assumptions that Christian art and architecture were borrowed directly from Jewish art and architecture usually are based on misdated synagogue buildings and a selective use of the evidence; for example, see the highly problematic discussion in Milburn 1988: 83-85.

<sup>75</sup> Elsner presumes that meaning did not adhere to imagery, as he states, "This kind of appropriation, which belongs to the level of forms and iconographic types, need involve no assimilation of content or meaning (unless particular viewers wished, and still wish, to impute such things)" (2009: 44). On the contrary, there is good reason to believe that meanings (however latent) were transferred in some form along with the image as they passed from one context to another, though that is not to say that such images did not acquire new meanings. On this, see Avi-Yonah 1981a: 53 and *passim*.

<sup>76</sup> Barasch 1980: 9 makes the additional point that the depiction of David in the Gaza synagogue juxtaposes his "pastoral" image with his "royal" image, two aspects which are often combined in depictions of Christ.

<sup>77</sup> On the "redemptory symbolism" of Orpheus, see Barasch 1980: 3, 10-11, 16. As Barasch notes (1980: 15-16), the connection between Orpheus and David can be traced in early medieval Christian literature of the Byzantine world and the West, as well as in Early Islamic traditions.

<sup>78</sup> Levine (2008: 236) considers Barasch's interpretation of David at Gaza as the only one worth even a footnote.



significance of the snake, which was associated with redemption and eternal life.<sup>79</sup> He further points out the strange juxtaposition in the scene between the bucolic images of animals and the symbols of royalty (specifically the crown and attire), the latter of which are not part of the Orpheus tradition.<sup>80</sup> The royal attributes are the defining characteristics of David here, and they increasingly became such during late antiquity and the early medieval periods, when the image of David was used as the symbol of royalty *par excellence*.<sup>81</sup> According to Barasch, the combination of royalty and music was a common theme in depictions of David in medieval art of both the East and West, one which appears as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> c. in Palestine.<sup>82</sup>

Barasch psychoanalyzes the artist of the David mosaic, suggesting that this was a unique work in which the artist carefully balanced the theme of Orpheus with the distinction of the royal David to emphasize the Jewish soteriological beliefs using a Greek motif.<sup>83</sup> We are less concerned with the intent of the artist and the piece's originality and more concerned with the social and historical circumstances that would have informed and influenced contemporary interpretations with the image. Barasch emphasizes the "pagan" character of Gaza that persisted into the 6<sup>th</sup> c. as the context for an image of David in the form of Orpheus. The figure of Orpheus would have been identifiable among the general population and therefore easily recognizable and relevant

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<sup>79</sup> Barasch 1980: 18-19, citing observations and discussions of Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le Symbolisme Funéraire des Romains* (1942), among others.

<sup>80</sup> Barasch 1980: 20-26.

<sup>81</sup> Barasch 1980: 24-25.

<sup>82</sup> Barasch 1980: 26.

<sup>83</sup> Barasch 1980: 26-27.

to a Jewish community accustomed to Hellenistic imagery.<sup>84</sup> Apparently, the figure of Orpheus was an attractive form for the symbol of David since it already possessed attributes understood by the average Gazan in late antiquity. The occasional use of the same figure to depict Christ suggests that Jews and Christians (and “pagans”) used the same symbolic language, in which the Orpheus figure professed an eschatological and messianic meaning.

The outer southern aisle, which is the best preserved part of the pavement, was decorated with an inhabited scrolls motif (fig. 151). The long, narrow panel is surrounded by a border consisting of thin lines and a two-stranded guilloche.<sup>85</sup> The medallions of the field are formed by vine trellises in contrast to the geometric style of this motif in the Na‘aran mosaic (figs. 9-11) and similar to the mosaic of the Eshtemoa narthex (fig. 104). The medallions are laid out as ten rows and three columns, and each medallion contains a depiction of an animal (with the exception of the ninth row, second column, where the dedicatory inscription is located [see below]). Many of the animals were badly defaced shortly after the mosaic’s discovery in 1965, presumably in the same act of vandalism that destroyed the David mosaic (see above). The animals depicted in the medallions are typical of the mosaic’s faunal repertoire of Byzantine Palestine—birds (eleven, including a caged bird), large cats (two leopards, a tigress, and a lioness with a suckling cub), and various quadrupeds (including two foxes, a donkey, a zebra, two giraffes, and a deer [?]). Several animals are unidentifiable, either on account of the

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<sup>84</sup> Barasch 1980: 29.

<sup>85</sup> The pattern conforms to Avi-Yonah’s A1+B3; see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61.

damage or the design (or both).<sup>86</sup> As Ovadiah notes, the style and use of the inhabited scrolls motif in Gaza synagogue have close affinities with the mosaic pavements in the synagogue at Ma'on-Nirim (see below, section 6.2) and the churches at Shellal and Hazor (south).<sup>87</sup> He suggests that these mosaics were created by the same workshop or even the same mosaicists.<sup>88</sup>

The remaining sections of the mosaic floor were poorly preserved. In the inner south aisle (north of the inhabited scrolls motif), a small section of mosaic was uncovered displaying a field of squares with interlacing ropes.<sup>89</sup> North of the nave, in the inner northern aisle, a badly damaged section of a panel displays a wavy-ribbon border bisected by a straight line set over a triangle pattern, all enclosing two separate fields which are distinguished by the same border-pattern through the center of the panel (fig. 152).<sup>90</sup> One field consists of braided circles, and the other consists of vine trellises, that is, an inhabited scrolls motif similar to the outer southern aisle (see above).<sup>91</sup> The medallions formed in both sub-panels probably enclosed various images. Ovadiah and Ovadiah suggest that the inhabited scrolls enclosed faunal images, as in the outer southern aisle,

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<sup>86</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah (1987: 61) lists of the animals depicted and their locations.

<sup>87</sup> Ovadiah 1969; 1975; 1981.

<sup>88</sup> For the specific argument, see Ovadiah 1975.

<sup>89</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61. The pattern conforms to Avi-Yonah's H13. No photographs of this section of mosaic have been published.

<sup>90</sup> The border conforms to Avi-Yonah's B1+A5-6+A1+B2 (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61).

<sup>91</sup> The pattern of the first field conforms to Avi-Yonah's J1 (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61).

however, a photograph published in their catalog seems to depict a basket of fruit, a common motif in Byzantine-period mosaics.<sup>92</sup>

The outer northern aisle—of which no photographs have been published—apparently contained an additional inhabited scrolls motif formed by vine trellises. The animals enclosed within the medallions were all defaced subsequent to their discovery.<sup>93</sup> Finally, a poorly preserved section of the intercolumniation mosaic between the inner northern aisle and the outer northern aisle apparently depicts the hind part of a horse (fig. 153).<sup>94</sup> Although the piece is very fragmentary, the subject matter—like the David mosaic—hints at the style of the overall pavement of the synagogue: richly decorated with figural imagery, including patterned faunal images and custom-made panels depicting biblical figures and scenes.<sup>95</sup> As such, it is more closely related in overall style to the synagogue pavements at Susiya and Ma'on-Nirim and at Sepphoris in Galilee than to the synagogues at Jericho and En-Gedi.<sup>96</sup>

#### **6.1.3.1 The Bas-relief Column and Inscription**

Because of the poor preservation of the synagogue's superstructure, the excavators uncovered no decorated architectural fragments or relief-work at the site. However, a column found in secondary use in the Great Mosque of Gaza (Jāma 'Ghazza al-Kabīr) is thought to have come from the synagogue. It should be noted, though, that

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<sup>92</sup> See Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61 and pl. LX:2.

<sup>93</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61.

<sup>94</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 61, pl. LXI.

<sup>95</sup> Barasch 1980 argues that the David mosaic at Maiumas is a unique and custom-made composition (see above).

<sup>96</sup> On the synagogues at Susiya, Jericho, and En-Gedi, see above. On the synagogue at Ma'on-Nirim, see below. On the Sepphoris synagogue, see Weiss 2005.

this is by no means certain. As with the decorated architectural fragments from Eshtemoa found throughout the village of es-Samua', the piece could have come from another building. In this instance at Gaza, the case is even more difficult, since, unlike Eshtemoa, Gaza and Maiumas formed a large urban area which could have supported more than one synagogue. The historical sources are silent regarding the existence of any synagogues—one or multiple. In fact, when Clermont-Ganneau observed the column in the Great Mosque in 1870, he suggested that it came from a synagogue at Caesarea or Alexandria, both of which were known to have supported large Jewish communities in late antiquity.<sup>97</sup>

Leah Roth-Gerson, writing after the discovery of the synagogue, contends that the column did not come from the synagogue, since it is too large (about 6 m or so in height) to have been lugged from Maiumas to Gaza.<sup>98</sup> However, large edifices were rarely constructed so close to their quarries. To the contrary, it is the relatively short distance of 4 km that supports Maiumas as the origin for this column.

In any case, there can be little doubt that this column came from a large and impressive Jewish building, presumably a synagogue. Although future discoveries may propose a different structure for the origin of the column, the present state of knowledge suggests the synagogue at Maiumas as the most plausible origin for the piece. We will here treat it as such.

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<sup>97</sup> Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 390-95.

<sup>98</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 98.

The column first came to the attention of scholarship in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. through publications by Clermont-Ganneau and Isidore Loeb.<sup>99</sup> It was erected in the Great Mosque of Gaza on top of another column, about 6 m off the ground (fig. 154). About two-thirds of the way up the column is a bas-relief carving depicting Jewish symbols enclosed in a wreath and situated above a bilingual Jewish inscription (fig. 155).<sup>100</sup> The mosque is thought to have been converted from a Crusader church which had been constructed over the 5<sup>th</sup>-c. church of Eudoxiana.<sup>101</sup> It is unclear when the column was erected, but if it came from the synagogue at Maiumas, it could have been inserted during the Crusader reconstruction or the conversion to a mosque. As of 1987, when Roth-Gerson's work was published, the relief carving was intact, but sometime between then and 1993, the column was defaced and the images and inscription were obliterated.<sup>102</sup> Clermont-Ganneau's 1896 publication remains the most detailed publication of the piece.

The entire carving measures about 1.2 m in height and 28 cm across (fig. 155).<sup>103</sup> The wreath and Jewish symbols were carved in bas-relief, as was the *tabula ansata* below the wreath. A three-line inscription was carved into the *tabula ansata*. The wreath is formed by twelve sections radiating from one-another upward toward the crest, where the uppermost sections meet at an egg-shaped design. From the bottom of the wreath, two wavy strands extend down and outward, at the end of which are spades, and between

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<sup>99</sup> Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 390-95; Loeb 1889.

<sup>100</sup> A sketch of the carving also appears in Hachlili 1988: 190, fig. 32, where it is mislabeled as a chancel screen decoration.

<sup>101</sup> But cf. Pringle 1993: I, 208-09.

<sup>102</sup> Shanks 1994: 55.

<sup>103</sup> Clermont-Ganneau 1896 :II, 390; Roth-Gerson 1987: 98.

which is a tripod-shaped leaf. The symbols in the wreath are simple and schematic, consisting of the most easily identifiable and commonly known Jewish symbols: the seven-branched menorah flanked by a shofar, lulav, and etrog. The seven-branched menorah—depicted entirely in a bead-and-reel pattern—stands on a tripod, and a crossbar rests over the ends of the arms. Five small points protrude upward from the crossbar. To the right of the menorah is a slightly curved design that widens at the bottom and splits at the top. Parallels indicate that this is meant to depict a shofar.<sup>104</sup> To the left of the menorah is a long, narrow design, the upper portion of which is straight, and the bottom portion of which bulges at the top and tapers at the bottom, giving the appearance of a spade or shovel. While one might be tempted to identify the design as an incense shovel—given examples of such symbols elsewhere—the small circle to the right of the design is surely meant to help identify the pairing as the lulav and etrog.<sup>105</sup>

Directly below the wreath is the *tabula ansata*. In each wing is a single line with protruding shorter lines fanning outward and upward. Clermont-Ganneau identified these two designs as palms, whereas others have identified them as lulavs.<sup>106</sup> If the latter is accepted, it would be curious to find a variance in the depiction of the same symbol in the same carving. A number of possibilities could account for this discrepancy. On the one hand, the lulav in the wreath is part of what may be described as a fixed form or grouping of symbols—the menorah flanked by the shofar on one side and the lulav-and-etrog on

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<sup>104</sup> Clermont-Ganneau mistook the shofar as a “horn for holy oil” (1896: II, 393). Loeb correctly identified it as a shofar.

<sup>105</sup> Clermont-Ganneau identified the lulav as a “sacrificial knife” (1896: II, 393), while Loeb identified it as an amphora (1889: 100). For depictions of incense shovels in Jewish mosaics, see *inter alia*, the examples from Hammath-Tiberias (Dothan 1983), Sepphoris (Weiss 2005), and Susiya (above), as well as the nearly complete listing in Ovadia and Ovadia 1987.

<sup>106</sup> Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 394; Roth-Gerson 1987: 98.

the other—while the lulav depictions in the *tabula ansata* are independent of other symbols, perhaps added as an afterthought. The latter may even have been carved by a different hand, such as an epigrapher (see below). Alternatively, Clermont-Ganneau proposed that the inscribed designs in the wings of the *tabula ansata* were not meant to depict lulavs originally. The fact that modern scholars—and perhaps also ancient viewers—interpreted the designs as such does not mean that the individual who carved the designs in the *tabula ansata* intended to depict the same symbol as in the wreath.

The central, rectangular section of the *tabula ansata* contains a three-line, bilingual inscription in Aramaic and Greek:<sup>107</sup>

Ḥananiah son of Jacob	חנניה בר יעקב	1
Ḥananiah	Ἡνανία	2
son of Jacob	υἱὸς(ς) Ἰακώ	3

Similar examples of inscriptions on columns and other architectural elements suggest that this inscription commemorates Ḥananiah’s donation of the column to the synagogue.<sup>108</sup>

The lack of a -β at the end of the Greek rendition of Jacob is peculiar to the modern eye, though there are a number of similar examples from sites elsewhere in Palestine.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> The transliteration here is based on Naveh 1978: no. 54 (Aramaic) and Roth-Gerson 1987: no. 22 (Greek). Roth-Gerson supposes that the first line of the inscription is in Hebrew, i.e., that the middle word should be read בן instead of בר. Given the long line over the top of the second letter of the second word of line 1, and the alternative rendering of the letter <נ> in the first word, I agree with Naveh’s reading, בר.

<sup>108</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 98-99, n. 4. See *ibid.* for examples in Greek and Naveh 1978, *passim*, for examples in Hebrew and Aramaic.

<sup>109</sup> The form of the name without the -β is known also from an inscription found along the road between Gaza and Jaffa (Roth-Gerson 1987: no. 23), two inscriptions found at Caesarea (Lehmann and Holum 2000: nos. 166 and 190), and three inscriptions from the Beth She’arim necropolis (Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974: 58-59, 95-96), 114-16). Clermont-Ganneau (1896: 394) stated that a popular abbreviation of Jacob existed in Greek as Ἰακῶ. However, I am unaware of this rendering of the name in the corpus of inscriptions from Palestine.



Little else is noteworthy about this inscription, except for the fact that it is bilingual. We have not yet encountered a bilingual inscription among the synagogues of southern Palestine. Although we have seen Hebrew used alongside Aramaic, such as in the En-Gedi inscriptions, none so far has repeated the same information in two languages. In fact, epigraphic bilingual translations are rare in the synagogues of late antique Palestine. Only in the Sepphoris synagogue do we find similar bilingualism, where the four seasons of the zodiac wheel are labeled in both Hebrew and Greek.<sup>110</sup> It is significant that the same information—however mundane and limited—is repeated in two languages, since it presupposes that some readers could read only Greek while others could read only Hebrew/Aramaic (in addition to those who could read both or neither).

Roth-Gerson suggests that the inscription was written in two languages because the donor was bilingual.<sup>111</sup> Although we should count the donor himself as among the “readers,” it is a strange suggestion, since I find it hard to imagine a scenario in which a donor insists on being able to verify his donation in every language he can read.

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<sup>110</sup> See di Segni in Weiss 2005: 212-14. In addition, six examples of direct bilingual translations are known from the Beth She‘arim necropolis; see Avigad 1976: 238-39; Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974: 19-20, 25, 26, 31. Regarding synagogues specifically, an inscription from Dabbura has both Aramaic and Greek, but it does not appear that the Greek is a translation of the Aramaic; see Naveh 1978: no. 7. Inscriptions where Hebrew and Aramaic are mixed together—as in the En-Gedi inscriptions—are not uncommon, however, in such cases the Hebrew is always some sort of standard blessing, such as “peace upon Israel,” “*selah*,” or “amen,” or used to identify biblical figures, zodiac signs, or Hebrew months; see Naveh 1978: 153, *passim*. Hebrew is occasionally mixed with Greek in this manner as well, such as in an inscription from the stratum IIa synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias, along with several examples from the Beth She‘arim necropolis, where the inscription is almost entirely in Greek except for the final word, שלום; see Dothan 1983: 60-62; Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974: *passim*. The epigraphic use of Hebrew for anything other than a standard blessing or phrase—such as the dedicatory and memorial inscriptions at Susiya (see above)—is very rare in synagogues, appearing more commonly in Upper Galilee and the Golan than in southern Palestine (contra Amit 2004 and Sivan 2008: 32-33). See, for example, Naveh 1978: nos. 1, 3, 4, 6, 13, 14, and below, Appendix B.

<sup>111</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 99.

Although we cannot know if Ḥananiah could read his name in both Aramaic and Greek, it is worth considering which of these two languages was primary to the donor.

The public language of Gaza—a major city of coastal Palestine—was undoubtedly Greek. We may suppose that any Jew living permanently in Gaza (or Maiumas) was fluent in Greek, and, if their occupation or social status demanded it, literate in Greek as well. That Greek was the primary language of the Jews of Gaza is suggested by the other surviving inscriptions (see below), all of which are in Greek, with the sole exception of the single word identifying King David (see above).

Ḥananiah may have been a local, wealthy resident of Maiumas who wished to see himself identified by his Aramaic name. An Aramaic rendition of his name would surely have been considered by the viewers to be more characteristically Jewish.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps the point would have been stronger had the name been inscribed in Hebrew rather than Aramaic (i.e., בן instead of בר for “son of”). Nevertheless, it seems significant that the donor’s name appears in Aramaic, a language that was no doubt used secondarily, at least from the perspective of the majority of viewers, if not Ḥananiah as well.<sup>113</sup> As a result, it is likely that the exceptional use of Aramaic in this inscription would have served the symbolic purpose of emphasizing the Jewish character of either the donor or the context

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<sup>112</sup> Roth-Gerson (1987: 99-100) points out that all the names in the inscriptions from the Gaza synagogue (see below) are identifiably Jewish.

<sup>113</sup> The only other site where such bilingualism in the identification of personal names is found is the Beth She‘arim necropolis, where it has been noted that a substantial number of Diaspora Jews were interred; for a discussion, see Rajak 1998.

of the inscription (much in the same way that the symbols of the menorah, shofar, lulav, and etrog mark the context as Jewish).

### 6.1.3.2 The Dedicatory Inscription

Two additional inscriptions were uncovered in the synagogue during excavation. The first comes from the outer southern aisle (fig. 156), where it was set into one of the medallions of the inhabited scrolls panel (fig. 151). It is entirely in Greek and reads as follows:<sup>114</sup>

1	Μανάα-	Mena-
2	μος καὶ Ἰσουος	hem and Yeshua,
3	υἱοὶ τοῦ μακαρ(ιωτάτου)	sons of the late
4	Ἰσσητος ξυλέμποροι	Isai/Issi, wood merchants,
5	εὐχαριστοῦντες	as a sign of thanks
6	[τ]ῷ ἁγίω(άτῳ) τόπῳ καὶ	for the most holy place,
7	[τ]ῆν ψήφωσιν ταύτην	this mosaic
8	προσενήγκαμεν	(we) have donated
9	μηνὶ Λῶσῳ τοῦ	in the month of Loos [July-August],
10	ΘΞΦ	569 [of the era of Gaza = 508/9].

The most informative aspect of this inscription is the date for the laying of the mosaic: 569 of the era of Gaza, or 508/9 (see further below on the dating). Regarding the names—Menahem, Yeshua, and Isai/Issi—all three have been encountered in the synagogues of southern Palestine (see Appendix B). The third name, Ἰσσητος, is not recognizable from the Greek sources and is probably a transliteration—as are the sons' names—from a Jewish name, perhaps Isai or Issi (as known from Susiya and Eshtemoa,

<sup>114</sup> Following the reading of Roth-Gerson 1987: no. 21, with a modification in the personal name of line 4.

see above).<sup>115</sup> It is notable that the donor chose (presumably) to use the Greek transliteration of the name Menahem (Μαννάμωϛ), instead of the Greek translation (Παρηγόριωϛ), the latter of which is known from Greek inscriptions in Jewish contexts from Jaffa and Beth She‘arim.<sup>116</sup> The same can be said for his brother Yeshua, whose name is transliterated as Ἰησοῦϛ rather than the more common transliterations Ἰησοῦϛ or Ἰέϛουϛ.<sup>117</sup> Since the congregants of the synagogue lived in a city whose public language was Greek, it seems unlikely they would have been ignorant of the Greek forms of their personal names, so we should consider the use of transliterations rather than translations as deliberate and likely based on their pronunciations.

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<sup>115</sup> The reading of Jesse was proposed by Avi-Yonah as an additional reference to King David (alongside the David mosaic, see above), whose father was Jesse, but this is likely to be coincidence. Roth-Gerson (1987: 92) dismisses the possibility that this name is a transliteration of יֵשׁוּ (Jesse), since (a) the name is transliterated in the Septuagint as Ἰεϛοῶλ and (b) it is otherwise unattested in Jewish epigraphy. Regarding her first objection, it should be noted that the Septuagint’s transliteration is from the Hebrew, while the epigraphic transliteration was more likely to have been from Aramaic. Moreover, the Septuagint’s transliteration predates the Gaza inscription by six or seven centuries, and while it was surely in circulation in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. C.E., it is unclear whether the Jewish community at Gaza would have been familiar with the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, or, if they were, whether their version was similar to the Septuagint known today. Regarding Roth-Gerson’s second point, I suggest that we may have epigraphic attestations of the name Jesse, though in its Aramaic forms, יֵשׁוּ and יֵשׁוּ (Isai), at Susiya and Eshtemoa (see above). In any case, we should consider the Greek Ἰηϛῆτωϛ to be a transliteration of the Aramaic name יֵשׁוּ or יֵשׁוּ, regardless of their Hebrew equivalents.

<sup>116</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 92.

<sup>117</sup> Both Second Temple period and later inscriptions tend to transliterate the name as Ἰησοῦϛ; see for examples, Rahmani 1994: 90, 106-07; Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974: 31-32; Gregg and Urman 1996: 101-02. The variants Ἰέϛουϛ and Ἰέϛουϛ also appear at Beth She‘arim; see Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974: 125-27. I am unaware of any other attestation of the variant Ἰησοῦϛ in the epigraphic corpus of Palestine.

Roth-Gerson notes that the inclusion of the donors' occupation (wood-merchants) is not unusual for dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>118</sup> Such identifications were established epigraphically to endow the donor with an additional element of prestige or to help identify him. As Avi-Yonah points out, the wood-merchant business would have been highly respected and lucrative, which is supported by their donation of "this mosaic," perhaps referring to the entire large pavement.<sup>119</sup>

The inscription follows a general dedicatory formula with references to thanksgiving, and employing features that are known from funerary inscriptions.<sup>120</sup> One aspect of the inscription is the phrase "the holy place." Typically the Hebrew and Aramaic dedicatory inscriptions in synagogues refer to "*this* holy place," using the demonstrative pronoun to emphasize the present edifice. It is curious that in the Gaza synagogue the epigrapher chose not to describe it as such in line 6, especially since he does so in the following line, in reference to "this mosaic." While it may have been a deliberate and perhaps meaningful choice, it is more likely that this was an arbitrary decision by the epigrapher—who may or may not have been familiar with Aramaic and Hebrew dedicatory inscriptions elsewhere—or there simply was not enough space in the medallion to include the word ταύτῳ in line 6 (see fig. 156).

### 6.1.3.3 The Basin Inscription

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<sup>118</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 95.

<sup>119</sup> On Avi-Yonah's comments, see Roth-Gerson 1987: 95.

<sup>120</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 93.

One of the two marble basins found near the east end of the synagogue preserves a Greek inscription around the upper face of the rim (fig. 157).<sup>121</sup> Two large fragments of the basin were uncovered. The inscription, as transliterated and translated by Ovadiah, reads as follows:

ὕπερ σωτηρίας Ῥουβήλου καὶ Ἰσσή(τος) καὶ Βενιαμίν
For the salvation of Roubelos (Reuben) and Isses (Jesse), and Benjamin

The contraction of σωτηρίας can be extrapolated with a fair degree of certainty based on parallels.<sup>122</sup> Ovadiah and Roth-Gerson suggest that the Greek name Ῥουβήλος is from the Hebrew name Reuben (רְבִינָה). As far as I know, the Greek version as seen here is otherwise unattested in inscriptions from Palestine.<sup>123</sup> The criteria for extrapolating Ἰσσή(τος) seem equally unclear, though I suspect it was in part based on the attestation of the name Ἡσσητός in the dedicatory inscription. In any case, both are probably attempts to transliterate the Aramaic Isai/Issi, a personal name which has been encountered already at Susiya and Eshtemoa and is probably the Aramaic form of Jesse or Yose (see above and Appendix B).

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<sup>121</sup> The object was mentioned in Ovadiah's preliminary report (1969: 196) and in Roth-Gerson 1987: 100, though the latter did not include it in her catalog. The piece has been restored and is on display in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.

<sup>122</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 100. For the contraction of σωτηρίας in Greek epigraphy, see Gronigen 1963: fig. 12.

<sup>123</sup> See Ovadiah 1969: 196; Roth-Gerson 1987: 100. A connection to the Latin *rubellus*, meaning "reddish," seems unlikely. A connection to the Greek ῥαμβός, meaning "crooked or bent" seems even less likely.

The introductory phrase, ὑπὲρ σ(ωτ)ηρ(ίας), is well-known from religious contexts (Jewish and otherwise) all over Palestine, including the Sepphoris synagogue.<sup>124</sup> Given the apparent soteriological and messianic implications of the David mosaic (see above), the appearance of such an exhortative prayer is unsurprising. The presence of the phrase—however common among the inscriptions of Palestine—underscores and supports the interpretation above.

#### **6.1.4 Phases and Dates**

Pre-synagogue structures in the vicinity of the building were dated by Ovadiah to the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. with a destruction in the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>125</sup> Assuming the mosaic pavement represents the earliest phase of the synagogue, the dedicatory inscription provides a construction date of 508/9 (see above). Ovadiah's preliminary reports assume that there was no synagogue phase prior to the laying of the mosaic pavement. Moreover, Ovadiah reports no finds from below the mosaic pavement that would corroborate the date provided by the inscription. In any case, a second phase of the synagogue is marked by the laying of a marble-slab pavement over the mosaic. Because the marble was quarried away almost entirely, there were no sealed contexts that could provide objects for the purposes of dating the laying of the marble pavement.

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<sup>124</sup> For the example from the Sepphoris synagogue, see di Segni in Weiss 2005: 210. For examples elsewhere, see the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. church at Khisfin in the Golan (Gregg and Urman 1996: 84-85); a 5<sup>th</sup>-c. architectural fragment (possibly bearing a cross) from the village of Mumsiyye (al-Ghassaniyye) in the Golan (ibid. 213-14); the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. altar from the Roman amphitheater at Bet Guvrin (Kloner and Hübsch 1996: 100-01); the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. altar from Senaim on Mt. Hermon (Dar and Kokkinos 1992: 13-16); and two inscriptions from the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. church of St. Stephen at H. Be'er Shema' in the northern Negev (Tzaferis 1996: nos. 1, 3, 5). An inscription that begins, "For the salvation of Jacob Lazarus and Marina ..." was found on the road between Gaza and Jaffa; see Roth-Gerson 1987: no. 23.

<sup>125</sup> Ovadiah 1977: 176. The finds to support this conclusion have not been published.

How the Gaza synagogue came to an end is unclear. The excavator does not report any evidence of fire or deliberate destruction. Finds found on the floor of the synagogue such as the delicate bone inlay might suggest a hasty end to the occupation, but there is no report of whole, restorable vessels that typically accompany such destructions. That said, the lack of such vessels is not surprising given the extensive amount of activity in the area over the centuries. Since almost no remains of the superstructure were uncovered, we should suppose that the building was quarried for building materials following its abandonment. Based on the available evidence, we can conclude that—unlike the synagogues at Susiya, Eshtemoa, and ‘Anim—the building was not transformed for any other purpose subsequent to its original and intended use. That is to say, the building began and ended its life as a synagogue.

Regarding the end-date of the synagogue’s occupation, we must rely on the excavator’s conclusion. Ovadiah reports that the ceramic finds indicate that the building continued in use until the first decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>126</sup> The pottery from the excavation is unpublished, so it is impossible to verify this conclusion. Nevertheless, the apparent lack of ceramics from any later period as well as evidence for iconoclasm seem to suggest that activity in the synagogue ceased before the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c. Therefore, the date of the synagogue can be established as the early 6<sup>th</sup> c. to the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c.

### **6.1.5 Conclusion**

Based on the epigraphic evidence, Roth-Gerson concludes that the Jewish community of Gaza lived in opposition to its Greek environment. By emphasizing their Hebrew names—Ḥananiah, Jacob, Menahem (?), Yeshua, Isai/Issi, Reuben (?), and

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<sup>126</sup> Ovadiah 1969: 198.



Benjamin—and by establishing and maintaining the large, communal synagogue of Maiumas, they professed an affinity with their fellow Jews.<sup>127</sup> The use of Jewish symbols, she suggests—such as King David, the menorah, shofar, lulav, and etrog—as well as the use of Hebrew characters, are all meant to underscore the local Jewish identity despite the Greek culture in which the Jews of Gaza were embedded.

Roth-Gerson's characterization is a curious one since—to my mind—the epigraphic evidence suggests precisely the opposite view. While she may be correct that the names represent an attempt to identify with their Jewish heritage, the fact that the surviving inscriptions are almost entirely in Greek suggests that the Jewish community at Maiumas was very comfortable with their non-Jewish environment. Indeed, only one of the donors' names—Ḥananiah son of Jacob—was rendered in its Aramaic form, and even then it was duplicated in Greek.

The subject matter of the mosaics likewise suggest that the Jews of Gaza were comfortable in their surroundings. In fact, there is very little that is demonstrably “Jewish” about the mosaics. Were it not for the epigraphic evidence branding a Jewish mark on the pavements—namely, the Hebrew inscription referring to David, the Jewish names of the dedicatory inscription, and the reference to the “holy place”—the mosaics could easily have been found in a church. As discussed above, King David and the Orpheus-type are better-known from Christian than Jewish art. The appearance and form of the David-Orpheus indicate that the Jews of Maiumas were fluent in the iconographic language of their surroundings. The remaining sections of the surviving mosaics portray standard floral, geometric, and faunal motifs known from across the late ancient Eastern

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<sup>127</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987: 100, 104.

Mediterranean in all sorts of contexts (religious or otherwise). There is nothing specifically Jewish about them. Although the majority of the pavement has not survived, it is notable that Jewish motifs seen elsewhere—such as the menorah, Torah shrine, shofar, etc.—are conspicuously absent. The only apparent instances of exclusively Jewish motifs are as small incisions made into the frame of the chancel screen and on a carved column that would have stood several meters above eye-level.

My case might be overstated here, as there may have been additional motifs that were specifically Jewish in parts of the mosaic that have not survived. However, Roth-Gerson's suggestion that the Jews of Gaza lived in an uneasy relationship with their surroundings is not supported by the evidence at hand. To the contrary, the extant evidence suggests that the Jewish community was well-integrated into their Greek and Christian environment, displaying popular forms of art, using the *lingua franca* in their epigraphic expressions, and demonstrating the sorts of redemptive and soteriological beliefs common to any resident of Gaza, all set within a large, communal, religious edifice that would have imposed itself upon the urban landscape no less than the city's churches.

## **6.2 Ma'on-Nirim<sup>128</sup>**

### **6.2.1 Location and Identification**

The final synagogue of southern Palestine we will consider is Ma'on-Nirim. The site is located about 20 km south of Gaza, and about 1 km southeast of Kibbutz Nirim

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<sup>128</sup> In addition to the references below, see the following catalog entries: Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977: 302-06; Chiat 1982: 243-47; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: no. 176; Ilan 1991: 283-85; Dauphin 1998: III, 952; Milson 2007: 422-25.

(NIG 14307-26/51886-98; 31°19'44"N, 34°24'32"E). At 93 m asl, Ma'on-Nirim is about 12 km from the coast, just east of the border between the State of Israel and the Gaza Strip. The variety of names given to Ma'on-Nirim in the historical and modern sources as well as the existence of a contemporary site by the same name in the Hebron Hills (Ḥ. Ma'on; see above) create some confusion. The Arabic designation, Kh. el-Ma'in, lent its name to the nearby modern road-junction, known in Hebrew as "Ma'on."<sup>129</sup> The ruins, situated between the junction and Kibbutz Nirim (fig. 158), took the name of both.<sup>130</sup> As a result, the site is most commonly referred to as "Ma'on (Nirim)," as it appears in the published reports and in the *NEAEHL*.<sup>131</sup> Sometimes the site appears in secondary literature as "Ḥ. Ma'on" (the Hebraicized version of Kh. el-Ma'in), "Kh. Ma'on" (a linguistic composite), and "the site near Kibbutz Nirim."<sup>132</sup> Here, we will refer to the site as Ma'on-Nirim to avoid any confusion with sites of similar names in southern Palestine and Transjordan.<sup>133</sup>

As Dan Barag notes, the site is located in the biblical region of Besor, although no biblical toponym has been associated with the ruins at the site.<sup>134</sup> How the ruins came to

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<sup>129</sup> According to Avi-Yonah and Gibson (2007b), a kibbutz by the name of "Ma'on" was established in the area in 1949, but no such kibbutz exists in the area today.

<sup>130</sup> Schwartz (1986: 111, n. 7) suggests that there are two sites: Kh. Ma'in where a civilian population was settled and Ḥ. Ma'on, where a fort was located (see below).

<sup>131</sup> See Barag 1993a: 944; Avi-Yonah and Gibson 2007b. For the reports, see below.

<sup>132</sup> See *inter alia* Milson 2007 and Bohak 2008, *passim*.

<sup>133</sup> On Ḥ. Ma'on in the Hebron Hills, see above. On the site of Ma'in in Transjordan, see Piccirillo 1989: 228-34, and the brief discussion in Schick 1995: 398-99.

<sup>134</sup> Barag (1993a: 944) places Ma'on-Nirim within the region of Besor.

be known as “Ma‘in” in the Arabic sources is unclear. It is probably a corruption of the town’s name in the Byzantine period, Μηνοεῖς, which may be a Hellenized version of the local Aramaic name. The earliest attestation of Menois comes from Eusebius, who mistakenly associates the town with Μαδεβηνα (a corruption of “Madmannah,” מַדְמָנָה, Jos. 15:31), “in the tribe of Judah.”<sup>135</sup> In the Madaba Map (fig. 159), the site is labeled Μαδεβηνα ἢ νῦ(ν) Μηνοῖς (“Madebena, which is now Menois”).<sup>136</sup> Despite establishing the same erroneous connection between Menois and biblical Madmannah as Eusebius, the mosaicist did not locate Menois “in the tribe of Judah,” but rather in the approximate location of Ma‘on-Nirim. It seems the mosaicist was, in this case, better acquainted with the regional topography than with the biblical text.

Other Byzantine period sources probably mention Ma‘on-Nirim. The *Codex Theodosianus* (VII, 4, 30) refers to “castrum Moenoenum,” and the *Notitia Dignitatum (Orientis* 34, 3, 19) identifies “Menocia” as the westernmost point of the *limes Palaestinae*. According to the latter, the *equites promoti* Illyriciani was stationed there. While no fort has been identified in the vicinity of the site, Ma‘on-Nirim is the most likely candidate.<sup>137</sup> In addition, several 5<sup>th</sup>- and 6<sup>th</sup>-c. references in the acts of the ecumenical councils indicate that bishops from Menois were present at the Second Council of Ephesus (449) and the Council of Chalcedon (451).<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Eus., *Onom.* 130:7. See Avi-Yonah and Gibson 2007b.

<sup>136</sup> See Donner 1992: 74.

<sup>137</sup> Avi-Yonah and Gibson 2007b. See also Alt 1930; Di Segni 2004: 48-52.

<sup>138</sup> See Bagatti 2002: 187. For primary references, see Schwartz 1959: II, 1, 1 (pp. 58, 80, 184, 193); II, 1, 2 (pp. 71, 86, 103, 132); II, 2, 2 (p. 69); II, 3, 1 (pp. 31, 55, 182, 245, 255); II, 3, 2 (pp. 110, 141).

In the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c., the area to the south of Gaza's city-territory became two imperial estates: Saltus Gerariticus and Saltus Constantinianus.<sup>139</sup> The estates presumably were founded by either Constantine or his son, Constantius, perhaps for the same reason that Maiumas was separated from Gaza at this time, i.e., to make the Christian communities in the area independent of their non-Christian neighbors (see above on Gaza).<sup>140</sup> It has been suggested plausibly that Menois served as the center or headquarters for Saltus Constantinianus.

Despite the modest size of the town illustrated in the Madaba Map (fig. 159), Ma'on-Nirim apparently supported a diverse population. As noted above, Menois served as an episcopal see in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c. The presence of a substantial Christian community is attested further by several ornate Christian lead sarcophagi, three 6<sup>th</sup>-c. Christian funerary inscriptions, and the remains of a building identified as a church about 700 m from the synagogue.<sup>141</sup> The degree to which the cavalry unit stationed at the nearby fort overlapped with this Christian community is unknown, as is the precise extent of imperial involvement in the royal estate, but there can be little doubt that military and administrative personnel contributed to the varied population of Menois. As we will see below, the character of the synagogue reflects the diversity of its context.

### 6.2.2 Research History

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<sup>139</sup> The latter is referred to alternatively in modern literature as "Saltus Constantiniaces," based on the spelling as Σάλτων Κωνσταντινιακής in Georgius Cyprius, *Descriptio Orbis Romani* in the early 7<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>140</sup> Alt 1930: 53-54; Di Segni 2004: 48.

<sup>141</sup> On the lead sarcophagi, see Rahmani 1996. On the inscriptions, see Meimaris et al. 1992: 324-25, 328-29, nos. 10-12. On the building identified as a church, see Seriy and Nahshoni 2004.

Little work was done in the area prior to the discovery of the synagogue during road construction in 1957. The site was excavated by Shalom Levy under the auspices of the IDAM in March to May of that year and in April of 1958. A modest final report was published in 1960 in the third issue of the *Bulletin of the Rabinowitz Fund*.<sup>142</sup> In 1980, additional excavations were carried out in the vicinity of the synagogue by Ora Yogev under the auspices of the IDAM.<sup>143</sup> In 1998-99, more extensive excavations were directed by Gregory Seriy and Pirhiya Nahshoni on behalf of the IAA 700 m west of the synagogue. Seriy and Nahshoni excavated thirty-eight 5-by-5-m squares in three areas, uncovering remains from the Byzantine through Mamluk periods. Only a short preliminary report has appeared on these excavations.<sup>144</sup>

No comprehensive survey of the ruins in the vicinity of Ma'on-Nirim has been undertaken to determine the extent of the settlement or periods of occupation. Some Persian period remains were identified during the 1998-99 excavations. Little else predating the 4<sup>th</sup> c. has been reported from the site.<sup>145</sup>

### **6.2.3 Description of the Synagogue**

Despite the frequent characterization of the site as part of the northern or western Negev, Ma'on-Nirim is located within the relatively flat coastal plain, just 12 km from

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<sup>142</sup> Levy 1960; Rahmani 1960; Hiram 1960; Dunayevsky 1960; Avi-Yonah 1960a; Yeivin 1960. Preliminary reports appeared in Levy 1957, and a short reprise was presented and published in a proceedings volume of a 1967 conference (Levy 1971). A version also appeared in Hebrew in *Eretz-Israel* (Levy and Rahmani 1961; Avi-Yonah 1961b).

<sup>143</sup> A preliminary report and the excavator's conclusions were published in Yogev 1987. A pottery report (Magness 1987) appeared along with Yogev's article, but no other details or comprehensive account of the excavations or finds have been published.

<sup>144</sup> Seriy and Nahshoni 2004.

<sup>145</sup> Seriy and Nahshoni 2004.

the coast. The site has no obvious mounds or local high points. Because there has been no comprehensive survey, it is unclear as to where the synagogue was situated relative to the town. No architecture immediately adjacent to or surrounding the synagogue is noted in the reports, however, it should be noted that the remains of the synagogue likewise were not visible prior to their accidental discovery. It is possible that the building was surrounded by other structures.

Although the synagogue's mosaic has received considerable attention, the precise outline of the structure is unclear. Very little of the walls—constructed primarily of mortar and rubble and (perhaps) brick—survives. Opinions regarding the layout differed dramatically among the original excavation team, with the result that the director was reluctant to favor any conclusion. Yogev's 1980 excavations purported to resolve the issue, though a careful reading of her report suggests that her conclusion is hardly definitive. Before addressing the debate regarding the building's layout, we will examine the more straightforward features of the mosaic and the inscription.

The excavated area centered around a rectangular, polychrome mosaic carpet.<sup>146</sup> About 5 cm below this level was a floor of predominantly white tesserae with occasional red tesserae.<sup>147</sup> The remains of this earlier floor are associated with the first phase of the synagogue and Stratum II (see below on phases). Too little of the floor was recovered to determine what designs or images were represented, if any. Although the later, polychrome mosaic was conserved (Stratum I / Syn. 2; see below), there does not seem to have been any excavation carried out below the earlier mosaic.

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<sup>146</sup> The most thorough description and discussion of this mosaic is Avi-Yonah's original report (Avi-Yonah 1960a). See also Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 106-07, no. 176.

<sup>147</sup> Levy 1960: 9; Yogev 1987: 211.

About two-thirds of the later mosaic survives (figs. 160; 3.161). The size and plan can be determined with a fair degree of certainty based on the extant portions. The carpet consists of a large panel encircled by a border, beyond which (to the northeast) is a *tabula ansata* with an inscription. The mosaic measures 10.2 m NE-SW by 5.4 m NW-SE.<sup>148</sup> The inscription and the images in the border are positioned so as to be read from the southwest and facing toward the northeast. The apse discovered to the northeast of the inscription (see below) suggests the orientation of the building toward Jerusalem. The 1957-58 and 1980 excavations treated the synagogue as if it were oriented toward the cardinal directions, however, the former wrote as if the building were oriented northward and the latter wrote as if the building were oriented eastward.<sup>149</sup> Here, we treat the building as it is on the ground, oriented northeast-southwest. Wherever possible, we will refer to the wall numbers assigned by both excavations to avoid further confusion (see fig. 162).

The border of the mosaic (fig. 161) consists of a stylized flower design that is common at 5<sup>th</sup>- and 6<sup>th</sup>-c. sites in Palestine,<sup>150</sup> framing an inhabited-scrolls motif. The motif includes eleven rows by five columns, for a total of fifty-five medallions, eighteen of which are lost.<sup>151</sup> The medallions are formed by vine trellises and tendrils, similar to those seen at Eshtemoa and Gaza-Maiumas (see above), emanating from an amphora

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<sup>148</sup> Avi-Yonah 1960a: 25. Barag (1993a: 944) reports the measurements as 8.9 m by 4.95 m. Although he does not indicate his source, the measurements seem to refer strictly to the area within the border.

<sup>149</sup> See Levy 1960 and Yogev 1987.

<sup>150</sup> Avi-Yonah 1960a: 25, n.1. The style conforms to Avi-Yonah's pattern A11+B1+9+A11. Cf. Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 106, no. 176.

<sup>151</sup> Avi-Yonah 1960a: 25; Barag 1993a: 944.



located in the lowest row. Although most of the inner-left column and the entire outer-left column are not preserved, the surviving images indicate that the two left columns are mirror images of the two right columns.<sup>152</sup> The images in these columns are entirely faunal, including birds, dogs, elephants, moose, rabbits, bulls, gazelles, and leopards (see figs. 163-169). Overlapping the tenth and eleventh row from the bottom and in the two inner columns are palm trees flanked by small birds at the base of the trees. The birds' heads are turned away from the trunk. This motif has been noted already at Susiya and is known throughout Palestine.

The central column includes a variety of images: the bottommost image is the amphora from which the inhabited-scrolls' vines emanate. In the second row from the bottom is an eagle with wings spread in an heraldic pose (fig. 170).<sup>153</sup> Above this row are several depictions of vessels and containers, some empty and some filled with fruit. In the eighth row from the bottom, in the central column, is a depiction of a white hen laying an egg (or rather, having just laid an egg) in a large basin (fig. 171). The egg sits behind the bird. Above this row is a caged bird, a motif seen already at Na'aran (see above) and known from churches around Palestine (fig. 172).<sup>154</sup>

In the central column, overlapping the tenth and eleventh (uppermost) rows is a seven-branched menorah (fig. 173).<sup>155</sup> The staff and branches of the menorah are formed

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<sup>152</sup> Avi-Yonah 1960a; 25; Barag 1993a: 945.

<sup>153</sup> On the form and meaning of eagles in Jewish art, see Werlin 2006. A similar depiction of an heraldic eagle in a medallion appears in the Church of the Deacon Thomas at Mt. Nebo, where the eagle's head is flanked by "A" and "Ω" and it stands over the inscription, "ΘΩΜΑ ΔΙΑΚ," or "Thomas the Deacon"; see Piccirillo 1993: 185. See also, the depiction in the church mosaic at Petra; Fiema 2003: 244-45, fig. 268.

<sup>154</sup> See Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, index.

<sup>155</sup> See Hachlili 2001: IS3.8, fig. II-14a, pl. II-17.

by a bead-and-reel motif, as seen in several examples already (above). The tripod base has lions' feet. A narrow crossbar extends over the ends of the branches, above which are small figures that resemble muffins or cupcakes with upward projecting wicks. Presumably these are meant to be glass oil containers.<sup>156</sup> On either side of the menorah's staff, just above the base, is a depiction of an object consisting of a round upper part overlapping an ovoid lower part that is tapered at the bottom. Avi-Yonah and Hachlili identify the objects as etrogs.<sup>157</sup> This double-form, in fact, looks nothing like the typical depiction of an etrog in Jewish art.<sup>158</sup> Perhaps it is meant to depict another piece of fruit (pomegranate?) coupled with the etrog. In any case, to the left of the menorah, is another depiction of this etrog-like object, paired with a partially-preserved, long, thin object, presumably meant to be a lulav. To the right of the menorah is a curved depiction of a shofar.

As Hachlili notes, the depiction of a single menorah as a visual centerpiece is paralleled in the synagogue mosaics at Beth-Shean (B), Gerasa, Huldah, Ma'oz Hayyim, and Tel Menorah.<sup>159</sup> This is not uncommon among the synagogues of southern Palestine as well, and is attested at Na'aran and Jericho. Hachlili suggests that the use of the menorah in inhabited scrolls generally—and at Ma'on-Nirim specifically—is meant to

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<sup>156</sup> Hachlili 2001: 290.

<sup>157</sup> Avi-Yonah 1960: 29; Hachlili 2001: 290.

<sup>158</sup> See the collection of such images in Hachlili 1988: 258-59.

<sup>159</sup> Hachlili 2001: 61.

mark an otherwise religiously-neutral motif as Jewish, perhaps distinguishing it from the very similar mosaic found in the nearby Shellal church.<sup>160</sup>

Located in the uppermost row, in the columns on either side of the menorah, are lions. As with the other features of the mosaic, the lions are depicted in relatively great detail, recalling the styles of lions in the mosaics of the synagogues at Hammath-Tiberias and Sepphoris and the Church of the Lions at Umm er-Rasas, and contrasting with the flanking lions at Na'aran and Beth Alpha.<sup>161</sup> The flanking lions, a common motif in Jewish art, has been noted already in relation to the three-dimensional menorahs at Eshtemoa and Ma'on-in-Judea (see above).<sup>162</sup>

Following the suggestion of Avi-Yonah, Ovadiah proposed that the mosaics of the synagogues at Gaza-Maiumas and Ma'on-Nirim and the churches at Shellal and Hazor (south) were all produced by the same workshop, located at Gaza.<sup>163</sup> The similarities between the mosaics of the Ma'on-Nirim synagogue and the Shellal church are particularly striking. In both cases, the rectangular carpet consists of an inhabited-scrolls motif of five columns, with the vines emanating from an amphora located in the bottommost row and flanked by peacocks.<sup>164</sup> In all four cases, the mosaics share floral and faunal motifs, while avoiding human images in the medallions of the inhabited-

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<sup>160</sup> Hachlili 1988: 316; 2001: 206-08. On the similarities with Shellal, see Ovadiah 1975.

<sup>161</sup> On Hammath-Tiberias, see Dothan 1983: pls. 17, 34. On Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005: 61-65. On the Church of the Lions at Umm er-Rasas, see Piccirillo 1993: 211. On Na'aran, see above. On Beth Alpha, see Sukenik 1932.

<sup>162</sup> See also Hachlili 2001: 230.

<sup>163</sup> Ovadiah 1975; 1978.

<sup>164</sup> Ovadiah 1978: 387.

scrolls.<sup>165</sup> That said, there are many similarities between these buildings (Ma'on-Nirim specifically) and synagogues and churches elsewhere in Palestine.<sup>166</sup> Whether or not these four mosaics were produced by the same local workshop is less important for the present study than the observation that both synagogues and churches in the area employed similar motifs and styles in their religious architecture, expressing their respective identities with specific and differentiated motifs, such as the menorah at Ma'on-Nirim.

Beyond the northeast border of the mosaic carpet is a *tabula ansata* enclosing a four-line Aramaic inscription.<sup>167</sup> The beginnings of lines 1-3 are partially damaged, and the execution of the letters makes reading difficult (fig. 174). Indeed, everyone who has discussed this mosaic has suggested that the epigrapher was not familiar with the script and perhaps the language in which he wrote.<sup>168</sup> In addition, repairs are evident in several places, especially in line 2, perhaps indicating some confusion and errors on the part of the secondary epigrapher.<sup>169</sup> The inscription transliterates and translates as follows:<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ovadiah 1978: 388.

<sup>166</sup> See the criticisms outlined in Ovadiah 1978: 390-91.

<sup>167</sup> The inscription was published initially by Yeivin (1960), but cf. Naveh 1978: no. 57.

<sup>168</sup> See *inter alia* Yeivin 1960; Naveh 1978, and Barag 1993a.

<sup>169</sup> Yeivin 1960: 38.

<sup>170</sup> The transliteration and translation here are based on Yeivin 1960 and Naveh 1978: no. 57, with some slight modifications.

[Remem]bered for good be the whole community	[דכ]רין לטב כל קהלה	1
[who] made this mosaic	[די] עבדו הדין פספה	2
[??] Aisu and Thomas and Judah	ד[??] אישו ותמה ויהודה	3
who have gave three <i>denarii</i> . ( <i>characters</i> )	( <i>characters</i> ) דיהבו תלתה דינרין	4

The reference to the whole community in line 1 is reminiscent of several of the dedicatory inscriptions we have seen, in particular Jericho and Susiya, where the term *קהלה* are similarly used. Although we translate the term “community,” Yeivin preferred to translate it as “congregation,” specifying that the inscription did not reference the entirety of the Jewish community at Ma‘on-Nirim but only the congregation of this synagogue.<sup>171</sup> This is a subtle yet important distinction, since it presupposes that there were Jews living in the town that were not part of this congregation, presumably because there was more than one synagogue in the community or there were Jews who were not part of any synagogue’s congregation at Ma‘on-Nirim. The former situation is plausible, particularly since we do not know how large the town was, let alone the size of the Jewish community that lived there. Moreover, historical sources attest to multiple synagogues in Jewish towns in Galilee. Nevertheless, the evidence from the inscription is too ambiguous to testify to multiple congregations within the Jewish community of Ma‘on-Nirim.

The word *פספה* in line 2 is a variant of the more typical form *פסיפסה*, both of which are borrowed from the Greek, *ψήφος* and *ψηφωσίς*. Yeivin suggests that the

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<sup>171</sup> Yeivin 1960: 37.

variant is a southern dialect, although I am not familiar with its use in Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions elsewhere.<sup>172</sup> We have seen the term as פסיפסה at Na‘aran and Jericho as well as a Hebrew variant, פסיפוס, at Susiya (see above). Naveh attributes the use of פספה to a fairly well-attested phenomenon in Aramaic, whereby Greek loan-words drop their ending.<sup>173</sup> This means that the epigrapher was transliterating the word ψήφος, rather than ψηφωσίς, and dropping the -ος ending. If Naveh’s interpretation is correct, in those instances where the Aramaic פסיפסה and the Hebrew פסיפוס are attested, the epigrapher was transliterating the word ψηφωσίς and dropping the -ος ending. Since neither of the Greek forms—ψήφος or ψηφωσίς—is better attested in the corpus of inscriptions from Byzantine Palestine, there is no reason to suspect that the epigrapher chose פספה over פסיפסה because he was more familiar with Greek. More likely, this form was used out of a concern for space.

The reconstructions and readings of line 3 are highly problematic, as Yeivin acknowledged.<sup>174</sup> Naveh revised Yeivin’s reading of the first name, Aisu, on the basis of

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<sup>172</sup> For Yeivin’s suggestion, see Yeivin 1960: 38.

<sup>173</sup> Naveh 1978: 93.

<sup>174</sup> Yeivin 1960: 38-39.

the attestation of the name  $\text{ܐܝܫܘܐ}$  in Nabataean inscriptions.<sup>175</sup> The name Thomas is attested as a Jewish name in the New Testament, but it is otherwise unknown in Jewish inscriptions and texts.<sup>176</sup> The name was popular among Christian communities, as indicated by the epigraphic corpus.<sup>177</sup> The final personal name, Judah, was popular among the Jewish communities of Palestine, although frequently as the Aramaic equivalent,  $\text{ܕܘܕܢ}$  (Yudan). It seems therefore that the three names of this inscription are not exclusively Jewish in character. Instead, we find that two names—Aisu and Thomas—were atypical among the Jews and more common among the Nabataean and Christian communities, respectively (cultural crossover notwithstanding). Such a mixture in the character of the names is noteworthy and perhaps indicative of the cosmopolitan quality of the coastal region.

The last line of the inscription ends with seven or eight illegible characters. Yeivin describes them as “decorative scrawls” with “faint reminiscences of Greek ligatures giving the month and day.”<sup>178</sup> In fact, they bear very little resemblance to either Greek or any other script. Given the strangeness of the inscription’s script altogether, it seems likely that the characters were “magical” signs included at the bequest of the

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<sup>175</sup> Conversely, the name  $\text{ܐܝܫܘܐ}$  could be a transliterated form of the Greek name  $\text{Ἰσαῦ}$ , or Esau. Although, the Masoretic Hebrew spelling is  $\text{ܐܝܫܘܐ}$ , a Greek-speaking epigrapher or translator unfamiliar with Hebrew might have confused the spelling. The name Esau is not attested among the personal names of Greek or Hebrew/Aramaic inscriptions of Byzantine Palestine, so this suggestion is difficult to support.

<sup>176</sup> Yeivin 1960: 39. For New Testament usage of the Thomas, see e.g., Matt. 10:3, John 11:7, 8.

<sup>177</sup> E.g., see inscriptions from Mumsiyye and Khisfin in the Golan (Gregg and Urman 1996: 83-84, 213-14).

<sup>178</sup> Yeivin 1960: 40. Naveh ignores these characters altogether.

patron(s) and meant to be unintelligible (at least to an outsider). As discussed below, nineteen amulets found inside the synagogue's apse indicate that some members of this community practiced a form of Jewish magic in which incantation formulas and unintelligible language were employed. If the final characters of the inscription are understood in this context, they may very well have been part of the community's "coded language" (similar to the "secret" of the En-Gedi synagogue inscription).

Beyond the inscription (to the northeast) is the chancel area of the hall, identified by the postholes for the chancel screen which are still visible at the site (marked as C-F in fig. 162; see also fig. 175).<sup>179</sup> Since no evidence of the chancel screen or posts was uncovered, they might have been constructed of wood.<sup>180</sup> Between these postholes were two small rectangular mosaic panels depicting geometric designs. Slightly less than 2 m to the northeast of the inscription is the apse (W8), constructed of very roughly-worked limestone ashlar, measuring about 3.2-m wide, 1.8-m deep, and about 60-cm thick.<sup>181</sup> The apse is positioned along the central axis (northeast-southwest) of the mosaic carpet, and was built into the exterior wall of the building/complex, as evidenced by a small section of wall extending to the southeast (W7). Levy reports that the apse is "joined to two sections of the external wall of the synagogue," presumably meaning they were

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<sup>179</sup> Note that while at least some of the area designations were assigned by the original excavation team under Levy, these did not appear in the 1960 report. Yosef's plan (1987: fig. 1) includes the area designations. Yosef refers to these horizontally-defined excavation units as *loci*, but we shall refer to them as "Areas."

<sup>180</sup> Levy 1960: 7, 9. According to Levy, two small columns (51 by 13 cm each) were uncovered by local residents of the kibbutz prior to the excavation, however, they do not have slits and therefore seemed inappropriate for chancel screen posts to the excavator.

<sup>181</sup> Levy 1960: 6-7.



bonded.<sup>182</sup> On the other hand, Yogev assigns the apse to the second phase of construction, and Milson omits the apse in the earlier phase of the synagogue (Stratum II / Syn 1).<sup>183</sup>

In the area of the apse, a small pit was excavated (marked A in figs. 160 and 162). Although the pit was empty, surrounding it were a number of small finds including bone and ivory objects, iron nails, lamps, and nineteen metal amulets (see below on amulets).<sup>184</sup> According to Levy, the objects were probably part of a ritual deposit or community chest buried in the pit.<sup>185</sup> A similar cache was found in the Beth Alpha synagogue.<sup>186</sup> Although the precise find-spots of the objects are not recorded, it seems more likely that some, if not all, of the objects originated in a wooden Torah repository that once stood in the apse, similar to the synagogue at En-Gedi. The presence of iron nails certainly suggests a structure of some sort, and, as Rahmani notes, the bone and ivory pieces likely were furniture fittings and inlay pieces.<sup>187</sup>

Levy and Yogev provide confusing and contradictory descriptions of the chancel/bema/apse area. According to Levy, the “chancel area”—stretching the width of the nave immediately to the northeast of the inscription—was sunken about 9 cm below the level of the nave.<sup>188</sup> The sunken area is visible in the section drawing of the original

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<sup>182</sup> Levy 1960: 7. The top plan provided by Levy (fig. 160) shows only one wall next to the apse (W7).

<sup>183</sup> Yogev 1987: 212, 214; Milson 2007: 422-25.

<sup>184</sup> Levy 1960: 9.

<sup>185</sup> Levy 1960: 9.

<sup>186</sup> Sukenik 1932: 13.

<sup>187</sup> Rahmani 1960: 14-16.

<sup>188</sup> Levy 1960: 7.

excavation (fig. 160), where it appears as a narrow band (or wide trough). It is not marked on the top-plan. Yogev notes that the depth below the level of the polychrome mosaic is roughly equal to that of the monochrome mosaic of the earlier phase (Stratum II / Syn. 1) and so was probably the original floor which was not covered when the later phase's mosaic was laid.<sup>189</sup> In any case, it appears that, when walking from the nave to the chancel area, one would have to step several centimeters down into the broad trough and then up through the chancel screen and onto the bema.<sup>190</sup>

Immediately to the northeast of the sunken area, the excavators uncovered four large, roughly-worked blocks. The northeast-southwest section plan (fig. 162) indicates that the blocks were resting on a floor at the same level of the polychrome mosaic (phase 2). According to Levy, the blocks formed a bema, measuring 60 by 75 cm, which served as a podium and the base for the Torah repository.<sup>191</sup> The rest of the blocks were robbed out. Yogev proposes that the blocks served as a series of steps leading from the chancel screen to the apse, where the Torah repository would have stood. This is supported by the faint outlines of similar blocks in the sunken area and in line with the apse.<sup>192</sup> Both reconstructions are problematic. Regarding the latter, the stones are only roughly in line; it is difficult to see how these rough blocks could have served as steps. Levy's suggestion of a bema or platform is hard to accept because of the randomness of the stones' positions and the various levels created by the tops of the stones. Fig. 162 shows

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<sup>189</sup> Yogev 1987: 211-12.

<sup>190</sup> Hiram (1960: 21) suggests that the sunken area was an attempt to symbolize the notion of Ps. 130:1: "Out of the depths have I cried to you, Lord."

<sup>191</sup> Levy 1960: 7.

<sup>192</sup> Yogev 1987: 212.

that the top of the stone closest to the nave is marked at 90.87 m asl while the stone farthest from the nave is marked at 90.81 m asl, making for an uneven platform. I suggest that these stones were part of the apse-wall (W8), which collapsed after the synagogue had gone out of use. In this case, the chancel area would have been at the same level as the nave, separated by both the screen and the sunken area before it. That said, we cannot rule out the possibility that a wooden platform stood in the area between the chancel screen and the apse.

The outline of the rest of the synagogue is unclear. Levy found that the site had been robbed of much of its construction materials, with the result that none of the wall-lines of the building could be reconstructed beyond doubt and without the use of indirect evidence in the form of floor layouts and parallels (see fig. 160).<sup>193</sup> Here we will attempt to present the evidence of the excavations before considering the various reconstruction plans.

Surrounding the mosaic to the southwest and southeast, the excavators uncovered a flagstone pavement (figs. 160 and 162). With the exception of a large section of this pavement to the southeast of the mosaic, the flagstones were sparse, presumably having been robbed out (fig. 176). To the southwest, the flagstones appeared to terminate at the face of a wall running northwest-southeast (W1+W2). This wall, which apparently formed the exterior wall of the structure, was constructed of rubble and mortar.<sup>194</sup> The largest blocks used in the construction were robbed out, leaving mostly large cobbles and small boulders. According to Levy, the wall was about 1.25-m thick, and as Yogev

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<sup>193</sup> See Levy's comments in Levy 1960: 6, as well as the opinions of Dunayevsky 1960 and Hiram 1960.

<sup>194</sup> Levy 1960: 6.

points out, this was the thickest of the extant walls by over a third of a meter (see below).<sup>195</sup> The stone-by-stone plan provided by the original excavation (fig. 160) suggests that the wall-materials were so disturbed that only a very rough line of the wall could be discerned. Levy's section drawing (see fig. 160) indicates that W1 was not excavated down to its foundations and that it was not evident in a complete course across. Yogevev must have observed this point when she refuted Levy's proposal of a triportal facade for W1+W2, opting instead for a single entrance through the wall.<sup>196</sup>

The original excavation uncovered a section of a wall 6.2 m to the southeast of the mosaic (W3). Unlike the southwest wall (W1+W2), an extant course of this wall as well as sections of the foundation were preserved. The former was constructed of *kurkar* (eolianite) blocks measuring 45 by 30 cm in top-plan, creating a wall 90-cm thick.<sup>197</sup> About 6 m from the presumed location of the corner created by the southwest and northeast walls (see fig. 162), the southeast wall (W3) ends and is traversed by a cobble path (Area N).<sup>198</sup> The path, measuring 80-120 cm in thickness, extends from just inside the inner face of W3 to the southeast beyond the (presumed) exterior wall of the synagogue and terminating at the end of a square installation (marked as Area K in fig. 162). The installation (fig. 177) is formed by four narrow walls (W20-23), all plastered

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<sup>195</sup> Levy 1960: 6; Yogevev 1987: 212.

<sup>196</sup> For Levy's suggestion of a triportal facade, see fig. 160, where the arrows indicate the location of the three doorways, as well as Levy 1960: 6. For Yogevev's proposal of a single entrance, see fig. 162, as well as Yogevev 1987: fig. 1.

<sup>197</sup> The depth of the blocks is not recorded. See Levy 1960: 6. On *kurkar* and eolianite, see Brooke 2001: 136.

<sup>198</sup> The measurement is an estimate; the precise distance is not reported.

on the interior faces and enclosing an area of roughly 2.50 by 2.25 m.<sup>199</sup> Levy noted that there was an entrance to the installation through the northeast wall (W20), but no clear break in the wall is visible today.<sup>200</sup> Three steps within led to the bottom of the installation, about 74 cm below the ground level.<sup>201</sup> Based on the size, shape, structure, and context of the installation, the excavators identified this feature as a *miqveh*.<sup>202</sup> According to Yogev, the *miqveh* was established at the same time as the synagogue, though she does not indicate to which phase she believes it belongs.<sup>203</sup> There is nothing about the structure of the synagogue or the path leading to it that would suggest any chronology relative to the adjacent wall of the synagogue (W3). Whether or not the *miqveh* antedates the construction of the synagogue is therefore unclear.

Although Levy and Yogev indicate that the path leading to the *miqveh* passed through the exterior wall of the synagogue, no evidence of the wall to the northeast of the *miqveh* was uncovered (see fig. 160). A short, narrow line of stones running northeast-southwest about 10 m to the southeast of the mosaic and 4 m to the northeast of the path (labeled W5 in fig. 162) may be evidence of an exterior wall here. The southeast wall of

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<sup>199</sup> Levy 1960: 11.

<sup>200</sup> Levy 1960: 11.

<sup>201</sup> Levy 1960: 11.

<sup>202</sup> Levy 1960: 11; Yogev 1987: 212. Barag (1993a: 944) was skeptical about whether or not the *miqveh* was contemporary with the synagogue. Cf. Reich 1991: 106-7, 336; 1995: 295. Reich questions the identification of this feature as a *miqveh* because (a) its relatively shallow depth would have required the walls to extend partially above ground and (b) it could not have been filled with rain water from roof tops. I disagree with Reich's skepticism. Regarding his first point, there is no reason to assume that late ancient *miqva'ot* should be as standardized in form as those of the Second Temple period. The evidence of the *miqva'ot* at Sepphoris display a range of forms. See Galor 2007; Miller 2007a. Regarding his second point, it is unclear which parts of the synagogue complex at Ma'on-Nirim were roofed (see below). In any case, Reich presents no alternative suggestion as to what this feature is, so as it stands, it is best identified as a *miqveh*.

<sup>203</sup> Yogev 1987: 212.

the synagogue could not have continued along the line established by W3 on account of a second water installation and a channel (Areas I and L respectively in fig. 162), as well as a section of flagstone pavement in the east corner of the excavated area. Levy described this water installation as an ashlar-built, circular cistern, measuring about 3.5 m in diameter and set into the ground to a depth of at least 1.5 m (fig. 178).<sup>204</sup> The cistern was fed by the channel (labeled L in fig. 162), which began in the south corner of the complex and ran northeastward to the cistern (see fig. 179). The channel does not appear to have supplied water to the *miqveh*. The trajectory of the channel curves around the cistern to the northeast side, terminating at a smaller basin (perhaps a settling tank), from which the water flowed into the cistern.<sup>205</sup> If W3 continued northeastward along its established trajectory, it would have run over the channel and the cistern, which seems unlikely.<sup>206</sup>

On the northeast side of the cistern, a second inlet in the form of a ceramic pipe fed water to the settling tank. The pipe was traced for some distance to the northeast of the excavated area. Little else is reported regarding the character of this feature or where the line terminates. Presumably, this second water source traveled beneath the proposed northeast wall of the complex. Unfortunately, no direct evidence for any wall in the east corner of the excavated area was uncovered. A hypothetical section of the northeast wall was labeled W6 (see fig. 162). Its existence was deduced by the straight edge of the flagstone pavement's extant portion in the east corner of the site running northwest-southeast. It is curious that these pavers cover an area that extends beyond the northeast

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<sup>204</sup> Levy 1960: 9. Levy indicates that the cistern was excavated to a depth of 1.5 m.

<sup>205</sup> Levy 1960: 9.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. the proposed plans of Dunayevsky and Hiram (below).

limit of the trajectory of W7, a short section of the northeast wall abutting the apse (see fig. 162). That is to say, the northeast wall of the structure was not a straight and unbroken line. So, in consideration of these paving stones, the cistern, and the water channel, Yogev (following Hiram, see below) reconstructed the plan of the east corner so that the corner juts outward from an otherwise rectangular plan.

W7, along with the apse (W8), constitutes the only extant portions of the northeast wall of the structure. As stated above, it is unclear how W7 and W8 were joined. In 1980, Yogev opened a small trench northwest of the apse, traversing the presumed line of the northeast wall (Area T in fig. 162). No evidence of the wall or its foundations was uncovered here, so the renewed excavations were unable to verify the location of this wall.<sup>207</sup> Although the large blocks probably were robbed out over the centuries, it is surprising that the excavators were unable to detect any remains of the rubble-and-mortar construction (such as scattered cobbles and rough fieldstones) or any signs of a robber's trench. It seems, therefore, that—despite her hypothetical W9 (see fig. 162)—Yogev's inability to confirm the location of the northeast wall in Area T casts further doubt on the proposed layout.

Directly northwest of the mosaic, Yogev continued and expanded excavation areas that were begun by Levy's team in 1957. Area S comprised a rectangular trench, measuring 5 m NW-SE by 6 m NE-SW.<sup>208</sup> In this area Levy uncovered irregular flagstones of a pavement, but too little survived to assign it to either phase of the

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<sup>207</sup> Yogev 1987: 209.

<sup>208</sup> Yogev 1987: 208.

synagogue.<sup>209</sup> His plan (fig. 160) indicates that the top of this pavement was at 91.02 m asl, about a quarter-meter above the level of the polychrome mosaic.<sup>210</sup> Without acknowledging this discrepancy, Yogeve assigns the pavement to Stratum I / Syn. 2.<sup>211</sup>

Below Yogeve's Stratum I pavement in Area S, at a level of 90.90 m asl, the excavators uncovered an earlier pavement, constructed of similar irregular and rough stones (fig. 180).<sup>212</sup> Although this pavement was 15-20 cm higher than the polychrome mosaic, Yogeve assigned the newly-discovered floor to Stratum II / Syn. 1. That is to say, she proposed that an earlier floor—less than 3 m away—was up to 20 cm higher than the later floor and 30 cm higher than the contemporary monochrome mosaic of the first phase (see the section drawing in fig. 162). As we shall see below, this situation required Yogeve's reconstruction to impose a wall (W16) to isolate the mosaic within in a larger complex.

Below the pavement assigned to Stratum II / Syn. 1, Yogeve uncovered a layer of potsherds, below which was another pavement of rough and irregular stones (fig. 180). The uneven stones of this pavement were between 90.70 and 90.81 m asl, roughly the same height as the polychrome mosaic (see fig. 162). Yogeve assigned this pavement to Stratum III, a phase not identified in the 1957-58 excavations and apparently pre-synagogue.<sup>213</sup> Below this Stratum III pavement (fig. 180), at around 90.60 m asl, Yogeve

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<sup>209</sup> Levy 1960: 9.

<sup>210</sup> Levy does not note the level of these paving stones in his report, but cf. Yogeve 1987: 208.

<sup>211</sup> Yogeve 1987: 208.

<sup>212</sup> Yogeve 1987: 208-09.

<sup>213</sup> Yogeve 1987: 208.



identified a hard, white plaster layer, several centimeters thick, and covered in patches of ash, which may be evidence of an earlier occupation (Stratum IV?).<sup>214</sup>

About 1.5 m to the northwest of Area S, Yogev opened Area R, measuring 1.5 m NW-SE by 7.0 m NE-SW.<sup>215</sup> At a level of 90.30 m asl, she encountered a line of foundation stones, about 75-cm thick, running northeast-southwest for about 4.5 m (see fig. 162). These stones apparently served as the foundation of the northwest wall of the synagogue complex (W10), about 7.8 m to the northwest of the edge of the polychrome mosaic. As Yogev points out, the level of the foundations correspond to those uncovered from the southeast wall (W3), suggesting that the two architectural elements are contemporary.<sup>216</sup>

Several meters southwest of Areas R and S, Levy's excavation uncovered two short sections of wall creating a corner (W11 and W12 in Areas P and Q in fig. 162).<sup>217</sup> In light of the discovery of the northwest wall (W10) in Area R, Yogev noted that if this wall continued southeastward, W11, W12, and a hypothetical W13 would create a small room measuring 4 m NW-SE by 1.5 m NE-SW.<sup>218</sup> A paving stone found in the proposed room suggests that the floor level was roughly the same as those beyond W11 and W12 (i.e., around 90.80 m asl), so the room should be contemporary with the later phase of the

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<sup>214</sup> Yogev 1987: 208.

<sup>215</sup> Yogev 1987: 208.

<sup>216</sup> Yogev 1987: 208.

<sup>217</sup> See Levy 1960: 6.

<sup>218</sup> Yogev 1987: 211.

synagogue, if not earlier.<sup>219</sup> Yogevev hypothesizes that such a small room could have been used for storage, as similar rooms have been identified in synagogues elsewhere (see above on En-Gedi, Susiya, and Rimmon). Nevertheless, the evidence for this room's size and purpose is meager. Despite Yogevev's suggestion, two of the four walls are conjectural, as is the assumption that these walls were even part of the synagogue complex (see below).

In addition to the fragmentary remains of the walls, five column bases were found at the site. The excavators could verify that only one of these—found immediately to the northeast of W12, and set in the flagstones—was in its original position. The others may or may not have been in situ. Regardless, the proposed reconstructions of the edifice have moved all or some of the columns or left them in their findspots (see below). Even less clear is a small, circular depression in the floor southwest of the mosaic, next to the hypothesized entrance (labeled G in fig. 162).<sup>220</sup> Levy and Avi-Yonah suggested that this was for the base of a small column or a stand for a stone bowl.<sup>221</sup> Hiram and Yogevev, however, suggested that this was for the base of a larger column that served a structural purpose. No photographs of this depression have been published. Small circular depressions and large vessels sunk into the floor near the doorway have been found in synagogues and churches elsewhere, including Susiya (fig. 181) and one of the churches (Building B) at Magen.<sup>222</sup> These features rarely receive much attention in excavation

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<sup>219</sup> Yogevev 1987: 211.

<sup>220</sup> Levy 1960: 9.

<sup>221</sup> Levy 1960: 9. Avi-Yonah in Dunayevsky 1960: 24.

<sup>222</sup> On Magen, see Tzaferis 1985: 3-4, fig. 4.

reports. In some cases, the depressions are plastered over or incorporated into the mosaic pavement, and thus could not have served as pits for the foundation stone of a column base. The function of these circular depressions is unclear.<sup>223</sup>

Much of the debate surrounding the layout of the Ma'on-Nirim synagogue concerns the interpretation of the areas running along the lateral edges of the mosaic pavement (fig. 160). The northwest edge of the mosaic pavement is not well enough preserved to provide useful information. Along the southeast edge, however, Levy uncovered a gap of about 45 cm between the edge of the mosaic and the line of paving stones.<sup>224</sup> The proposed reconstructions presume that this gap was either the place of a wall or a stylobate.

According to Levy, a column base found just beyond the south corner of the mosaic was the first of four running in a line northeastward toward the apse.<sup>225</sup> He states that “[t]he position of three other columns is shown in situ by their foundations.”<sup>226</sup> In his plan (fig. 160), the base of the corner column is visible, as is the square foundation stone of the column third from the southwest, marked at a level of 90.78 m asl, i.e., just a few centimeters above the level of the mosaic pavement. A smaller, square stone visible in the plan may mark the location of the column closest to the apse, and a larger square

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<sup>223</sup> There has been no extended discussion of this typical feature in churches and, less commonly, in synagogues with mosaic pavements. Tzaferis (1985: 4) suggests that this was used as a type of drain for washing the floor. Dr. Robert Schick informed me that these are common in the churches of Transjordan, though they often go unreported (personal communication, May 2009). He suggested that they may be used as wash basins of some sort. Considering the widespread practice of ritual ablution in church and synagogue complexes, it is surprising that no one has suggested that these were used for foot-washing. On the Jewish practice of foot washing, see Bar-Ilan 1992.

<sup>224</sup> This is reported by Yogev 1987: 211.

<sup>225</sup> Levy 1960: 9.

<sup>226</sup> Levy 1960: 9.

stone, broken in one corner, may mark the location of the column second from the southwest.

On the basis of the 45-cm gap, the column base in the south corner, and the three square stones in a line with a northeastward trajectory toward the apse, Immanuel Dunayevsky suggested that this row of columns was paralleled on the northwest-side of the mosaic to form a central nave (fig. 182).<sup>227</sup> According to his reconstruction, the flagstone-paved areas on either side of the nave consisted of two aisles. The area in front (southwest) of the mosaic pavement was paved in flagstones as well. Without considering the southeast wall (W3), Dunayevsky suggested the synagogue's plan was that of a standard basilica with a triportal facade. He hypothesized a lateral wall for the building running northeast-southwest between the most well-evidenced portion of flagstones southeast of the mosaic (his southeast aisle) and the water channel. This plan puts the cistern (I) and the *miqveh* (K) outside the synagogue. On the northwest side of the building, Dunayevsky suggested that W13—the short section of wall that Yogev proposed was part of a storage room (see above and fig. 162)—is the remnants of a wall running northeast-southwest as the northwest exterior wall of the basilica. Dunayevsky's reconstruction—called the “basilica reconstruction”—was supported by Avi-Yonah.<sup>228</sup>

Conversely, A. S. Hiram suggested that the 45-cm gap alongside the mosaic was the line of a wall (fig. 183; labeled as the hypothetical W14-W15 in fig. 162).<sup>229</sup> The

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<sup>227</sup> Dunayevsky 1960.

<sup>228</sup> Dunayevsky 1960: 23-24.

<sup>229</sup> Hiram 1960.

column base and foundations uncovered by Levy's excavation supported pillars that were built into this wall to provide structural support. In this reconstruction, a parallel wall ran along the northwest edge of the mosaic (labeled in fig. 162 as the hypothetical W18). On the southwest edge of the mosaic and in line with the column base in the south corner, a wall with a single portal enclosed the hall to recreate a narrow, one-room synagogue. According to Hiram, the circular depression uncovered by Levy (see above) supported a small column that was paralleled on the other side of the entrance as flanking columns in *antis*. To the southwest of the main hall, the paved area was roofed, as suggested by the two stray column bases and third column set into the flagstones running roughly in a line northwest-southeast (figs. 160 and 162). According to Hiram, the areas on either side of the main hall were unroofed courtyards. Hiram suggests that the largest of the rectangular stone column foundations uncovered by Levy in the 45-cm gap on the southeast side of the mosaic (see above) was a threshold for a side doorway leading out to the southeast courtyard in the direction of the *miqveh*.

Yogev prefers Hiram's suggestion that the 45-cm gap was the base of a wall. She points out that small stones scattered inside the gap are typical of foundations of brick walls in the region.<sup>230</sup> Her conclusion is supported by Levy's comment that this space was "full of debris."<sup>231</sup> Although Levy does not elaborate on the nature of this debris, mudbrick tends to decay over time, leaving behind the sort of lumpy and amorphous matrix that may not have been readily identifiable as the remains of a mudbrick wall. Moreover, Yogev argues, mudbrick walls do not necessarily need massive stone

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<sup>230</sup> Yogev 1987: 211.

<sup>231</sup> Levy 1960: 9. Yogev 1987: 211, n. 16 mentions Levy's comments in this regard.

foundations, as ashlar walls do. As evidence, she cites Buildings B and C at the nearby site of Magen. However, the mudbrick walls without foundations at Magen are only for internal walls and partitions—not external walls that supported the roof.<sup>232</sup> The absence of roof tiles at Ma‘on-Nirim may suggest that the synagogue’s roof was constructed of lighter, perishable materials (*pace* Yogev). Nevertheless, external mudbrick walls without stone foundations would have been susceptible to undermining by rainwater. As a result, Yogev’s suggestion of a mudbrick wall is difficult to accept.

As it stands, none of the proposals is convincing. Dunayevsky’s reconstruction is based on a standard basilical layout that is unsupported by the evidence. Most problematic are the lateral walls he proposes, which are—for lack of a better term—imaginary. The triportal facade that was suggested by Levy is not only poorly-evidenced but posits a southeast entrance that lies outside the southeast lateral wall proposed by Dunayevsky (compare figs. 160 and 182). The reconstruction proposed by Dunayevsky is based on comparisons with Galilean-type synagogues instead of on the findings at the site.

Hiram’s proposal, modified slightly by Yogev, is similarly problematic. Yogev rightly dismisses Dunayevsky’s reconstruction on account of his imaginary lateral walls on the northwest and southeast sides.<sup>233</sup> However, neither Hiram nor Yogev adequately deals with the 45-cm gap between the southeast side of the mosaic and the flagstone pavement. They ignore two of the column base foundations uncovered by Levy (compare figs. 160 and 162). While it is possible that the line of columns (as evidenced

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<sup>232</sup> See Tzaferis 1985: 4-5.

<sup>233</sup> Yogev 1987: 211.

by the rectangular stones and the column base) was built into a mudbrick wall as a means of structural support, it seems more likely that they followed the line of a stone stylobate that was not supported by subterranean foundations.<sup>234</sup> The fact that the stones of the stylobate do not survive is consistent with evidence of robbing activity elsewhere around the site.<sup>235</sup> Had a mudbrick wall stood here, one would expect to see some sort of foundation. Last, the southwest transverse walls (W16-W17) proposed by Yogev (following Hiram) would cover the circular depression at the southwest end of the mosaic (see figs. 162 and 183). While the lack of published evidence regarding this feature makes its function a matter of conjecture, our suggestion that it is similar to other circular depressions and sunken vessels in churches and synagogues (see above) conflicts with the positioning of a wall over it.

Despite the problems surrounding Dunayevsky's reconstruction of the synagogue, his assumption (following Levy) that the 45-cm gap alongside the mosaic is the impression of a stylobate and columns seems more likely than the proposition of Hiram and Yogev. Given the criticisms of Dunayevsky's plan (above), as well as the additional evidence in Areas R and S uncovered by Yogev, we agree that a basilical reconstruction is not possible. It seems most likely that the flagstone pavements to the southeast and southwest of the polychrome mosaic were roofed. The lack of evidence of any walls surrounding the mosaic on the southeast or southwest sides supports the possibility that W1, W2, W3, and W7—as well as the hypothetical W4, W5, and W6—formed the exterior walls of the synagogue in the southeast half of the edifice. The rubble-and-

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<sup>234</sup> This was the case of the stylobates in Buildings B and A at Magen.

<sup>235</sup> Levy 1960; see also Seriy and Nahshoni 2004. In Building B at Magen, the stylobate was robbed out almost entirely, while paving stones in several areas were left, similar to the situation at Ma'on-Nirim.

mortar construction with foundations suggests that these were substantial walls that could have supported wooden beams for a roof.

The evidence for the northwest-half of the structure is complicated by Yogev's discoveries in Area S. The discrepancy in floor levels between the paving stones uncovered there and the mosaic (see above and the section drawing in fig. 162) suggest that one had to step up into the section of the hall northwest of the mosaic. Moreover, the character of these stones differs dramatically from the rectangular flagstones found elsewhere in the complex.<sup>236</sup> The uneven surfaces and roughness suggest that they did not pave an interior space but were part of an open courtyard. If this is correct, W10 in Area R would not have served as the exterior northwest wall of the building. Nevertheless, W10 remains the most likely candidate for the exterior wall. Unfortunately, the state of preservation along the northwest edge of the mosaic limits our ability to determine whether the construction of the nave was symmetrical, with a colonnade on the northwest side as well.

We therefore conclude that the entire area was occupied by a roofed building measuring about 23.2-m wide along the northeast side, 21.0-m wide along the southwest side, and 17.2-m long NE-SW.<sup>237</sup> In the second phase (and perhaps also the first), the nave was paved in mosaic and the surrounding sections with flagstones. A row of five or six columns extended southeast-northwest across the width of the building about 3 m northeast of the southwest wall (W1-W2). Two additional rows of four columns each extended southwest-northeast along either side of the polychrome mosaic. A drainage

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<sup>236</sup> Yogev 1987: 208.

<sup>237</sup> For dimensions, see Yogev 1987: 212.



channel ran below the floor and terminated at a cistern located in the east corner of the building. A *miqveh* just outside the southeast wall of the facility probably was enclosed and roofed with perishable materials. On the northwest side of the building, the floor level was raised. The numerous columns make it possible that there was a second story, though it seems unlikely that the broad areas on either side of the nave served as a gallery for seating. There might have been gallery seating over the aisle formed by the row of columns running southeast-northwest. The internal floor space would have encompassed about 360 m<sup>2</sup>, resulting in a maximum occupancy of approximately 480 to 1,122 people.<sup>238</sup>

A comparison between the plan of the actual finds provided by Levy (fig. 160) and the reconstructions of Dunayevsky (fig. 182), Hiram (fig. 183), and Yogev (fig. 162) underscores the conjectural nature of all the proposed layouts, including my own.<sup>239</sup>

#### 6.2.4 Phases and Dates

Levy's excavation identified two phases to the synagogue. The later phase (Stratum I / Syn. 2) is attested by most of the extant features, including the polychrome mosaic, the flagstone pavements to the southeast and southwest of the mosaic, and various architectural fragments. In Area S, Yogev associates the uppermost stone

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<sup>238</sup> No permanent stone benches were reported by Levy (contra Milson 2007: 422-25). On the lower floor, the usable floor space could allow for as many as 28 portable, wooden benches at 15 m in length (facing toward the northeast). These benches could support as many as 952 congregants. Upper-story galleries running the width of the hall (17-m long by 3-m wide) could allow for an additional 5 benches, enough space for another 170 people. Thus, the upper limit of the maximum occupancy estimate is calculated at 1,122 people. Alternatively, if there was no second-story seating, and the congregants sat on the floor and required room for prostration, the 360 m<sup>2</sup> of usable floor space could support 480 people with space for prostration. For methodology and coefficients, see Spigel 2008: 178, Table 3.1 and *passim*.

<sup>239</sup> Indeed, the reconstruction presented here is not without its own problems: (a) It is unusual to have a drainage channel and cistern in the main hall of a synagogue, (b) floors are not commonly mixed with mosaic and flagstones in this manner, (c) the raised and uneven floor of Area S suggests exterior space, and (d) there is no clear evidence for any enclosure for the *miqveh*.

pavement with this later phase of the building, although it is several centimeters higher than the level of the mosaic (see above). There is no evidence of a conflagration or deliberate destruction of the building. The synagogue seems to have been simply abandoned.

The earlier phase (Stratum II / Syn. 1) is represented only by the scant remains of a white mosaic with some red tesserae below the polychrome mosaic. It is unclear whether the apse was included in this phase or was added in Syn. 2 (see above). Yogeve assigned it to the second phase, though without explanation.<sup>240</sup> While no section drawing of the apse has been published, the top plan (figs. 160 and 162) seems to indicate that it was not bonded with W7, suggesting that the apse was not part of the original construction. A small section of pavement uncovered in Area S was associated with Stratum II, despite being several centimeters higher than the lower mosaic pavement in the nave.

Yogeve identified at least one floor and possibly two below Stratum II in Area S (see above; fig. 180), labeled Stratum III and IV. Neither of these can be associated conclusively with the synagogue.

Because much of the construction material was robbed out in antiquity, the site's stratigraphy is disturbed.<sup>241</sup> The most important evidence for determining the date of the second phase of the synagogue (Stratum I) should come from below the polychrome mosaic. Unfortunately, no datable finds were reported from below the mosaic. However, several coins were uncovered "between foundation stones" (probably of W3) that were

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<sup>240</sup> Yogeve 1987: 214. See also Milson 2007: 425.

<sup>241</sup> Levy 1960: 6; Magness 1987: 223.

dated to 527-538.<sup>242</sup> It is unclear whether this wall and its foundations belong to Stratum II or Stratum I. Levy seems to prefer the former, while Yogev prefers the latter—neither with an explanation.<sup>243</sup> In any case, a 6<sup>th</sup>-c. date of construction is consistent with the ceramic report from the 1980 excavations.<sup>244</sup> The numismatic and ceramic evidence both suggest that the synagogue had gone out of use by the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>245</sup>

### **6.2.5 The Amulets**

Among the finds in the apse were nineteen metal amulets inscribed with magical formulas in Aramaic. This cache of amulets is unparalleled among ancient synagogues.<sup>246</sup> The amulets were rolled up and some were wrapped in woven material.<sup>247</sup> Rahmani suggests that threads uncovered with the amulets indicate that they were either worn around the neck or perhaps suspended within the Torah repository.<sup>248</sup> At the time of excavation, the amulets could not be opened without destroying them, so they were deposited in storerooms until the 1980s, when they were brought to the Israel Museum for conservation. Since that time, three have been unrolled successfully. These were published in the corpus of Naveh and Shaked.<sup>249</sup> Although a comprehensive discussion of these amulets and their use in the synagogue is beyond the scope of the

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<sup>242</sup> Rahmani 1960: 18.

<sup>243</sup> See Levy 1960: 11; Yogev 1987: 214.

<sup>244</sup> Magness 1987.

<sup>245</sup> Levy 1960: 11; Rahmani 1960: 18; Magness 1987: 223.

<sup>246</sup> Bohak 2008: 151.

<sup>247</sup> Rahmani 1960: 15.

<sup>248</sup> Rahmani 1960: 15.

<sup>249</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 90.

present work, we have reproduced the transliterations and translations as published, with slight modifications.

The first measures 130 by 45 mm:<sup>250</sup>

I am who I am. In the name of Q[....]h, Shenron, 'Arsakhi'el, N[...]	[א]היה [א]שר אהיה בשם ק [ ]ה שרונ ארסכיאל נ]	1
...]'el, Mashnidah, Sakhsakh, Doqun, Doqun, and 'A[...	[אל משנידה שמגרון סכסך דוקון דוקון וא]	2
...]'el, Barqiel, Uriel, Milḥamiel, 'ah, 'ah, 'ah, 'ah, 'ah, 'ah, 'a[h ...	[אל [ב]רקיאל אוריאל מלחמיאל אה אה אה [א]ה א[ה]	3
... you should depart from the head of Natrun, the daughter of Sarah, Amen, A[men ...	[א דתתקרון מן רישה דנתרן בריתה דשאר[ה] אמן א[מן]	4
... which is] called <i>kephalargia</i> and goes into the bones (?) of the chest	[דמתקרייא קפלרגיא ועלא בכורכוריא דניא ולא]	5
in the n]ame of Nagdiel, the angel who is bound by chains, which are not of [b]ronze and [...	[בש]מה ד[נ]גדיאל מלאכה דכביש בשושלן דלא ד[נ]חש ובש]	6
... which is] not of iron and in the name of Naḥshur and in the name of Suriel, the ang[el ...	[דלא דפורזיל ובשמה דנחשור ובשמה דסוריא [ל] מלא]כה	7
... blast-demons and tormentors, and shadow-spirits should flee away from her. Joel, Joel ...	[זיקין ומזקין וטלנין יערקון מנה יואל יואל ]	8
... Na]trun, daughter of Sarah. In the name of 'Ewah, Halusa', El, Ba'el, Rab[...]	[נתרון בריתה דשארה בשם אוה הלוסא אל באל רב]	9

<sup>250</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 90-94, Amulet 11, pl. 10, fig. 13, IDA no. 57.733. I have added vowels to the personal names of angels here. While the vocalization of the Aramaic names is unknown, probable vowels have been included for the sake of simplicity and consistency with those names whose vocalization is known, such as "Uriel."

... remove from the bones (?) of her chest and from her head ...	תעקרו מן כורכוריא ] דניה ומן רישה ]	10
[...]	[ ... ]	11

The second amulet measures about 115 by 38 mm:<sup>251</sup>

I [adjure] against every spirit and against every ...	[משבע] אנה על כול רוח ועל כול [ ] ]	1
... in the name of Abrasax, who is appointed over ...	[ ] בשם אברסכס דממני ע]ל [ ]	2
... and the guardian of the boys ...	[ ] א ונטר טליא במ] [ ]	3
... guard of the child [of Sh]lam[ṣu]	[ ] יא טור ולד]ה דש]למ]צו]	4
... of the blessing ...	[ ] ה דברכתא לנ] [ ]	5
[I-am]-who-I-am	[אהיה] אשר אהיה ] [ ]	6
... of his/her mother; and in the nam[e] ...	[ ] דאמה ובש]ם [ ]	7
...	[ ] ארא וכף א] [ ]	8
[I adju]re you, spirit, ...	[אשב]עת עליך רוחא ] [ ]	9
... that you should not force (?) and [not]	[ ] תא דל]א (א) תכ]פ]ין ו]לא [ ]	10
... [Shla]mṣu daughter of ...	[ ] של]מצו ברתה ד] [ ]	11
... and to the spirit that is lodging ... [you should not]	[ ] ולרוח באתא ] דלא] [ ]	12

<sup>251</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 94-997, Amulet 12, pl. 11, fig. 14, IDA no. 57.739.

[be] seen to Shlamṣu dau[ghter of] ...	[תתח]מין לשלמצו ב]רתה ד [	13
[neither at] night and not during the da[y] ...	לא ב]ליליא ולא בימ]מא [	14
... in the great name ...	[ בשמא רבא בש]מ [	15
[of Host]s Holy, Holy, Ho[ly, Holy]	[צבאו]ת קדוש קדוש קדוש [קדוש]	16
[Hol]y, Holy, Holy [“God of vengeance]	[קדו]ש קדוש קדוש [אל נקמות]	17
[Lord] God of vengeance [appeared” (Ps. 94:1)]	[יי] אל נקמות [מופיע [	18
[the Lor]d God, God [of Israel ...]	[אדו]ני אל אלוה]י ישראל [	19
[King of] the King of King[s] ...	[מלך] מלכי מלכי]א [	20
<i>lines 21-23 illegible</i>		
... God of Hosts ...	[ אל צבאות ש] [	24
... Yeḥish Yeḥi[sh] ...	[ יחיש יחי]ש [	25
...	[ ] [	26
... Shaddai ...	[ שדי ש] [	27
[the G]od, God [of] ...	[ אלוהים אל ] [	28
... Yah, Yah, Yah ...	[ יה יה יה ] [	29
...	[ ] [	30
... hero ...	[ גיבור ] [	31

I [adjure] against you, spirit	[אשבע]ת עליך רוח ] [	32
[that you should not] be seen and not ...	[דלא ת]תחמין ולא ] [	33
... the child of Sh[lamšu] ...	[ולדה דש]למצו ] [	34
<i>lines 35-39 illegible</i>		
[I-am-]who-I-am ...	[אהיה א]שר אהיה ] [	40
... the Lord God ...	[ אדוני א]ל ] [	41
...	[ ] ] [	42
... La, La, La, La ...	[ ל ל ל ל ] ] [	43
... Holy ...	[ קדוש ] ] [	44
...	[ ] ] [	45

The third amulet measures 88 by 35 mm:<sup>252</sup>

...	[ ... ]	1
A proper [a]mulet for Esther,	[ק]מיע טב לאסתר	2
Daughter of Tettius (Titus?)	[ב]רתה דטאטיס	3
[to] save her from	[ל]פלטא יתה מן	4
the evil [to]rmentors,	[מ]זקין [בי]שין	5
[from] evil eye,	[מן] עין בישה	6
[from] spirit, from demon,	[מן] רוח מן שיד	7
[fr]om shadow-spirit, from	[מן] טלני מן	8
{all} evil tormentors,	[כל] מזקין ביש[ין]	9

<sup>252</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985: 98-101, Amulet 13, pl. 11, fig. 15, IDA no. 57.744.

[from] evil eye, from	[מזן] עין רעה מזן	10
... from im[pure] spirit,	[ ] מזן רוח טמ[אה]	11
... “if you will diligent[ly]	[ ] אם שמו[ע]	12
heed the L[ORD]	[ת]שמע בקול י[יי]	13
your [G]od, and do what is right	[א]להיך והישר	14
in His si[ght], giving	[ב]ע[יניו] תעשה	15
e[ar]	[והאזנת]ה	16
[to] his [co]mmandments	[למ]צוותיו	17
[and] keeping all his [laws]	[ו]שמרתה כל ח[וקיו]	18
[(then) all] the diseases whi[ch]	[כל] המחלה אש[ר]	19
[I brought upon the Eg]yptians	[שמתי במ]צרים	20
[I will not bring upon you]	[לא אשים עליך]	21
for I the LORD am your healer. (Ex. 15:26)]	[כי אני יי רפאך]	22
...	[...]	23

The use of amulets among the Jews of late antiquity is well-attested in the literary sources.<sup>253</sup> The amulets from Ma‘on-Nirim have much in common with the corpus of known Jewish amulets, including their adjuration of God and various named angels for help, healing, and protection.<sup>254</sup> They are representative of the broader use of amulets in magical praxis throughout the Mediterranean and Near East in a variety of religious contexts of late antiquity.<sup>255</sup> Indeed, the amulets include angelic names and formulas that are non-Jewish in origin.<sup>256</sup> The subject matter of these amulets makes their presence in

<sup>253</sup> Bohak 2008: 150.

<sup>254</sup> Bohak 2008: 152; Eshel and Leiman 2010.

<sup>255</sup> Bohak 2008. Cf. Eshel and Leiman 2010: 198, who point out that the manner of deposition of Jewish *lamellae* differs from any known phenomenon in churches.

<sup>256</sup> Bohak 2008: 260-61.



the synagogue unexpected. Amulets concerned with specific individuals and personal healing are more likely to have been worn than deposited.<sup>257</sup> As Gideon Bohak suggests, their presence in the apse underscores the local reverence toward the Torah and its sacred repository within the synagogue.<sup>258</sup> Whether these were deposited to amplify the healing power of the amulets or as a permanent interment (i.e., a *geniza* or “post-success dedication”) is less clear.<sup>259</sup> The number of amulets and the fact that they remained there rather than being collected after the individual was healed suggests the latter. The cache at Ma‘on-Nirim is such a singular example that it is tempting to consider this a local practice. That said, there can be little doubt that many Jews in late antiquity wore amulets. Why the community at Ma‘on-Nirim deposited these objects in or under the Torah shrine is a mystery.

#### **6.2.6 Conclusion**

As the above discussion shows, the remains of the synagogue’s architecture are so scant that any reconstruction is problematic and conjectural. The fact that the building does not conform to a standard plan—contra Dunayevsky, Avi-Yonah, and Hiram—reinforces the point that reconstructions based on comparative evidence rarely provide neat solutions in the study of synagogues. In the case of Ma‘on-Nirim, the state of preservation presents an interesting situation, in that time has whittled away nearly all features of the edifice with the exception of the mosaic pavement and the well-constructed apse. With these features, the Jews of Ma‘on-Nirim communicated in the

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<sup>257</sup> Bohak 2008: 315.

<sup>258</sup> See Bohak 2008: 315-16, who suggests that this is analogous to the modern Jewish practice of placing folded paper with personal wishes in the cracks of the Western Wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

<sup>259</sup> Bohak 2008: 316-17; Eshel and Leiman 2010: 198.

same artistic and architectural language in their religious edifice as the neighboring non-Jewish communities, a point underscored by the epigraphic evidence and attestation of “magical” practices within the synagogue.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

Two questions were posed at the outset of this study (section 1.2.1). To summarize:

- (1) *Chronology*. What are the dates of these synagogues and their phases, and how do these chronological factors affect our understanding of the ancient synagogue in Palestine?
- (2) *Synagogue regionalism*. What characteristics of these ten synagogues, if any, unite them as a cohesive group? Based on the archaeological evidence, was regionalism a factor in determining the physical characteristics of these buildings? What methodological contributions does a regional study of these ten synagogues make to synagogue studies?

The first issue, chronology, has been dealt with most extensively in this study and therefore receives the fullest treatment in the concluding chapter. The second issue, regionalism, reaches a negative conclusion. That is, the features that appear to unite these ten synagogues do not form a unit distinct from those in the north. The discussion below summarizes some characteristics and addresses how the buildings are more similar to those of Lower Galilee and the Beth-Shean region than the synagogues of the Golan. In addition to these two issues, the analyses above have highlighted those characteristics

of the synagogues that might provide evidence for inter-religious relations between Jews and their neighbors. Section 7.4 below summarizes some of these features and suggests how they might be addressed in future studies of Jewish-Christian relations in late antique Palestine.

## **7.2 Chronologies of the Synagogues of Southern Palestine**

### **7.2.1 The Beginning of the Southern Synagogues**

Let us begin by summarizing the conclusions reached above regarding the construction dates of the synagogues' earliest phases (see Appendix A). At En-Gedi, the evidence from the village suggests that the synagogue was constructed as early as the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. The synagogue at Ma'on (in Judea) might have been constructed during the 4<sup>th</sup> c., although a 5<sup>th</sup>-c. date is possible. The remains from Susiya suggest that the village was not occupied prior to the second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> c., but the published remains from the synagogue do not indicate whether the building dates from that century or later. At 'Anim, the ceramic evidence favors a 5<sup>th</sup>-c. date for construction, but a 4<sup>th</sup>-date is possible. For the synagogues at Eshtemoa and Ma'on-Nirim, the earliest phases appear to date to the 5<sup>th</sup> c. The synagogues at Na'aran and Gaza-Maiumas almost certainly date to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. and at Jericho probably either the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c. In the case of Rimmon, we are without firm criteria to suggest a date for the earliest phase.

Eusebius characterizes several Late Roman villages in southern Palestine as Jewish (see above, section 1.3.2). In addition, rabbinic evidence suggests that in the Late Roman period, Jews conducted liturgical activities in synagogues.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, none of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see *m.Berakhot* 7:3; *m.Terumot* 11:10; *m.Eruvin* 10:10; *m.Pesahim*. 4:4; *m.Sukkah*. 3:13; *m.Rosh Hashannah* 3:7; *m.Shevu'ot* 4:10. On tannaitic literature attesting to synagogues in 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c., see Fine 1997 and Meyers 2010b.

the archaeologically-attested synagogues in southern Palestine evidenced phases predating the 4<sup>th</sup> c. Assuming that the literary sources are dated correctly, there are three possible explanations to account for this discrepancy:

- (1) Later structures obscure the remains of synagogue buildings dating to the Late Roman period.
- (2) The Jews of southern Palestine did not build *any* synagogues in the Late Roman period, and the rabbinic evidence attesting to the existence of Late Roman synagogues refers to the communities of northern Palestine only.
- (3) The Jews of southern Palestine in the Late Roman period did not build large, decorated synagogues, as they did in the Byzantine period.

The first suggestion is unlikely. The excavators at En-Gedi, Susiya, Eshtemoa, Ma'on (in Judea), 'Anim, and Rimmon identified multiple phases in the synagogues. Despite their conclusions, I was unable to verify that these early phases predate the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. There is no reason to suspect that the excavators missed evidence of earlier structures below these synagogues. While future discoveries may uncover Late Roman synagogues below later structures in southern Palestine, it would be an argument from silence to suggest that their apparent absence is a matter of archaeological preservation. Such an argument would necessitate that all Late Roman buildings in southern Palestine were obscured by later constructions, which is not the case. Moreover, the intensity of archaeological survey throughout the country makes it unlikely that such buildings are merely awaiting discovery.

The second suggestion—that Jews built no synagogues in southern Palestine during the Late Roman period—is confounded by literary evidence attesting to the use of

synagogues during the Late Roman period. While the archaeological evidence for Jewish presence in southern Palestine during the Late Roman period is rather sparse, the rabbinic evidence testifies to Jewish communities throughout the area and Eusebius confirms the presence of established Jewish villages in the south by the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> c.

Is it possible that Jews lived in southern Palestine and did not build any synagogues? Such a proposal follows the thesis suggested by Seth Schwartz in *Imperialism and Jewish Society* for all of Jewish Palestine.<sup>2</sup> Schwartz argues that the failure of two revolts against Rome, coupled with the annexation of Palestine, “shattered” Judaism, leaving the Jewish people without identifiable material culture until its reemergence in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>3</sup> Schwartz considers traditionally Greco-Roman motifs—for example, in the necropolis at Beth She‘arim and the city coins of Late Roman Galilee—to be evidence of the abandonment of Jewish religious ideology and full assimilation into Greco-Roman culture.<sup>4</sup>

Schwartz’s study has received a number of criticisms, mostly regarding his characterization of the rabbinic movement as marginal in Late Roman Palestinian society.<sup>5</sup> Regarding Schwartz’s interpretation of the archaeological evidence, the underlying assumption behind his argument reflects that of Erwin Goodenough: traditional Judaism cannot be reconciled with Greco-Roman figural art. To explain the apparent contradiction between rabbinic sources and the archaeological evidence,

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<sup>2</sup> Schwartz 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Schwartz 2001: 15.

<sup>4</sup> Schwartz 2001: 129-61.

<sup>5</sup> Fine 2004: 58; Eliav 2004: 118-19; 124-26; Millar 2006; Miller 2007: esp. 337-38; Meyers 2010b.

Goodenough posited an alternative “Hellenistic Judaism.”<sup>6</sup> Schwartz, on the other hand, proposes that most Jews simply abandoned the religious principles developed during the Second Temple period. Such a position runs counter to the important studies by scholars of late ancient Judaism—such as Lee Levine, Stuart Miller, Steven Fine, Zeev Weiss, and Yaron Eliav—whose work in rabbinics and material culture in recent years has demonstrated that traditional Judaism and Greco-Roman art are not mutually exclusive.<sup>7</sup> In a sense, it regresses the debate surrounding Jewish art to an absolute either-or argument.

Regarding the synagogue evidence of southern Palestine, Schwartz has a point. Where are the Late Roman synagogues? The answer, I believe, lies in the third suggestion above: the Jews of southern Palestine in the Late Roman period did not build large and richly decorated religious edifices as they did in the Byzantine period. Instead, their synagogues were modest buildings which are not readily identifiable in the archaeological record.

The rabbinic evidence supports this conclusion. Tannaitic sources (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c.) treat the synagogue as a physical place distinguished only by the presence of a chest or ark (תיבה) and the liturgical activities that take place there, such as the recitation of the

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<sup>6</sup> Goodenough 1953-65. Interestingly, Goodenough’s thesis was sparked in part by the discovery and publication of the Dura Europos synagogue, where Jewish motifs and biblical scenes are blended with Hellenistic and Persian styles. Schwartz does not include this 3<sup>rd</sup>-c. synagogue as it is outside Palestine.

<sup>7</sup> Levine 2003; Miller 2004; Fine 2005; Weiss 2005; Eliav 1998.

*Shema* and Torah reading.<sup>8</sup> The overall impression is that 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. synagogues were not grand or elaborate structures.<sup>9</sup> As Lee Levine writes:

For all the richness of rabbinic material with respect to our subject [i.e., the ancient synagogue], it is devoid of any overall picture of the synagogue as an institution. Instead, these sources focus on certain liturgical components of synagogue (and private) worship, i.e., key prayers and the Torah-reading, as well as the use of the synagogue as a place of study. Material relating to other aspects of the institution—communal functions, synagogue officials, benefactors, *interior and exterior design* [my emphasis], furnishings, etc.—is relatively sparse and noted only en passant.<sup>10</sup>

The sages' omission of the synagogue's physical aspects may be a result of their disinterest with such matters or with the synagogue altogether.<sup>11</sup> However, the rabbinic views toward the synagogue expressed in amoraic literature suggest that the character of the building changed from the Late Roman to Byzantine periods. Based on his study of the rabbinic sources, Steven Fine suggests that the "templization," i.e. *imitatio templi*, of the synagogue did not reach its full form until the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods, a conclusion shared by Joan Branham's study based on theoretical models of sacred

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<sup>8</sup> See *m.Meg.* 4:3. Generally, the synagogue is mentioned in the Mishnah only tangentially; see *m.Berakhot* 7:3; *m.Terumot* 11:10; *m.Eruvin* 10:10; *m.Pesahim*. 4:4; *m.Sukkah*. 3:13; *m.Rosh Hashannah* 3:7; *m.Shevu'ot* 4:10. Based on tannaitic evidence, Fine 1997: 35-59 suggests that the internal layout of the Late Roman synagogue was arranged in front of the Torah shrine, though even this minor stipulation is not clear from the Mishnaic evidence.

<sup>9</sup> The existence of purely functional synagogues meeting only the minimal requirements throughout the Late Roman and Byzantine periods has been noted by others despite the lack of archaeological evidence for such structures. See Miller 1998: 64 (and the sources cited there), who cautions against the preoccupation with only those synagogues that are identifiable in the archaeological record. See also McKay 1998; cf. Levine 2004b.

<sup>10</sup> Levine 2000a: 165. See also Miller 1998: 63.

<sup>11</sup> For a minimalist position regarding the role of rabbis in the ancient synagogue, see Levine 2011.



space.<sup>12</sup> During the Byzantine period, the rabbis increasingly bestowed sacrality on the synagogue, identifying it as a *miqdash me'at*, or “lesser temple.”<sup>13</sup>

Although their studies rely on textual sources, both Branham and Fine note that the archaeological evidence supports the notion of increased synagogue sacrality during the Byzantine period. Fine argues that this reconceptualization of the synagogue in late antiquity was expressed in the embellishment and standardization of the Torah shrine and by the Temple imagery found in the artistic repertoire.<sup>14</sup> Branham argues that Jews emphasized the increased sacrality of the synagogue during the Byzantine period with the division of internal space, evidenced most clearly by the chancel screen.<sup>15</sup> Both Branham and Fine also point to inscriptions referring to the synagogue as a “holy place,” just as we have seen at Na‘aran and Gaza-Maiumas.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the apse and the permanent stone-built bema did not become common features in synagogues before the 4<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>17</sup> Fine connects the widespread appearance of the apse to the embellishment of the Torah repository as a sacred shrine for the scrolls.

Fine and Branham both focus on the internal aspects of the synagogue: furniture, layout, spatial divisions, decoration, symbolic motifs, and inscriptions. All of these are evidenced in the synagogues of southern Palestine. The mosaic floors and relief carvings

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<sup>12</sup> Branham 1995; Fine 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Branham 1995: 331; Fine 1997: 67-94.

<sup>14</sup> Fine 1997: 95-126.

<sup>15</sup> Branham 1995: 331-33.

<sup>16</sup> Branham 1995: 333-35; Fine 1997: 97-105.

<sup>17</sup> Milson 2007: 105.

described above include a variety of sacred imagery referencing the Temple and Torah, such as the “four kinds” (lulav and etrog), the shofar, the Torah shrine facade, and the menorah (see Appendix C).

In addition, the external appearance, size, and location of the building can emphasize the importance and perhaps sacrality of the southern synagogues. Levine suggests that Jews preferred to build synagogues in specific types of locations.<sup>18</sup> These preferences vary, as we have seen in the southern synagogues. In the cases of Na‘aran and Jericho, the synagogues do not appear to have been built adjacent to or in domestic areas and perhaps even were outside the town altogether, though it is unclear what, if any, meaning should be applied to this.<sup>19</sup> Despite a comment from the Babylonian Talmud indicating that it was not unusual to place synagogues beyond the official boundaries of the city, archaeological evidence suggests otherwise.<sup>20</sup> In southern Palestine, seven of the ten synagogues were in or near the center of the town or, in the case of Gaza-Maiumas, in an otherwise densely settled area of the city.<sup>21</sup> Again, it is difficult to know how to interpret this. More significant though is the situation at Susiya, Ma‘on (in Judea), ‘Anim, Rimmon, and perhaps Eshtemoa, where the synagogues are situated on relative high points in the village. The elevated positions of the Susiya and Rimmon synagogues are particularly striking. There can be little doubt that the placement of these

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<sup>18</sup> Levine 2000a: 292.

<sup>19</sup> The case for the location of the synagogue relative to the town at Ma‘on-Nirim is less clear.

<sup>20</sup> See Levine 2000a: 292, referring to *b. ‘Eruvin 55b*. Levine cites only the synagogue at Gush Ḥalav as an example of a synagogue outside the town, but the excavators disagree; see Meyers et al. 1990: 246-47.

<sup>21</sup> As noted above, the extent and layout of Maiumas is unclear, but the areas surrounding the synagogue included various structures.

synagogues on elevated positions was a deliberate attempt to make the building stand out in the village.<sup>22</sup>

The materials used to construct several of these synagogues may also have marked their importance. While the structures at Na‘aran, Jericho, En-Gedi, and Ma‘on-Nirim were built of roughly hewn blocks and fieldstones, the synagogues at Susiya, Eshtemoa, Ma‘on (in Judea), ‘Anim, and Rimmon were built mostly of well-cut ashlar or faced with large blocks.<sup>23</sup> The appearance of these buildings would have contrasted them with the surrounding architecture, perhaps emphasizing the synagogues’ importance.<sup>24</sup>

The synagogues discussed above that were not impressive externally—Na‘aran, Jericho, En-Gedi, and Ma‘on-Nirim—were decorated with mosaic floors. Other features and details inside these synagogues also marked their importance, such as apses or bemas, but it was the mosaic floor that allowed for the preservation and identification of these four buildings. All of these buildings were uncovered accidentally. Na‘aran was

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<sup>22</sup> For a rabbinic comment suggesting a preference for elevated spots for synagogues, see *t.Megillah* 3:23; Levine 2000a: 296.

<sup>23</sup> Although very little of the superstructure survives at Ma‘on (in Judea), the lower courses were constructed of large ashlar. The fact that the remaining stones were robbed out may suggest that they were well-cut blocks as well. The five synagogues built of ashlar and block-facing are also the most densely concentrated group among the southern synagogues. One could argue that they were built in this manner simply because the architects employed local building materials that were not as readily available in the other sub-regions of southern Palestine. Nevertheless, the fact that the synagogues employed these building materials while the other buildings in the villages did not suggests that the synagogue buildings had special importance. On the construction materials used in villages, see above and Hirschfeld 1984; 1995; Baruch 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in the case of the Gaza-Maiumas synagogue, the sheer size of the great hall would have endowed the building with importance. Not incidentally, the building materials that marked these synagogues’ significance and made them externally impressive also allowed for their preservation in the archaeological record. This point is underscored by the few Second Temple period synagogues (see below), in which the only example not preserved at a site destroyed during the First Jewish revolt (Qiryat Sefer) is also the only one constructed of ashlar. See Magen et al. 2000; 2004. The recent finds from Magdala (Migdal) in Galilee may be another case of a Second Temple period synagogue built of ashlar masonry, though the finds so far suggest a modest hall.

exposed by artillery fire, Jericho was unearthed during crop cultivation, En-Gedi was found during preparation for the construction of a parking lot, and Ma'on-Nirim was found during road construction. At Gaza-Maiumas, the great hall must have been impressive from the exterior, but there too it is primarily the mosaic pavement that survived and allowed for identification. If these buildings had earthen floors—or even flagstone or coarse, monochrome pavements—they likely would not have been identified as synagogues.

External opulence and decorated mosaic pavements did not become common in the synagogues of southern Palestine before the 4<sup>th</sup> c., but Jews apparently decorated their synagogues in other ways. Despite rabbinic evidence suggesting that synagogue sacrality developed in the Byzantine period (see above), Jews might have marked their synagogues' importance in ways that do not survive in the archaeological record, as, for example, with painted walls. In fact, the only uncontested 3<sup>rd</sup>-c. synagogue, Dura Europos, is also that with the most lavishly decorated walls among synagogues from antiquity. The layout of the Dura Europos synagogue is that of a relatively small meeting room, having been converted from a domestic structure. The painted walls, however, lend a sense of grandeur to the otherwise modest hall. Were it not for the impressive paintings, the building would not have been identified as a synagogue. The wall paintings were preserved only because of a set of unusual circumstances: the building was filled with earth during the Persian siege, and the site was never reoccupied. Evidence of painted walls rarely survives beyond a few fragments, even when lower portions of the walls are preserved, as the evidence of painted plaster from En-Gedi,

Ma'on (in Judea), and Rimmon demonstrates (see above).<sup>25</sup> Therefore, despite the conclusions of Fine and Branham regarding increased synagogue sacrality during the Byzantine period, it is possible that Jews decorated their synagogues during the tannaitic period. Synagogues with painted walls could easily be lost to the archaeological record.

It is also possible that Jews of Late Roman southern Palestine worshiped in synagogues that are archaeologically indistinguishable from domestic architecture. Stuart Miller has suggested that even during the Byzantine period, large synagogues, such as at Na'aran, En-Gedi, Eshtemoa, and Ma'on-Nirim, and "grand synagogues," such as at Gaza-Maiumas, were exceptional, and that most people conducted liturgical activities among smaller groups in modified houses or *batei midrash*.<sup>26</sup> Rabbinic texts also suggest the use of exterior spaces for liturgical activities.<sup>27</sup> Miller contends that the *batei keneset* known from rabbinic sources should be understood as "places of meeting" in the broadest sense.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, evidence of Late Roman synagogues in southern Palestine might be obscured if Jews continued the tradition of the late Second Temple period, building modest halls that lacked the sorts of decoration of their Byzantine-period counterparts. Josephus and the Gospels attest to the pervasiveness of the institution throughout 1<sup>st</sup>-c.

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<sup>25</sup> Evidence of painted plaster also has been discovered in the synagogues at Beth She'arim, Capernaum, Hammath-Tiberias, Rehob, Qaşrin, Kh. Shema', and H. Sumaqa. In each case, no more than a few fragments or so survive, thus allowing the Dura synagogue to remain a singular example.

<sup>26</sup> Miller 1999: 60. This should not be surprising since "mass" worship among Christians in Palestine was also a product of the Byzantine period.

<sup>27</sup> See Spigel 2008: 326, 420.

<sup>28</sup> Miller 1998; 1999.

Palestine, but only a few synagogues have been identified.<sup>29</sup> These include Masada, Gamla, Herodium, Qiryat Sefer, and Magdala (Migdal).<sup>30</sup> All of these are relatively modest halls. Only the building at Magdala is paved with mosaics, although according to the limited preliminary reports, the pavements are not decorated with the sorts of figural imagery or faunal and floral designs seen in later synagogues. A stone table decorated with a menorah suggests the building's use as a synagogue, as does the context.<sup>31</sup> Masada, Gamla, Herodium, and Qiryat Sefer were identified as synagogues based on their character as meeting halls—established by their size, layout, and the presence of stone benches lining the walls—and their Jewish contexts. The synagogues at Masada, Gamla, and Herodium are preserved because the buildings were never reoccupied following their destruction.<sup>32</sup> Analogous sites do not exist for the Late Roman period, so modest synagogues might go unnoticed in the archaeological record.

Given the literary and archaeological evidence, we must conclude that the Jews living in southern Palestine during the Late Roman period likely did not build the sorts of large, richly decorated synagogues known from the 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. The points outlined above—including increased synagogue sacrality during the Byzantine period, the media of synagogue decoration, the use of domestic or exterior space, and the variable preservation of sites—present probable, non-mutually-exclusive explanations for the absence of Late

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<sup>29</sup> Only the identifications and dates of the Masada and Gamla synagogues are uncontested. On the paucity of archaeological evidence for the 1<sup>st</sup>-c. synagogue compared to late antiquity, see Levine 2004b: 91.

<sup>30</sup> I do not include here the hall identified as a synagogue at Hasmonean Jericho. See Netzer 1999 and cf. Schwarzer and Japp 2002. On Qiryat Sefer, see Magen et al. 1999; regarding the building's date, cf. Spiegel 2008: 218.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Flesher 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Byzantine occupation is attested at Masada and Herodium, but there is no evidence to suggest that the synagogues were in use at that time.

Roman synagogues in the archaeological record of southern Palestine. From this perspective, the material evidence does not conflict with the literary sources.

### **7.2.2 The End of the Southern Synagogues**

Avi-Yonah suggested that Byzantine Christian intolerance of Judaism during the 6<sup>th</sup> c. led to the violent destruction of many synagogues.<sup>33</sup> He believed that the conversion of the Gerasa synagogue to a church supported this scenario. While it is possible that imperial attitudes and local zealotry aroused occasional violence against Jewish communities, the archaeological evidence discussed above does not attest to the widespread destruction of synagogues in southern Palestine during the 6<sup>th</sup> c. In fact, all of the late ancient synagogues of southern Palestine appear to have continued in use beyond the 6<sup>th</sup> c. En-Gedi, Rimmon, Gaza-Maiumas, and Ma'on-Nirim, and perhaps also Ma'on (in Judea) and 'Anim likely went out of use during the 7<sup>th</sup> c. Susiya, Eshtemoa, Na'aran, and Jericho continued to function as synagogues until at least the 8<sup>th</sup> c. As a result, none of these synagogues can be associated with Christian destructions in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. To the contrary, the evidence analyzed above indicates that at least two of the southern synagogues were newly built during the 6<sup>th</sup> c., while several others were renovated at that time. That is to say, the later Byzantine period appears to have been a time of prosperity for at least some Jews in southern Palestine.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, only two or three of the synagogues appear to have met violent ends. The En-Gedi synagogue was destroyed along with the village at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. Yizhar Hirschfeld, who excavated the structures north of the synagogue, suggested

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<sup>33</sup> Avi-Yonah 1978: 1132.

<sup>34</sup> On the level of prosperity in Palestine in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> in general, see Magness 2003: 195-214.

Bedouin attacks as the cause of the massive conflagration,<sup>35</sup> but given the date, the Sasanian conquest in 614 seems equally, if not more, likely. Evidence of hasty abandonment and a fire at Na‘aran suggests violent ends there and at Jericho some time during the 8<sup>th</sup> c. or later. Although the political turmoil of the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. or the earthquake of 749 are possible causes, the evidence is too limited to identify a specific event.

The synagogues at Susiya, Eshtemoa, and ‘Anim appear to have been converted into mosques. Only at ‘Anim is there evidence of abandonment between the building’s use as a synagogue and a mosque. At Susiya and Eshtemoa we should not necessarily assume that the community was uprooted and replaced, as it is possible that a peaceful transition to Islam occurred among the village’s inhabitants. At Susiya, the evidence also allows for the possibility that the main hall of the building continued to function as a synagogue while the courtyard was used as a mosque in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>36</sup>

The evidence of synagogue abandonment during the 7<sup>th</sup> c. is even less clear. The synagogues at Gaza-Maiumas, Ma‘on-Nirim, and Rimmon appear to have ceased to function during the 7<sup>th</sup> c. without later reuse. The remains from Gaza-Maiumas and Ma‘on-Nirim are so meager that it is difficult to determine the means by which the occupations ended. However, the lack of burn-marks on the mosaics—as at Na‘aran and En-Gedi—might suggest abandonment instead of violent destruction.

As the matter stands, the archaeological evidence cannot determine the precise reasons that these synagogues went out of use. Given the variances in date and probable means, there does not seem to be a single event or policy that ended the history of these

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<sup>35</sup> Hirschfeld 2008: 1720.

<sup>36</sup> As noted above, such a scenario has been identified at the Kathisma Church in Jerusalem. See Avner 2008: 1832.



ten buildings and their communities. To be sure, the dates above eliminate 6<sup>th</sup>-c. Christian persecution as the cause of widespread synagogue destruction in southern Palestine. Future studies should consider the political and religious contexts of the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c., as well as specific circumstances of the villages and sub-regions, to understand the end of these synagogues' histories.

### **7.3 Synagogue Regionalism and Southern Palestine**

In Chapter One and in section 7.2 above, we addressed the shortcomings of the traditional synagogue typology. It is now generally accepted that the types identified in early synagogue studies are contemporary and do not reflect a diachronic development. The regional studies of Foerster, Ma'oz, and Amit (see above) offer a more synchronic approach to the question of synagogue typology, suggesting building types specific to Galilee, the Golan, and the southern Hebron Hills, respectively. Although the characteristics among the synagogues of these groups can vary, regional groupings are perhaps useful as organizational and hermeneutical tools.

In considering the characteristics of the ten southern synagogues, it is important to distinguish between those features that unify them as a *distinct group* among synagogues elsewhere. That is to say, many common aspects of these synagogues—such as orientation, use of dedicatory inscriptions, figural mosaics, etc.—are not distinct from synagogues in the north. These features do not favor a regional approach. In addition, it is important to note the difficulty of summarizing the evidence from elsewhere in Palestine for comparison. The detailed discussions of the southern synagogues above were necessary in nearly every case due to the inadequacy or absence of published

reports. This criticism can be extended to synagogue sites elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> As a result, the conclusions presented here must be considered preliminary.

### **7.3.1 Architectural Plans**

As noted above, the regional typologies of the three previous studies grouped the synagogues by architectural plan.<sup>38</sup> For the southern synagogues, we have endeavored to reconstruct the most likely plan of each building throughout its history. Even a cursory comparison of the plans underscores the variety found among these ten buildings (fig. 184). Others have noted the similarity between the broadhouse plans of the Susiya and Eshtemoa synagogues (see above). Likewise, Amit identifies the common feature of eastern portals among all four synagogues in the southern Hebron Hills.<sup>39</sup> Kloner suggests that the Rimmon synagogue similarly had an eastern portal in an early phase, although the evidence is unclear. The occurrences of other architectural features—including apses or niches, forecourts or atriums, porticoes or narthexes, auxiliary rooms, and second stories—do not seem in any way significant or distinct from the synagogues in northern Palestine.<sup>40</sup>

### **7.3.2 Mosaic Pavements**

Nine of the ten southern synagogues include a mosaic floor in at least one phase. Rimmon is the exception. In the cases of Ma'on (in Judea) and 'Anim, flagstone

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<sup>37</sup> Notable exceptions are the publications of the Meiron Regional Project and the Sepphoris synagogue. Early excavations published by Sukenik—especially at Hammat Gader and Beth Alpha—provided an important model for publishing synagogue excavations as monographs.

<sup>38</sup> Ma'oz 1995 subdivides the Golan synagogues based on stylistic criteria and identifies a chronological progression among these sub-groups. That said, it should be noted that most of the synagogues in Ma'oz's study have not been fully excavated.

<sup>39</sup> Amit 2003.

<sup>40</sup> For comparison, see Chiat 1982: Tables 3, 5, 8-10.

pavements replaced earlier mosaic floors. In northern Palestine, mosaic pavements are proportionately less common, although many of the buildings have not been fully excavated and so it is possible that mosaics underlie the extant flagstones. Nevertheless, flagstone pavements predominate among the excavated Galilean-type synagogues and those of the Golan.<sup>41</sup> Of the thirty known synagogue buildings in Galilee, the Beth-Shean valley, and the Mt. Carmel region, only sixteen preserve evidence of mosaic pavements.<sup>42</sup> As with the southern synagogues, there are examples in the north that varied between phases. Arbel, for instance, apparently was paved with mosaic in an earlier phase and then repaved in flagstones.<sup>43</sup> Mosaic pavements are unattested among the Golan synagogues except at Qaşrin.<sup>44</sup> Although this might suggest that mosaic pavements were preferred among the southern synagogues, a consideration of regional preferences among the northern synagogues suggests otherwise. Of the seventeen examples of synagogue mosaics in northern Palestine, only two—Meroth and Qaşrin—are located in the

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<sup>41</sup> Galilean-type synagogues with flagstone pavements include: Gush Ḥalav, Bar‘arm (the large synagogue), Capernaum, Chorazin, Arbel, and perhaps Hammath-Tiberias North. (The Arbel synagogue included a mosaic pavement in its earliest phase.) Among the Golan synagogues, flagstone pavements are found at Kanaf, ‘Ein Nashut, Dabiyeh, Umm el-Qanatir, ed-Dikkeh, and Qaşrin. As many as ten other synagogues in the Golan probably also had flagstone pavements, however, these have not been excavated or published fully. See Ma‘oz 1995.

<sup>42</sup> These include the synagogues at: Rehob, Ma‘oz-Hayim, Beth-Shean (Kyrios Leontis synagogue), Beth Alpha, Japhia, Beth Yerah, Ḥammat Gader, Hammath-Tiberias, Kafr Misr, ‘Ammudim, Arbel, Wadi el-Hammam, Tiberias, Sepphoris, Ḥusifah, and Meroth.

<sup>43</sup> Ilan 1991: 117; Milson 2007: 302-05.

<sup>44</sup> Qaşrin included a mosaic in its second phase; see Ma‘oz and Killebrew 1988: 8. Ḥammat Gader includes a mosaic pavement, although it is more closely connected geographically with the cities and villages of Lower Galilee and the Beth-Shean valley. Regarding the relative dearth of mosaics in the Golan synagogues, it should be noted that of the nineteen known examples, evidence of the flooring has been uncovered only at six.

northernmost regions of Upper Galilee and the Golan. It would be more accurate to suggest that the synagogues of Upper Galilee and the Golan favored flagstone pavements than to suggest that the synagogues of southern Palestine favored mosaic pavements. That is, we should not consider mosaic pavements to be a distinct unifying characteristic of the southern synagogues.

### **7.3.3 Stone Relief Decoration**

Only two of the ten southern synagogues—Eshtemoa and ‘Anim—were decorated with stone relief work. “Relief work” here excludes the sorts of shallow-incised images, such as the column capital from Jericho (fig. 39), the chancel screen decorations from Susiya, ‘Anim, and Gaza-Maiumas (figs. 91-97, 128, 143-44, 146), and the incised flagstones from Rimmon (figs. 135-36). In some cases though, such as Na‘aran and Ma‘on-Nirim, this absence of stone relief work might be due to the state of preservation. In northern Palestine, just over half of the extant synagogue buildings preserve evidence of stone relief decoration. As with the evidence of mosaic versus flagstone pavements in the north, the lines are drawn roughly along sub-regional boundaries, with Upper Galilee and the Golan providing the vast majority of synagogue relief work and Lower Galilee almost none.

### **7.3.4 Water Installations or Basins**

Nine of the ten southern synagogues include some sort of water installation or basin, Jericho being the exception. At Na‘aran and En-Gedi, the installations are permanent above-ground basins that could *not* have been used for bodily immersion. At Susiya, Eshtemoa, Ma‘on (in Judea), ‘Anim, and Rimmon, there are large subterranean cisterns below the synagogue, which presumably collected water for a variety of

functions. In most cases, it is unclear whether or not these subterranean cisterns predate the synagogue. At Gaza-Maiumas, a marble basin was uncovered (fig. 157). A stone basin was reported also at Eshtemoa.<sup>45</sup> Only one synagogue, Ma'on-Nirim, provides evidence of an installation that probably was associated directly with the building and could have served as a *miqveh* (fig. 177), though as noted above, *miqva'ot* were uncovered adjacent to the synagogues at Susiya and En-Gedi.

The evidence from elsewhere in Palestine is difficult to summarize for comparison. Many of the synagogues in the north, particularly in the Golan, have only been surveyed or have not been reported adequately enough to determine whether water installations or basins are present at the site. Of the thirty-three northern synagogues for which sufficient evidence has been uncovered and reported, only seven preserve remains of water installations.<sup>46</sup> Geographically, these seven sites stretch from Upper to Lower Galilee and the Beth-Shean region and exclude the Golan. It should be noted that none of these synagogues has portable stone basins, such as the example from Gaza-Maiumas.<sup>47</sup> Of these seven northern instances, only the installation at Kh. Shema' could have been used for a *miqveh*, and in that case, it is unclear if the pool was contemporary with the

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<sup>45</sup> The stone basins, known as a *כיור* or *גורנה* in rabbinic literature, are considered by some scholars to be a typical feature of synagogue courtyards and atriums in antiquity; see Levine 2000a: 308. Nevertheless, no comprehensive study has addressed the occurrences of this feature in the archaeological evidence (to my knowledge). Some rabbinic texts suggest that stone basins were used for hand- and foot-washing; see Bar-Ilan 1992: 162-69. Water from subterranean cisterns could have been used to fill smaller basins—portable or permanent—of the sort evidenced at Susiya (fig. 181), 'Anim, and Gaza-Maiumas. Permanent basins are known from synagogues in the north (see below).

<sup>46</sup> These include Arbel, Beth Alpha, Hammath Tiberias (IB-IA), Sepphoris, Meroth, Kh. Shema', and Gerasa.

<sup>47</sup> A large, barrel-shaped stone vessel uncovered beneath the floor at Sepphoris is not contemporary with the synagogue; see Weiss 2005: 310.

construction of the synagogue.<sup>48</sup> In the six other cases, the installations were in the form of subterranean pools or cisterns located in the forecourt or narthex, or in a small chamber in the main hall.

The discrepancy in the occurrences of water installations and basins between the northern and southern synagogues may be significant. That said, the lack of thoroughness in the reporting of such features may contribute to the apparent rarity in the north.<sup>49</sup> In any case, it seems that there is a starker contrast between the situation in the south and Galilee, on the one hand, and the Golan on the other, though again, the fact that the majority of the synagogues in the latter region have not been fully excavated makes this a tenuous conclusion.

### **7.3.5 Liturgical Foci: Bemas , Chancels, Torah Shrines, Apses, and Niches**

In the present study, a bema has been defined as a raised platform, used for leading liturgy, reading Torah, addressing the congregation, and perhaps delivering priestly benedictions.<sup>50</sup> A chancel—a term typically used in church architecture—is any delineated area that serves as the focal point of the prayer hall. In churches, this is where the altar is placed, while in synagogues, the chancel area, usually delineated with stone or

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<sup>48</sup> See Meyers et al. 1976: 40-41.

<sup>49</sup> In some cases, the feature may have been misidentified. For example, at Arbel, a permanent basin built into the exterior wall next to the building's northern entrance was identified as a "charity chest"; see Ilan and Izdarechet 1993: 88. On the feature's more probable identification as a water basin, see Levine 2000a: 308.

<sup>50</sup> On the use of the bema, or the *dukhan*, for priestly benedictions, see Safrai 1989. Safrai defines a bema as a centrally-located platform distinct from the *teva*, or Torah repository, however, I see no reason to exclude from the definition those platforms that were not centrally-located, such as Bema B at Susiya, or those whose function was combined with the *teva*, such as Bema A at Susiya, and the examples at Eshtemoa and perhaps 'Anim and Rimmon.

wooden screens, is where the Torah shrine or bema is located. The Torah shrine is a decorated, free-standing repository.

Eight of the ten synagogues provide direct evidence for a bema or defined chancel area. At the other two synagogues, Na'aran and Gaza-Maiumas, chancel screen fragments were uncovered, and so it is reasonable to assume that these two synagogues also had a defined chancel area. In seven cases, chancel screen fragments were found. Therefore, all ten synagogues probably had a bema or chancel area.

Synagogues in the Golan generally do not have bemas or defined chancel areas. Of course, the matter depends on how one defines such features. For example, the high stone platform in the Umm el-Qanatir synagogue could be considered a bema, but it is probably better identified as part of an elaborate Torah shrine. The assumption here is that a bema is as a raised platform or stage for leading liturgy, reading Torah, or addressing the congregation. At Susiya, for example, the central platform identified as Bema A almost certainly served as a Torah shrine primarily, while the smaller platform, Bema B, would have been better suited for a bema in the stricter sense. The problems surrounding the definition of these features and the inconsistent terminologies in reports are compounded by the probable existence of wooden platforms and chancel screens that would not have survived in the archaeological record. Therefore, despite the apparent predilection toward bemas in the south and Lower Galilee, the evidence from the Golan synagogues is hardly conclusive. Conversely, apses and niches occur more frequently

among the synagogues of the south and Lower Galilee as compared to the Golan, where they are almost entirely absent.<sup>51</sup>

### 7.3.6 Inscriptions

Only seven of the ten synagogues include inscriptions (see Appendix B), a frequency that seems to be roughly in line with the synagogues in the north. All seven synagogues include a dedicatory inscription of some sort, and all have at least one inscription in Aramaic. Hagith Sivan suggests that Hebrew was preferred and revered epigraphically among the Jews of southern Palestine,<sup>52</sup> and indeed five of the seven synagogues also include at least one inscription in Hebrew. However, this ratio is somewhat misleading. At Na‘aran the Hebrew inscriptions are limited to the labels for the signs of the zodiac and the seasons. At Jericho, Hebrew is limited to the formulaic phrase, שלום על ישראל. At En-Gedi, Hebrew is limited to a biblical quotation (Inscription 1), the signs of the zodiac, the names of the months, biblical figures, and the formulaic phrase, שלום על ישראל (Inscription 2). At Gaza-Maiumas, Hebrew inscriptions are limited to biblical and personal names. The subject-matter used for Hebrew in these four synagogues is in no way distinct from the Hebrew inscriptions from synagogues in Lower Galilee. Susiya is an exception: several of the Hebrew inscriptions are dedicatory, including the unique inscription that dates the building according to *anno mundi*.

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<sup>51</sup> Hachlili 2008: 425. Milson 2007: 208-09. Milson distinguishes among semicircular niches, rectangular niches, blocked doorways that formed niches, small chambers, and rectangular recesses. Here these are all treated equally.

<sup>52</sup> Sivan 2008: 32-33. The presumption is that a preference for Hebrew over Aramaic reflects a reverence for an antiquated and “dead” language over the *lingua franca*.



Compared to the synagogues in the north, there appears to be no preference for Hebrew in the southern synagogues in general. Among the synagogues of Lower Galilee, dedicatory inscriptions are typically in Aramaic. As in the south (with the exception of Susiya), Hebrew is relegated to specific formulaic phrases or words—such as שלום or אמן אמן סלה—and identifications of biblical figures or quotations and zodiac signs, as at Sepphoris.<sup>53</sup> The few instances comparable to the Hebrew dedicatory inscriptions from Susiya come from Upper Galilee at Bar‘am, Nabratein, and Meiron.<sup>54</sup> Although a number of inscriptions have been uncovered among the Golan synagogues, few have been associated with a specific synagogue. A lintel found in Dabura in the Golan bears a Hebrew inscription identifying the building which it once adorned as a *bet-midrash*.<sup>55</sup>

### 7.3.7 Conclusion: Synagogue Regionalism

Despite this project’s attempt to understand the ten synagogues of southern Palestine as a unified group, we conclude that no distinct cohesion can be discerned. In fact, the synagogues of the south are remarkably similar to those of Lower Galilee, particularly in building forms, use of mosaics, and the epigraphic style.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Generally, see Naveh 1978. On Sepphoris, see Weiss 2005.

<sup>54</sup> See Naveh 1978.

<sup>55</sup> Naveh 1978: no. 6.

<sup>56</sup> As Vincent and Benoit noted, the dimensions of the Na‘aran synagogue are very similar to those at H. Ammudim, Chorazin, Meiron, and Bar‘am (see above), while the basilical, tripartite layout with the backward-facing mosaic panel near the doorway is almost identical to the Beth Alpha synagogue. In addition, as noted above, there is a probable connection between the orientations of the Na‘aran and Sepphoris zodiacs (see section 2.1.3).

This conclusion does not necessarily support Joshua Schwartz's study, which suggests that the rabbis of southern Palestine and their traditions often ran counter to those of the rabbinic schools of Lower Galilee.<sup>57</sup> The inter-rabbinic conflicts he identified in the literary sources are not evident in the archaeological remains. On the one hand, this may cast doubt on Schwartz's conclusions. On the other hand, it may support the notion that the rabbis represented in the literary sources did not dictate the forms and styles of the synagogues represented in the archaeological remains. Regardless, the Talmudic literature that formed the core of Schwartz's study is primarily a product of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> c., while the synagogues of southern Palestine are products of the 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c.

Methodologically, our conclusion should serve as a warning against a taxonomic oversimplification of ancient synagogues. Upon closer consideration, the studies of the Galilean, Golan, and southern Hebron Hills hint at the problem endemic to synagogue regionalism. For example, as described above, Galilean-type synagogues are characterized by a Jerusalem-oriented triportal façade, but only four of the eight or nine synagogues typically considered "Galilean" have this feature.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, although the synagogues of the southern Hebron Hills are characterized by their eastern triportal entrances, only the synagogues at Susiya and Eshtemoa had such entrances. Moreover, eastern entrances are not limited to this "group"; the synagogues at Ḥ. Sumaqa and Japhia

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<sup>57</sup> Schwartz 1986.

<sup>58</sup> Included among the Galilean-type synagogues are: Ḥ. Ammudim, Arbel, Bar'am (the large synagogue), Capernaum, Chorazin, Gush Ḥalav, Meiron, Nabratein, and perhaps also Hammath-Tiberias North. See the corpus in Milson 2007.

also have their main entrances on the east.<sup>59</sup> Ma'oz recognized the problems of regionally-defined synagogue groups, choosing to subdivide the Golan synagogues into chronological groups. But even within these groups, there is significant variation in size and decoration.<sup>60</sup>

In each of these studies including the present one, the geographic region defined the group more absolutely than specific characteristics of the buildings. This is not to say that the observation of regional variations does not yield any significant data. Sometimes such groupings are quite telling. For example, the similarities in architectural plans of the Susiya and Eshtemoa synagogues are notable, as are their emphases on the priestly family of Isai in their epigraphic records, likely pointing to close a relationship between these communities, shared and distinct traditions, and probably proximate dates of construction.<sup>61</sup> The mosaic styles of the Gaza-Maiumas and Ma'on-Nirim synagogues probably point to the use of the same school of artisans, or at least the same mosaic traditions.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the overall dissimilarity of the synagogues in the Golan and Upper Galilee compared to those of Lower Galilee and the south suggest different traditions and religious concerns. For southern Palestine though, the buildings do not constitute a significant group for classification. Future studies should therefore treat them as part of the same disjointed tradition of synagogue construction and use exhibited

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<sup>59</sup> Dar 1993: 1414.

<sup>60</sup> See Ma'oz 1995.

<sup>61</sup> On all of this, see Amit 2003 and above.

<sup>62</sup> Ovadiah 1975; 1978.

in the demographic centers of Jewish Palestine in Lower Galilee, despite their communities' minority status among the Christian population in the south.<sup>63</sup>

#### **7.4 Suggestions for Further Research: Inter-Religious Relations**

In Chapter One we noted the demographic disparity between the Jewish populations of northern and southern Palestine: Jews living in the south comprised a smaller portion of the local population than Jews in the north. The conclusion of the chronological discussion above—namely that the extant synagogues of southern Palestine are products of the Byzantine period—suggests that the question can be framed generally as one of Jewish-Christian relations.<sup>64</sup> Jews and Christians lived in relative proximity, whether in neighboring villages of the inland hill country, or in neighboring households or city-sectors of the urban centers along the coast. Similarities in art and architecture therefore should come as no surprise. Despite some trends in 20<sup>th</sup>-c. scholarship to minimize Christo-centric interpretations of Jewish material culture,<sup>65</sup> most treatments today take into account inter-religious exchange between Jews and Christians, as well as the reactions to this exchange. Few would maintain that late antique Judaism existed in a cultural vacuum.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The tradition of ancient synagogues in Palestine is characterized as “disjointed” compared to church and temple architecture in antiquity, which tended to be more codified. Considering the variety among these buildings, we would be wise to follow the trend in the study of Early Judaism in general which assumes a “messy cartography,” as Jonathan Z. Smith puts it (1980: 19-20).

<sup>64</sup> Of course, Jews and Christians were not the only inhabitants of Palestine during the Byzantine period. The historical sources—particularly the Christian ones—attest to the vibrancy of the traditional Greco-Roman religions along the coast as late as the 6<sup>th</sup> c. In addition, historical sources and archaeological evidence indicate the presence of a Samaritan population in the central hill country north of Jerusalem and in the northern coastal region. See Avi-Yonah 1976; Strousma 1989: 27-28; Sivan 2008.

<sup>65</sup> For overview and criticism, see Fine 2005: 22-34.

<sup>66</sup> Elsner 2001: 303. For studies that have considered more seriously the use of material evidence for interpreting Jewish-Christian relations as a two-way street in late antique Palestine, see *inter alia* Barasch

The analyses in Chapters Two through Six noted the variety of material remains that can be considered a reflection of interaction on some level between Jews and their neighbors. The following section presents a brief overview of some issues raised in the course of research that might serve as avenues for future studies of the material evidence in understanding Jewish-Christian relations in late antique Palestine.

#### **7.4.1           References to Gentiles**

The obvious point of departure is the reference to non-Jews from inscription 3 in the En-Gedi synagogue. The inscription describes the curses upon the one “who causes division among his fellow men or speaks libel ... to the gentiles, or steals his fellow’s possession, or who reveals the secret of the town to the gentiles” (see above, section 3.1.3.4). The term for “gentiles” here is **עַמֵּי**, whose definition is established by rabbinic and Targumic sources.<sup>67</sup> The meaning in this inscription is mildly derogatory, treating “the gentiles” as a group beyond the community who cannot be trusted and perhaps should be feared. Whether or not the relationship between the Jewish community at En-Gedi and non-Jews (presumably Christians) elsewhere was openly hostile when the mosaic was laid is unclear, but certainly the inscription suggests that such relations were uneasy. In any case, the inscription provides important data for any study of Jewish- Christian relations toward the end of Byzantine rule in Palestine.

#### **7.4.2           Daniel**

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1980; Levine 2000b; Habas 2000; Talgam 2000; Schwartz 2001: 177-289; Irshai 2002; Kühnel 2004; Magness 2005b, and Milson 2007; and cf. Fine 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Sokoloff 2002: 411. In Targumic sources, it is used for the translation of **גוֹיִם** in the Hebrew Bible.

Symbols from the biblical book of *Daniel* appear in at least three southern synagogues. At Na‘aran, Daniel is depicted in mosaic in a heraldic position, flanked by lions, and identified by an inscription (section 2.1.3, fig. 29). The scene is Dan. 6, in which Daniel escapes death-by-lion through his unwavering faith in God. The symbol’s placement—in the southernmost, third panel, just below the depiction of the Torah shrine—perhaps highlights its importance. At Susiya, the scant remains of Daniel (section 4.1.3, figs. 80-81) suggest that the form was similar, if not identical, to that at Na‘aran. Inscription 2 at En-Gedi (section 3.1.3.4, figs. 52-53) refers to Daniel’s three companions—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—following the “ancestors of the world/Israel,” the signs of the zodiac, the months, and the biblical patriarchs. To these references we may add an incised relief from the Sardis synagogue depicting Daniel in the Lions’ Den and probably also the orthostat depicting a master-of-beasts motif found at ‘Ein Samsam in the Golan.<sup>68</sup>

The subject matter of *Daniel* presents an obvious allegory to how Jews might have viewed their relationship to the Christian majority or the Byzantine government. On the one hand, the scene could refer to perceived hostility emanating from Byzantine authorities, though as we have seen, the southern synagogues do not provide unequivocal evidence for such hostility.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, the scene may refer to a less brash cultural and religious onslaught by the Christian majority, in which the symbol reminded

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<sup>68</sup> On the Sardis relief, see Rautman 2010a. On the ‘Ein Samsam orthostat, see Ma‘oz 1995: 102-03, Pls. 75-76; Hachlili 1988: 173, 322-23, Gregg and Urman 1996: 103-04; Werlin 2006: 70-72, no. 40, fig. 40. The provenance of the latter is unclear, and we cannot be sure that the piece originated in a Jewish context.

<sup>69</sup> Ovadiah 1995: 310.

Jews to stand firm in their adherence to their people and religion rather than be engulfed.<sup>70</sup>

That said, social and political factors need not dictate the interpretation of these references to *Daniel*. As we have noted above, religious contexts invite us to seek foremost theological explanations. The few references in rabbinic literature highlight Daniel's wisdom and his (anachronistic) devotion to Jewish liturgy.<sup>71</sup> Christian perspectives on the *Daniel* traditions are more telling. As Levine writes:

The figure of Daniel was significant to Christians for a number of reasons: owing to his prophetic-messianic predictions (i.e., the coming of Jesus or the end of the Roman Empire); his brave defiance of the command to defile his faith (i.e., a prototype of the Christian martyr); as one who escaped death to be resurrected, i.e., a prototype of a newly baptized Christian or even Jesus himself.<sup>72</sup>

The Syriac Christians in particular understood Daniel as the martyr *par excellence* and a model for relations between Christians and the government in Persia.<sup>73</sup> Any of these—including messianic foresight, martyr of faith, and soteriological resurrection—could have motivated the Jewish references to *Daniel*. Without corresponding Jewish literary attestation, it is difficult to determine how these symbols were understood. Nevertheless, it is surely significant that Jews and Christians both employed Danielic symbols to express important socio-religious concerns.

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<sup>70</sup> Others have theorized religious competition between Jews and Christians in late ancient Palestine, in which Jews were threatened more by the prospect of losing congregants than by physical violence; see Simon 1964. On “competitive interpretation,” see Magness 2005b: 18-21.

<sup>71</sup> *b.Yoma 77a; Midrash Tehillim 24, 66.*

<sup>72</sup> Levine 2008: 230. For examples of references to *Daniel* in Christian art, see the Moggio pyxis in Badawy 1978: 158, no. 3.77; and in mosaic in the church of the Amman citadel, in Zayadine et al. 1987; Piccirillo 1993: 262.

<sup>73</sup> Becker 2008: 405-06.

### 7.4.3 Soteriological and Messianic Symbols

In addition to a possible soteriological or messianic interpretation of *Daniel* imagery, other features of the southern synagogues might represent beliefs similar to contemporary Christian ones. For example, the depiction in the Gaza-Maiumas synagogue of David as Orpheus—as understood by Moshe Barasch—connects the figure to a symbolic language used by Christians in references to Christ as savior (see above, section 6.1.3). The epigraphic language used at Gaza emphasizes personal salvation in the basin inscription (above, section 6.1.3.3).

To these shared symbols we might add the most ubiquitous and definitively *Jewish* symbol: the menorah. Dan Barag suggested that, from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. onward, the menorah became a messianic symbol, expressing the “hope for personal redemption and resurrection.”<sup>74</sup> The proliferation of the menorah as the Jewish symbol *par excellence* in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. coincides with the parallel development of the Christian cross and the rapid spread of mainstream Christianity in Palestine.<sup>75</sup> The similarly pervasive use of these two symbols—the menorah and the cross—in a variety of contexts suggests that Jews and Christians respectively were cognizant of their use as religio-ethnic signifiers. Of course, it would be enough to conclude that these were both understood as religious identifiers whose signal meaning—whether in reference to Jesus’ crucifixion or the furniture of the Jerusalem Temple—need not have any correlation. However, the symbolic reference of each of these—whether to Jesus’ role as the messiah and savior or to the renewed Temple

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<sup>74</sup> Barag 1985-86: 46.

<sup>75</sup> Levine 2000b.



as heralding a messianic era—should not be overlooked.<sup>76</sup> Considering the extensive use of the menorah among southern synagogues, future studies should consider its role in Jewish-Christian relations.

#### **7.4.4 Synagogue Art: Style, Form, and Motifs**

Jewish art has received more attention from archaeologists than any other topic in synagogue studies. As the sections above on Danielic and redemptive concerns imply, the motifs, figures, and scenes in synagogue art—whether mosaic, fresco, or relief—are interpreted most often as symbols, referencing a greater idea or delivering a deeper message intelligible to the onlookers.<sup>77</sup> But as Avi-Yonah and, later, Ovadiah emphasized, the styles and forms of synagogue art represent important points of interaction between Jews and Christians in Byzantine Palestine.<sup>78</sup> Both Avi-Yonah and Ovadiah suggested that regional mosaic workshops operated out of the coastal urban centers; the latter, in particular, made a convincing argument based on stylistic similarities among the synagogues at Gaza-Maiumas and Ma'on-Nirim and the churches at Shellal and Hazor (south).<sup>79</sup> In addition, the discussions above have noted the stylistic similarities of mosaics in the southern synagogues and churches throughout Palestine and Transjordan, often employing the same patterns, geometric designs, and floral and faunal

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<sup>76</sup> On the use of the menorah as part of “Temple memory” in synagogues, see Amit 2003: 162-65; 2004.

<sup>77</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, this methodology can be found at the root of synagogues studies, with the works of Sukenik, Avi-Yonah, and (most especially) Goodenough, and continues to dominate studies of ancient Jewish art today (e.g., Fine 2005; Weiss 2005; Magness 2005b; Leibner 2010). The decorative-interpretation (or “art for the sake of art”) put forth by Avigad 1976, has been largely rejected.

<sup>78</sup> See Avi-Yonah 1981a and Ovadiah 1975; 1978; 1995. See also Tsafirir 1987.

<sup>79</sup> Ovadiah 1975; 1978.

motifs. Our study therefore supports the hypothesis that Jews in southern Palestine and Christians did not hesitate to share artisans in the construction of their religious edifices.

The manner in which some motifs and styles were used suggests that the congregants (or potential congregants) were conscious of the commonality between church and synagogue physicality. Three peculiar examples warrant mention. At Na‘aran, the guilloche pattern decorating the narthex menorah (fig. 4) is paralleled by the use of the design on crosses in the church at Shavei Z̄ion, north of Akko, and the earliest sanctuary at the Mt. Nebo church (see fig. 185), thus creating a stylistic connection between the primary religious symbols of Jews and Christians.<sup>80</sup> In the same narthex mosaic at Na‘aran, the menorah stands upon a three-hills motif (fig. 4). The chancel screen fragment at ‘Anim displays traces of this motif, though it is unclear if it served as the base of a menorah (fig. 128). This motif, well-known from Christian contexts (fig. 186), is thought to be a schematic depiction of Golgotha.<sup>81</sup> If so, the use of the three-hills motif in synagogues raises questions regarding the extent of Jewish understanding of Christian symbols and perhaps also the use of the menorah as a symbol of redemption (see above). Finally, a chancel screen fragment from Susiya depicts in relief a lamp atop a tripod pricket stand (fig. 97), a form of bronze and silver lamp found in Byzantine-period churches around the Eastern Mediterranean (fig. 187), but otherwise unknown

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<sup>80</sup> On Shavei Z̄ion, see Prausnitz et al. 1967: 48, pl. XXXVIIIb; Britt 2003: 151, fig. 27. On Mt. Nebo, see Piccirillo 1993: 144, fig. 175.

<sup>81</sup> Avi-Yonah 1993: 1075.

from synagogue contexts.<sup>82</sup> In each of these cases, the viewer in the synagogue may have been aware of their uses in Christian contexts, so each would have served as an important index to connect synagogue and church. Such a message would be particularly suitable for proselytes or would-be apostates. Whatever the meaning behind such shared styles, forms, and motifs, these examples should not be overlooked in future studies of Jewish-Christian relations in the material record of late antique Palestine.

#### **7.4.5 Iconoclasm**

One of the most enigmatic topics of Jewish-Christian relations that emerged in the course of this research is that of iconoclasm. Three sites in southern Palestine—Na‘aran, Susiya, and Eshtemoa—preserve evidence of deliberate destruction of figural art. In the Na‘aran synagogue, the extensive evidence was executed in a haphazard and careless manner, and the mosaic was not repaired following the event (see above, section 2.1.4, and e.g. figs. 10-12, 15-25). The damage to the mosaic pavement would have rendered the floor unusable as a prayer hall, since the edges of the damaged sections would spread quickly when trampled.<sup>83</sup> At Susiya and Eshtemoa, evidence of iconoclasm in the mosaic pavements was repaired. In the case of the former, the defaced areas of mosaic were filled with scrambled tesserae or replaced with large mosaic panels decorated with aniconic designs (see above, section 4.1.3, and e.g. figs. 69-74, 76). In the case of the latter, the mosaic was patched with coarse monochrome tesserae (see above, section 4.2.3, and fig. 104). Extensive vandalism was evident also in the chancel screen reliefs at

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<sup>82</sup> For examples, see Dalton 1911: 527; Cooney 1943: pl. 330; Badawy 1978: 327, no. 5.13; Nagy et al. 1996: 224, no. 121; Biers and Terry 2004: no. 153. The use of such lamps is known from Islamic contexts; see Baer 1983: 18; Hadad 1997: 182, no. 54.

<sup>83</sup> Schick 1995: 193-94.

Susiya (figs. 92-96) and the lions adorning the marble menorah at Eshtemoa (fig. 111). The repaired mosaics suggest that the buildings continued in use following the iconoclastic event, unlike at Na‘aran.

Determining motives and agency in these cases is a difficult task. Nowhere in Jewish literature is iconoclasm of this sort mandated.<sup>84</sup> For Christendom on the other hand, historical sources record a period of state-mandated Byzantine Iconoclasm beginning with the declaration of Leo III in 726 and ending with the restoration of images in 843.<sup>85</sup> A contemporary, though apparently short-lived, era of Islamic iconoclasm also began in the 720s with the Edict of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid II, although the historicity and impact of this edict are a matter of debate and archaeological evidence is nonexistent.<sup>86</sup> Despite the supposedly widespread nature of Byzantine Iconoclasm, archaeological evidence is relatively meager. Robert Schick has suggested that the phenomenon was limited to Palestine and Transjordan in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>87</sup>

Given the overall similarity between the destruction of mosaics in these three synagogues and in the churches of Palestine and Transjordan (fig. 188), it is reasonable to assume that they were part of a contemporary inter-religious phenomenon. Schick identifies fifty-five churches in which iconoclasm occurred.<sup>88</sup> Of these, eight were left

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<sup>84</sup> See Fine 2000; Levine 2011: 112. There is a reference to Jewish iconoclasm in the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, however, this should not be taken at face value; see Schick 1995: 204.

<sup>85</sup> See the classic study of Vasiliev 1956; and also Bowersock 2006: 92-111.

<sup>86</sup> See Bowersock 2006. On the lack of physical evidence for Muslim iconoclasm, see Schick 1995: 205.

<sup>87</sup> Schick 1995: 207-09. Schick tacitly attributes this to the Chalcedonian dominance in Syria-Palestine, who, it seems, were generally more concerned with representation than the Monophysites or Nestorians (1995:219).

<sup>88</sup> Schick 1995: 195-98.

unrepaired in a manner similar to Na‘aran. Schick believes that these instances were carried out by later occupants, *not* the congregants. At Na‘aran, the evidence for deliberate destruction to the building and hasty abandonment of the nearby residences suggests that the iconoclasm was carried out as part of an attack upon the community. In any case, church iconoclasm often resembles the type of damage and repair seen at Susiya and Eshtemoa. Schick concludes that while it is possible that Umayyad officials or competing Christian adherents carried out the damage which was then repaired by the immediate community, it seems more likely that each community undertook the iconoclastic destruction and repairs themselves.<sup>89</sup> Although Schick is skeptical that the damage carried out in synagogues could have been done by Jews,<sup>90</sup> there is no reason to apply a different line of reasoning, and so we conclude that the damage and repairs at Susiya and Eshtemoa were likewise inside jobs.

It is possible that iconoclasm was as widespread in synagogues as it was in churches in the Early Islamic period. Other than Na‘aran, Susiya, and Eshtemoa, few, if any, Palestinian synagogues with figured mosaics continued in use into the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>91</sup> Synagogue mosaics with non-figural imagery include the examples from Hammath Tiberias (IB-IA) and perhaps the Jericho synagogue. Other extant synagogues that may have continued into this period were paved in flagstones, such as the examples from

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<sup>89</sup> Schick 1995: 209-10.

<sup>90</sup> Schick 1995: 205, 209.

<sup>91</sup> An exception might be Meroth, though the date of the mosaic there is unclear; see the most detailed publication, Ilan and Damati 1987. Damage to the mosaic in the Meroth synagogue complex has been interpreted as iconoclasm; see Fine 2000: 189. Because the damage was not comprehensive and was left unrepaired, Meroth presents a problematic and doubtful case of Jewish iconoclasm. Regarding the northern synagogues, it should be noted that the dates for the end of Jewish occupation at most of these buildings is unclear.

Ma'on (in Judea) and 'Anim in the south and perhaps some of the Galilean-type synagogues in the north.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the evidence of “only” three synagogues displaying iconoclastic damage should not necessarily be interpreted as exceptional or isolated cases.

Regardless of the extent of iconoclasm among the Palestinian synagogues, the evidence from Susiya and Eshtemoa strongly suggests that this was not a strictly Christian phenomenon.<sup>93</sup> Schick's analysis of Christian iconoclasm underscores the point that we probably will never know why Christians defaced the figural imagery in their churches, and the same is likely true for synagogue iconoclasm. Nevertheless, these examples highlight the level of inter-religious relations, in some sense, between Jews and their Christian neighbors in late antiquity.

## 7.5 Concluding Remarks

In many ways this dissertation has raised more questions than it has answered. The datings of these synagogues to the Byzantine period should prompt further studies to consider the data in light of Jewish-Christian relations in southern Palestine. Moreover,

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<sup>92</sup> It is unclear whether instances of iconoclasm in the relief-work of some of the Upper Galilee and Golan synagogues can be attributed to the same period or phenomenon. For a nearly comprehensive list of these synagogues, see Amit 1994a. As with the few examples of iconoclastic damage to architectural fragments in churches (see Schick 1995: 200-01), these synagogues were mostly exposed and lying in ruins for centuries prior to their excavation, meaning that the iconoclasm could have been carried out at any time and by anyone. This was also the case in some of the architectural fragments from the synagogues in the southern Hebron Hills (see above). Similarly, the temple at Kedesh in Upper Galilee bears evidence of iconoclastic damage, which probably was carried out long after the building had ceased to function and at a time when it was lying in ruins. For studies that take for granted that iconoclasm in the northern synagogues was carried out by the communities while the buildings were in use, see Chiat 1982; Amit 1994a; and Fine 2000. Fine (2000: 189) acknowledges that the damage at Bar'am and Capernaum could have taken place at any time but still assumes Jewish agency.

<sup>93</sup> As Schick (1995: 219) notes, Theodore Abu Qurra, a late 8<sup>th</sup> c. Christian source, suggests that Christian officials in Syria-Palestine undertook iconoclasm in response to critical attacks by Muslims and Jews. This comment might indicate that *Jews* were the instigators of iconoclasm and that Christians followed their lead.

this project draws attention to the continued use of several of the southern synagogues into the Early Islamic period. Therefore, Jewish interaction with the newly-arrived Muslim Arabs is another area that should be addressed in further research. A study of how these buildings ultimately came to an end and the fate of synagogues across Palestine in the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> c. would likewise build upon much of the research begun in the present work. Finally, similarities between the southern synagogues and those of Lower Galilee underscore the differences between the Golan synagogues and those elsewhere in Palestine, and so future inquires might examine more closely the socio-historical circumstances in the Golan.

The goal of this dissertation was to examine the ten late ancient synagogues of southern Palestine as a regional group. It is evident that these buildings do *not* form any sort of cohesive unit distinct from synagogues elsewhere, so any treatment of “southern synagogues” as a regional group is an artificial scholarly construction. The study could be expanded to include the synagogues of the Beth-Shean region and Gerasa, as well as surface finds, thus opening the corpus of data to material evidence from the coastal cities. A broader framework might also allow for a more thorough examination of the differences between the urban synagogues, such as at Gaza-Maiumas and Gerasa, and the village synagogues. Alternatively, the Diaspora synagogues could present an important area of comparison, since the southern communities were a minority among Christians. Indeed, archaeological evidence suggests similar religious concerns and aesthetics, such as the Daniel fragment and three-dimensional marble menorahs from Sardis. That said, the Diaspora communities differ markedly in their urban settings and mixed demography and probably also in their perspectives on and relationship with the “Land of Israel.” In

the end, any characterization of the southern communities as pseudo- or semi-Diasporic is not entirely useful.

The intensive analysis of the ten synagogue excavations provides a more in-depth and critical examination than has been undertaken by broader surveys in the past (see above, section 1.2.2). In particular, this study endeavored to clarify the chronologies of these structures. More often than not, the analyses underscored the lack of detailed published data. The preliminary reports that comprise the bulk of the primary publications on these synagogues do not provide adequate details on the work conducted at the sites. As a result, each building is left with broad date-ranges for construction and destruction/abandonment (see Appendix A). Hopefully, future publications of synagogue sites will provide a sounder basis for evaluating chronology and typology.

Despite the difficulties encountered, this study has reached three significant conclusions. First, the post-Bar Kokhba synagogues of southern Palestine were products of the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. and later. The archaeological evidence suggests that monumental synagogue construction in southern Palestine was a phenomenon of the Byzantine period. Second, several of these buildings continued in use into the Early Islamic period, suggesting the continued vitality of some of the Jewish communities at that time. Third, the southern synagogues display important similarities with their counterparts in Lower Galilee and the Beth-Shean region, to the exclusion of most of the synagogues in the Golan and Upper Galilee. Thus it is the latter group whose features contribute to a regional distinction. The implications of these conclusions will provide an important contribution for future studies of late ancient Judaism in Palestine.



## APPENDIX A

### ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES AND DATES

The following table presents an overview of the notable architectural details, significant features, and characteristics of the ten synagogues of southern Palestine. The epigraphy and artistic details are dealt with in the following sections, Appendices B and C, respectively.

All marks and values below are representative of the final or best-attested phase of the synagogue, unless otherwise noted. The criteria used for determining water installations include permanent features, such as *miqva'ot* and cisterns, as well as large, semi-permanent stone basins. The values for the maximum occupancies are broad in range on account of the possible existence of second-story balconies at several synagogues and the variety of possible liturgical positions.<sup>1</sup>

The buildings' dates are the most difficult aspect to summarize in this format, as the extensive chronological discussions above demonstrate. The table below is an attempt to reduce the dating information into manageable figures for the sake of comparison. Any conclusions reached from this set of data must take into account the problems surrounding the dating of the synagogues in southern Palestine. Numbers separated by a forward slash should be understood as the end of the century and beginning of the subsequent century. (Thus "6/7" means "late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> c.") A plus-sign indicates evidence to suggest that the synagogue continued beyond the century

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<sup>1</sup> See Spigel 2008. The calculations of each occupancy value have been outlined in detail in the relevant sections above.

identified but a firm conclusion could not be reached. A question mark indicates that the evidence was inconclusive.

## Architectural Details, Features, Furniture, and Dates

	Na'aran	Jericho	En-Gedi	Susiya	Eshtemoa	Ma'on (in Judea)	'Anin	Rimmon	Gaza-Maiumas	Ma'on-Nirim
Dates	6-8+	6/7?-8+	4-7	4/5-8	5-8	4/5-7/8	4/5-7/8	? - 7	6-7	5-7
Long-walls of the prayer hall (m)	21.94 N-S	11.0 NE-SW	14.5 N-S	15.6 E-W	21.0 E-W	12.97 N-S	12.85 N-S	13.5 N-S	30 E-W	17.2 NE-SW
						8.65 E-W				
Short-walls of the prayer hall (m)	14.94 E-W	8.6 NW-SE	9.75 E-W	9.0 N-S	10.8 N-S	8.65 N-S	6.45 E-W	9.5 E-W	26 N-S	21 SE-NW
						8.65 E-W				
Apprx. floor-space (m <sup>2</sup> )	327.8	95.2	141.4	140.4	226.8	112.2	82.9	128.3	780	360
						74.8				
Maximum occupancy	253-1,059	50-391	267-1,127	118-484	355-830	121-264	87-328	146-342	1,014 - 3,324	480-1,122
Forecourt / Atrium	*			*	*		*	*		?
Narthex / Portico	*		*	*	*	* (II)	*	*		?
Auxiliary room	*	*	*	*			?	*		?
Walled complex	*			*				*		*
Floor	Mosaic	*	*	*	*	*	* (I)	*	*	*
	Flagstones						* (II)	*	*	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Story	?	?	?	?		?	(II)	?	?	?
Apse / Niche	?	*	?	*	*	*			*	*
Water basin / installation	*		*	*	?	*	*	*	*	*
Bema	?	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	?	*
Secondary bema			*	*						
Chancel screen	*		*	*			*	*	*	*

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INSCRIPTIONS**

The following four tables summarize significant characteristics of the inscriptions from the synagogues of southern Palestine. These tables highlight only the public displays of epigraphy in the synagogues, so the amulets from Ma'on-Nirim and the ostracon from Rimmon have not be included.

The first table outlines the uses of ritual roles or titles, such as rabbi, priest, scribe etc. The occurrence, identification, and significance of these terms have been the subject of many studies.<sup>1</sup> The second table outlines references to the community and places (i.e., “synagogue,” “holy place,” etc.). The third table shows the various languages used in the inscriptions with an asterisk indicating instances of distinct inscriptions (as treated above). The fourth table identifies the personal names that are evidenced among the inscriptions of the synagogues of southern Palestine.

These tables are meant to be a quick comparative reference tool. Any conclusions reached on the basis of them should take into account the nuances of each case as described in Part I above.

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<sup>1</sup> See Grey 2011.

### References to Ritual Roles and Titles

	<i>Rabbi</i>	<i>Priest</i>	<i>Scribe</i>	<i>Parnas</i>	<i>Hazan</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Levite</i>	<i>Birebbi</i>
Na'aran	*	*		*				
Jericho								
En-Gedi	*				*			
Susiya	***	***	*			*	* (*?)	*
Eshtemoa		*						
'Anim								
Ma'on								
Rimmon								
Gaza- Maiumas								
Ma'on- Nirim								

### References to Community and Place

	general (those who give, fix, make, etc.)	אתרה קדישה (holy place)	קהלה קדישה (holy community)	כנישתה (the synagogue)	בני קרתה (members of the town)	שלום על ישראל (peace upon Israel)
Na'aran	*	**(*)				
Jericho	*		*			*
En-Gedi	*			*	*	*
Susiya	****				*	*
Eshtemoa	*					
'Anim						
Ma'on						
Rimmon						
Gaza- Maiumas	*	*				
Ma'on- Nirim	*					

## Language

	Aramaic	Hebrew	Greek
Na'aran	*****	**	
Jericho	*	*	
En-Gedi	***	**	
Susiya	*****	****	
Eshtemoa	**		
'Anim	?	?	?
Gaza-Maiumas	*	*	****
Ma'on-Nirim	*		

## Personal Names

		masc.	fem.
Na'aran	Benjamin, Ḥalifu, Krispis (?), Marutha (2x?), Pinḥas, Rebecca, Safra, Samuel, Jacob, Yose (2x), Yusta	***** ***	**
Jericho	[none]		
En-Gedi	'Ezrin, Ḥalifi, Ḥeziqin, Jonathan, Yose	*****	
Susiya	Isai/Issi/Jesse, Yoḥanan, Yeshua', Yoshua', Yudan (2x), Menaḥem (?)	***** ?	
Eshtemoa	Lazar, Iulia/us, Samuel (?), Isai/Issi/Jesse	*** ?	?
Gaza-Maiumas	Ḥananiah, Jacob, Menaḥem, Yeshua, Isai/Issi/Jesse (2x?), Reuben, Benjamin	***** *	
Ma'on-Nirim	Aisu, Thoma, Judah	***	

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PROMINENT SYMBOLS AND ARTISTIC THEMES**

The table below summarizes the prominent symbols and artistic themes found in and around the synagogues of southern Palestine. In some cases, multiple instances occur at a single site, however, the table only indicates whether or not a given symbol or motif appears, not the number of instances. In addition to artistically-rendered images, the table includes symbolic references rendered epigraphically, specifically in the case of the En-Gedi inscriptions (on which see above, section 3.1.3.4).

The final rows indicate the medium of the artistic (or epigraphic) renderings, i.e., mosaic or stone, as well as the evidence for iconoclastic activity.

## Prominent Symbols and Artistic Themes

	Na'aran	Jericho	En-Gedi	Susiya	Eshtemoa	Ma'on (in Judea)	'Anim	Rimmon	Gaza-Maiumas	Ma'on-Nirim
Faunal (general)	*		*	*	*				*	*
Floral (general)	*	*		*	*			*	*	*
Geometric designs	*	*	*	*		*		*	*	*
Inhabited scrolls	*				*				*	*
Menorah(s)	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
Lulav / Etrog / Shofar		*			*				*	*
Incense shovel									*	
Torah shrine façade	*			*						
Zodiac / Months	*		*	*						
Biblical Symbols	*		*	*					*	
Daniel	*		*	*						
'Aqedah				*						
Biblical Patriarchs			*							
Ancestors of the World			*							
David									*	
Three-hills motif	*						*			
Medium	Mosaic pavement	*	*	*	*	*	?		*	*
	Stone relief					*	*			
	Painted plaster			*		*		*		
<i>Iconoclasm</i>	*			*	*	?	?			



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AASOR	Annual of ASOR series
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ACOR	American Center of Oriental Research in Amman
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BAIAS	<i>Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i> (publication of BAS)
BAR Int.	British Archaeological Reports International Series
BAS	Biblical Archaeology Society
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BIES	<i>Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society</i>
BRF	<i>Bulletin of the Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues</i>
CA	<i>Cahiers archéologiques</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EAEHL	<i>Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> (Avi-Yonah and Stern 1978)
E-I	<i>Eretz-Israel</i> (publication of IES)
EJ	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> (Berenbaum and Skolnik 2007)
ESI	<i>Excavations and Surveys in Israel</i> (publication of IAA)
HA	<i>Hadashot Arkheologiyot</i> (publication of IAA)
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
IDAM	Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> (publication of IES)
IES	Israel Exploration Society
IMSA	<i>Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology</i>
INJ	<i>Israel Numismatic Journal</i>
JAJ	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
JJA	<i>Journal of Jewish Art</i>
JJPES	<i>Journal of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRA Supp.	Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series
JSAH	<i>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>JSRS</i>	<i>Judea and Samaria Research Studies</i> (annual conference proceedings, published by Kedumim-Ariel)
JTS	Jewish Theological Seminary of America
<i>LA</i>	<i>Liber Annuus</i> (publication of SBF)
<i>NEAEHL</i>	<i>New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> (Stern 1993-2008)
PEF	Palestine Exploration Fund
<i>PEFQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>QDAP</i>	<i>Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i> (publication of École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem)
SBF	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum

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## **FIGURES**



**Fig. i** Map showing the archaeologically-attested synagogues of Late Roman and Byzantine Palestine (modified from Levine 1981a).



**Fig. ii** Map of southern Palestine in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, showing sites where Jewish communities are attested either in literary sources or by archaeological evidence (from Schwartz 1986: 278). The sites of the Lower Jordan Valley are not included.

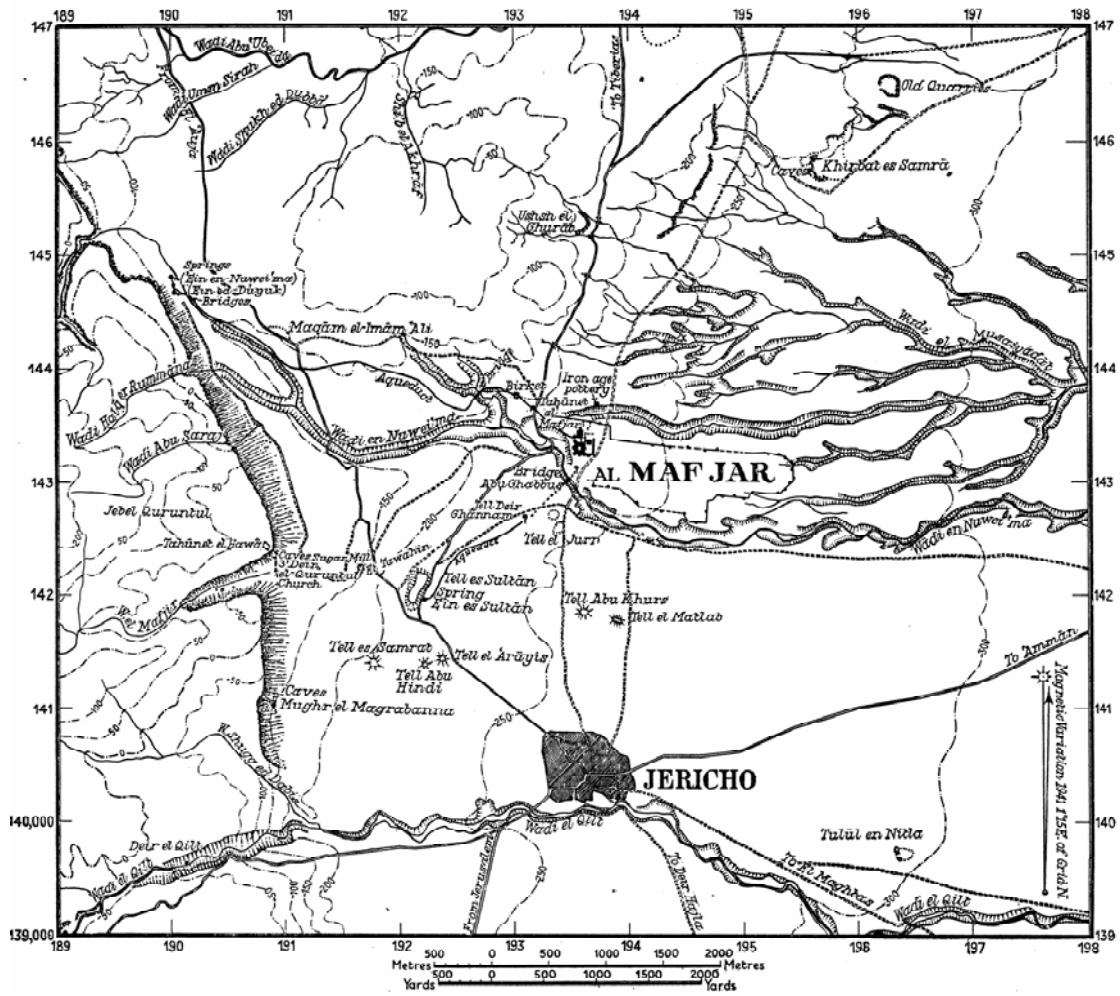
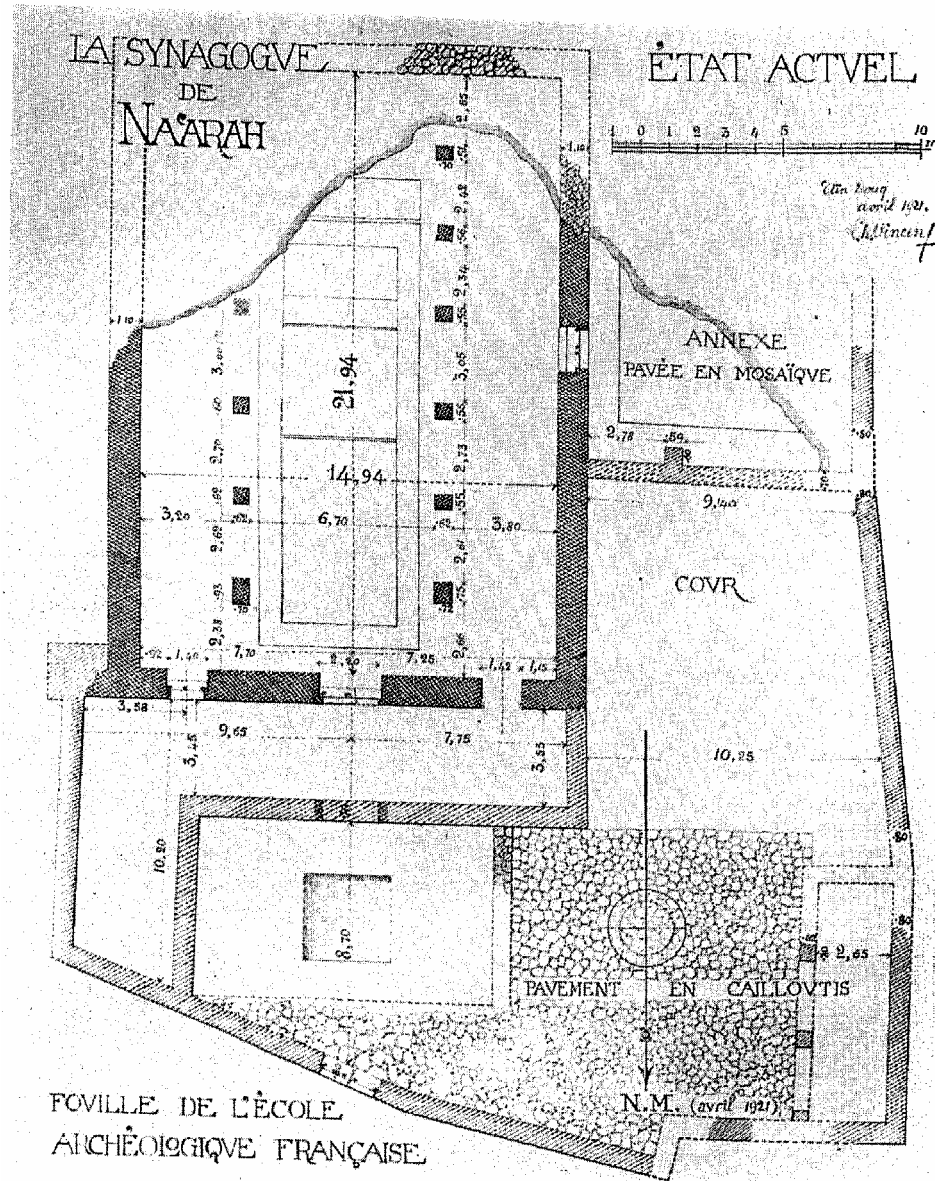
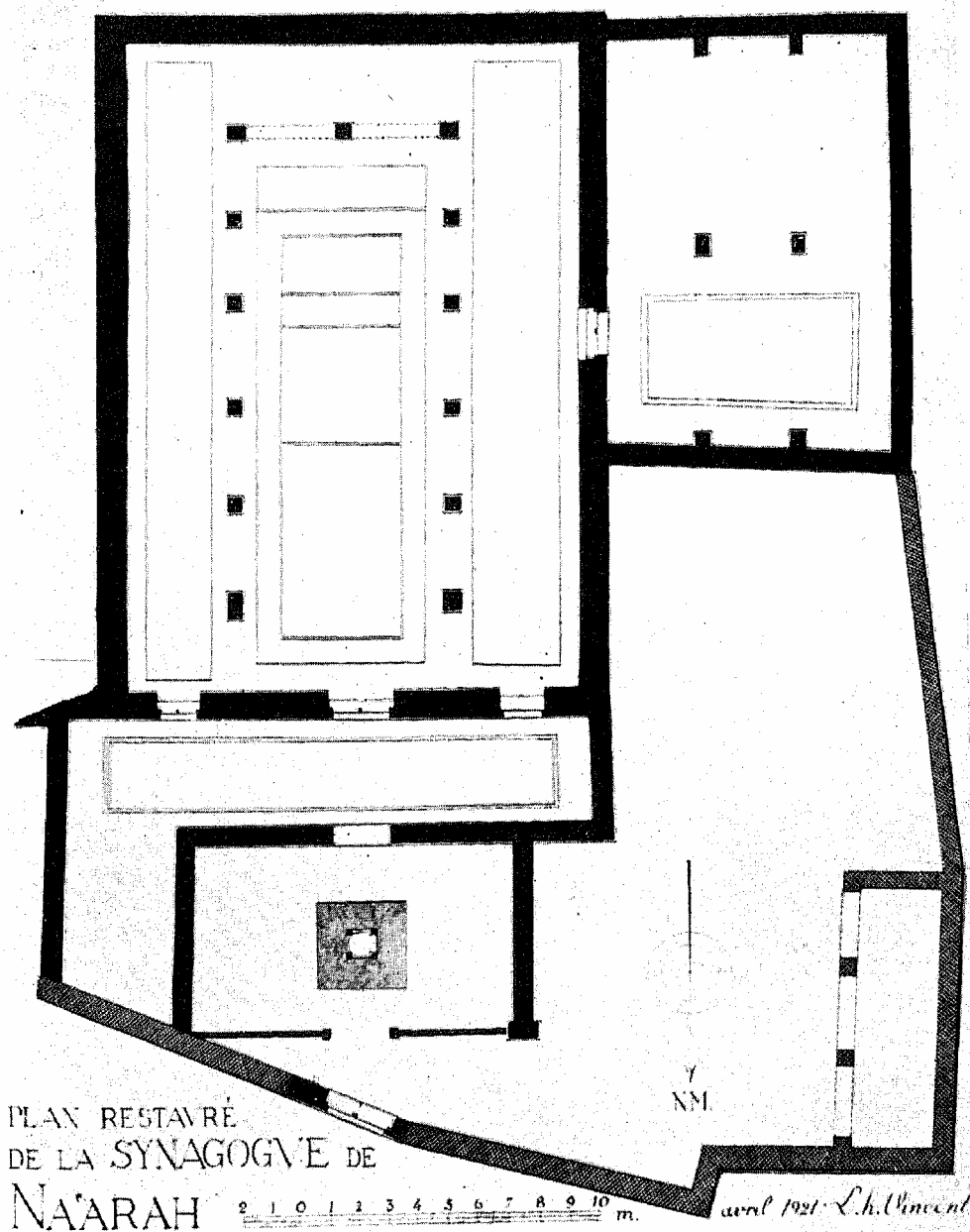


Fig. 1 Map of the Jordan Valley.



**Fig. 2** Na'aran: Plan of synagogue complex by L. H. Vincent (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. IV); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.

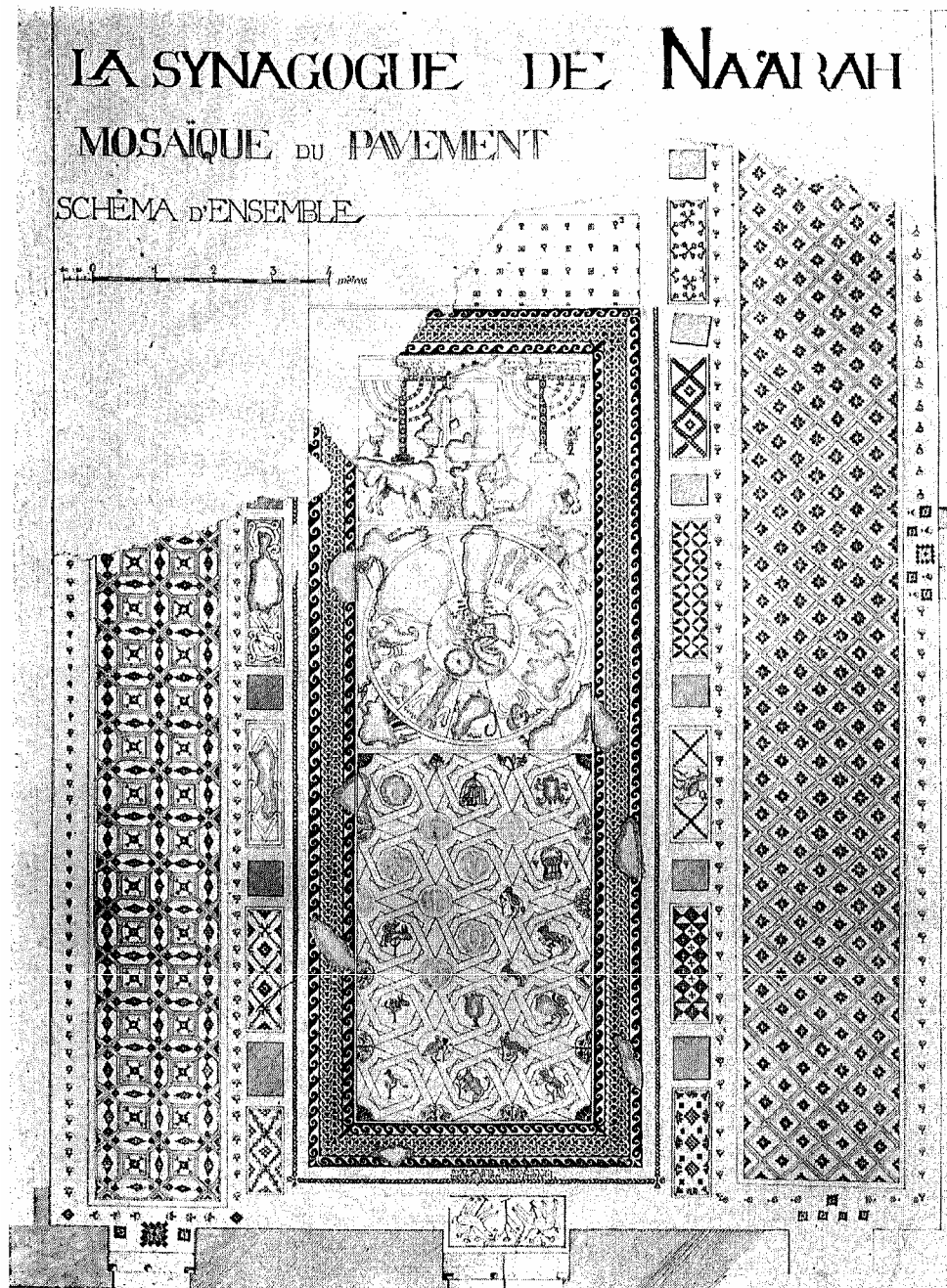


**Fig. 3** Na'aran: Schematic plan of reconstructed synagogue complex by L. H. Vincent (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. V); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.





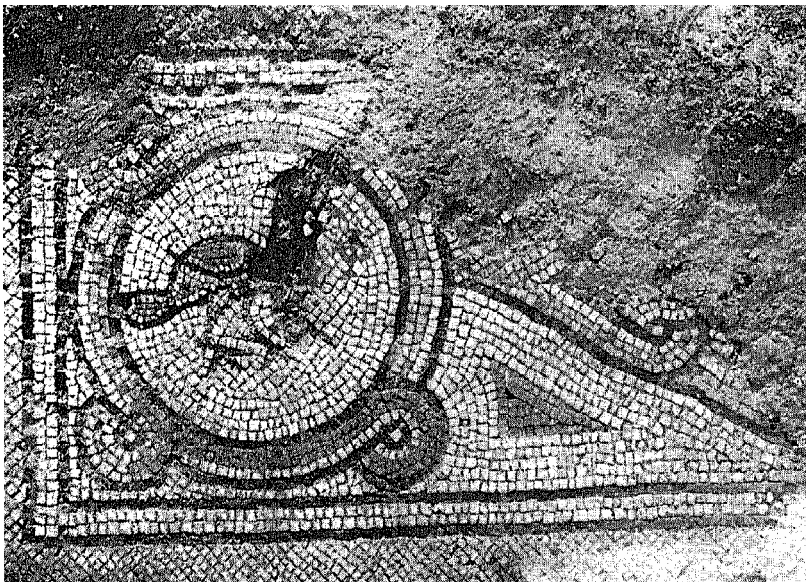
**Fig. 4** Na'aran: Stylized menorah mosaic from the narthex of the synagogue, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. IX); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 5** Na'aran: Vincent's drawing of the mosaics pavement of the synagogue's main hall, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. VII); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 6** Caesarea: The “Ibex Mosaic,” Area NN19. Photo by author.



**Fig. 7** Na‘aran: The fourth intercolumnar panel on the eastern side, depicting a bird that has been partially defaced, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XIVa); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 8** Na‘aran: Guilloche border surrounding the three panels of the nave. This piece is currently on display in the Yad Sarah building on Herzl Boulevard in Jerusalem. Although it was originally removed from the site by the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem, it is currently registered with the IAA, no. S901. Photo by author.



**Fig. 9** Na‘aran: Scroll medallion in the nave mosaic, panel one, located in the central row, first from the south; depicts a caged bird, partially defaced, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XIVb); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



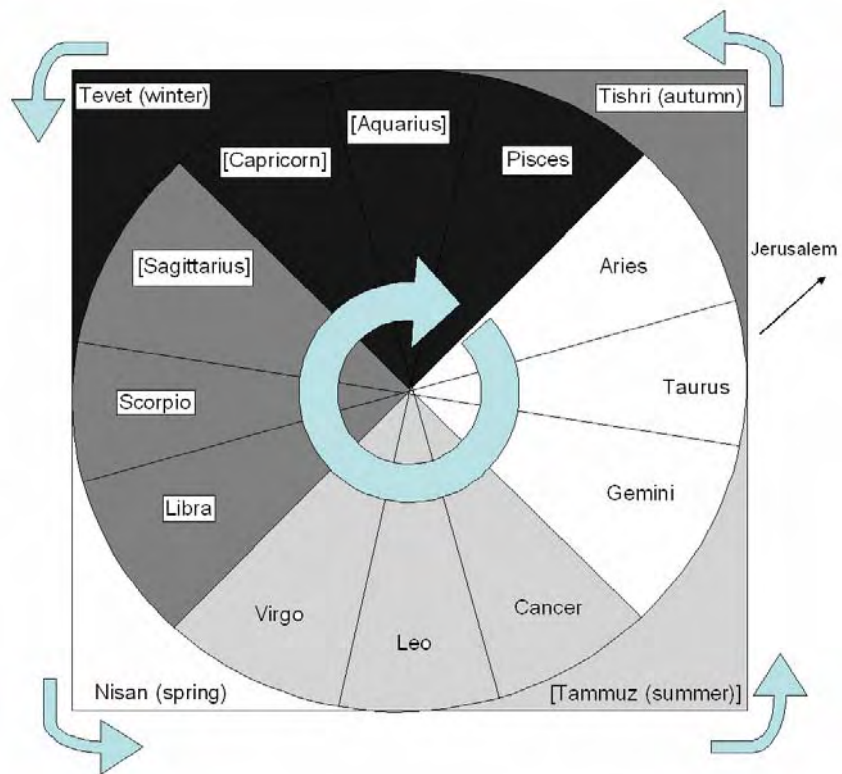
**Fig. 10** Na'aran: Scroll medallion of the nave mosaic, panel one, depicting a partially defaced lion, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XVIIb); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 11** Na'aran: Scroll medallion of the nave mosaic, panel one, depicting a partially defaced jackal, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XVIIIa); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



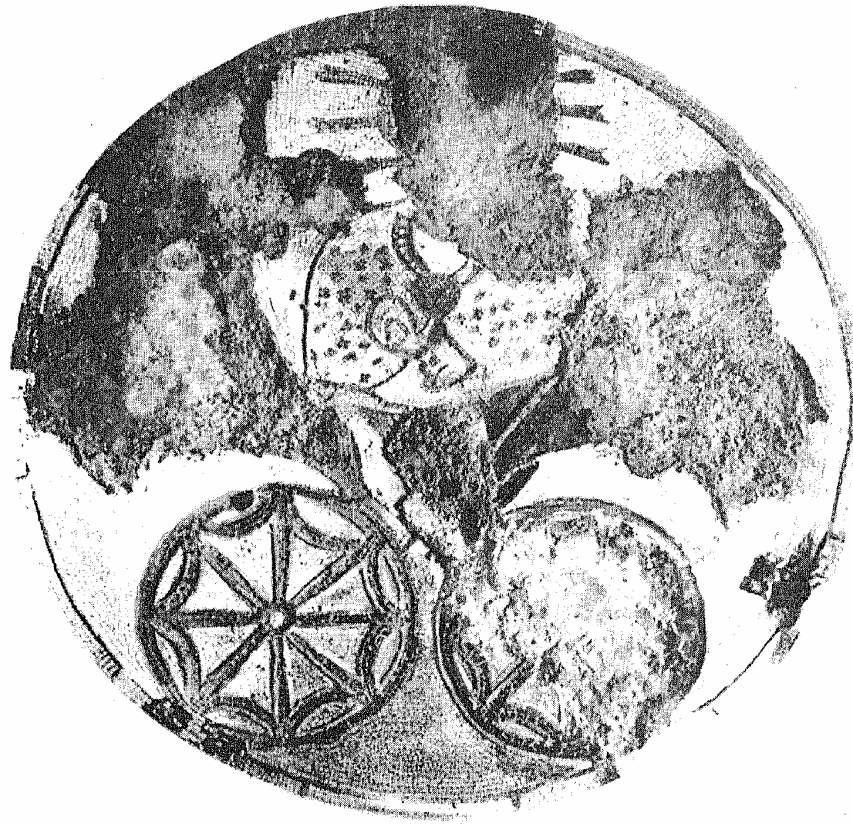
**Fig. 12** Na'aran: Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, after a sketch drawn by L. H. Vincent (Sukenik 1932: Fig. 49).



**Fig. 13** Na'aran: Diagram of the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave. Drawn by author.

ZODIAC		גלגל המזלות		
Greek	Hebrew	Symbol	Gregorian Month	Hebrew Month
Aries	טלה	ram	March-April	Nisan/Aviv
Taurus	שור	bull	April-May	Iyyar <span style="float: right;">Spring</span>
Gemini	תאומים	twins	May-June	<u>Sivan</u>
Cancer	סרטן	crab	June-July	Tammuz
Leo	אריה	lion	July-August	Av <span style="float: right;">Summer</span>
Virgo	בתולה	female virgin	August-September	<u>Elul</u>
Libra	מאוזניים	scale	September-October	Tishrei
Scorpio	עקרב	scorpion	October-November	Heshvan/Marheshvan/Bul <span style="float: right;">Autumn</span>
Sagittarius	קשת	centaur/archer	November-December	<u>Kislev</u>
Capricorn	גדי	goat/sea-goat	December-January	Tevat
Aquarius	דלי	water-bearer	January-February	Shevat <span style="float: right;">Winter</span>
Pisces	דגים	fish	February-March	<u>Adar</u>

**Fig. 14** Table outlining the complete zodiac, its Hebrew equivalents, symbols, months, and seasons.

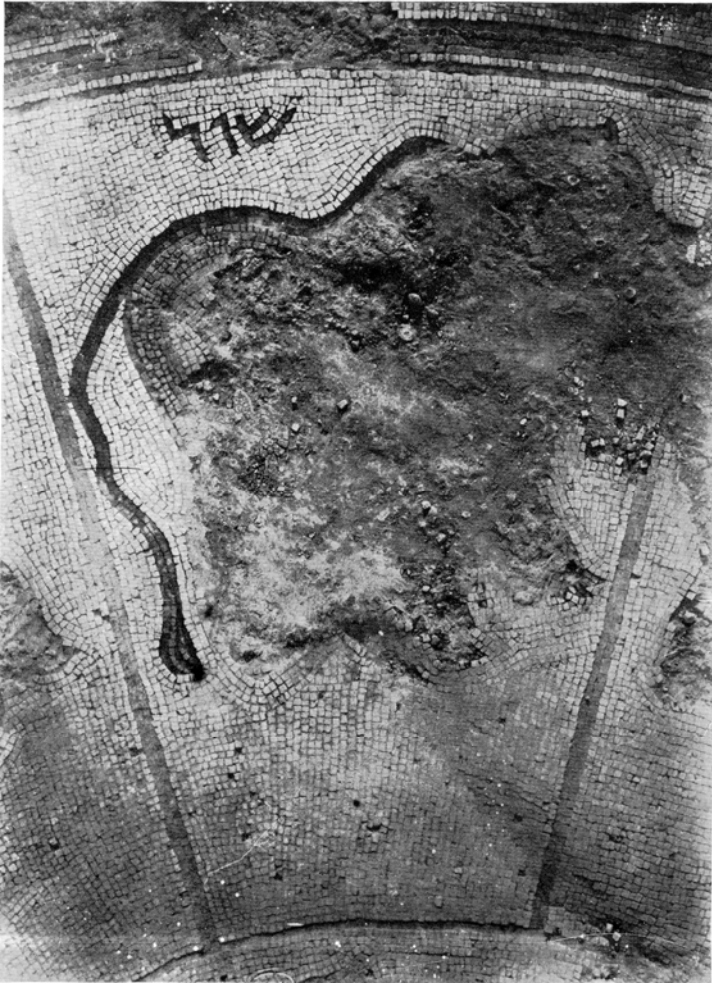


**Fig. 15** Na'aran: Helios in nave mosaic, panel one, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XXI); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 16** Na'aran: The defaced ram, representing Aries, in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XXa).





**Fig. 17** Na'aran: The defaced bull, representing Taurus, in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Suknik 1932: Pl. 2a).



**Fig. 18** Na'aran: The defaced crab, representing Cancer, in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Suknik 1932: Pl. 2b).



**Fig. 19** Na'aran: The defaced lion, representing Leo, in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1932: Pl. 3a).



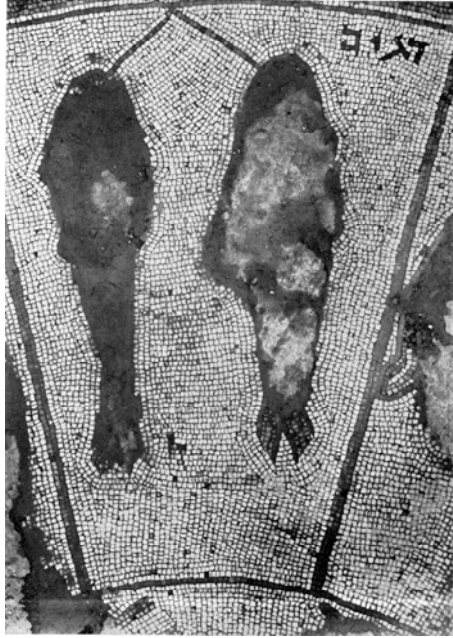
**Fig. 20** Na'aran: The defaced Virgo in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1932: Pl. 3b).



**Fig. 21** Na'aran: The defaced Libra in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1932: Pl. 4a).



**Fig. 22** Na'aran: The defaced Scorpio in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XXb); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



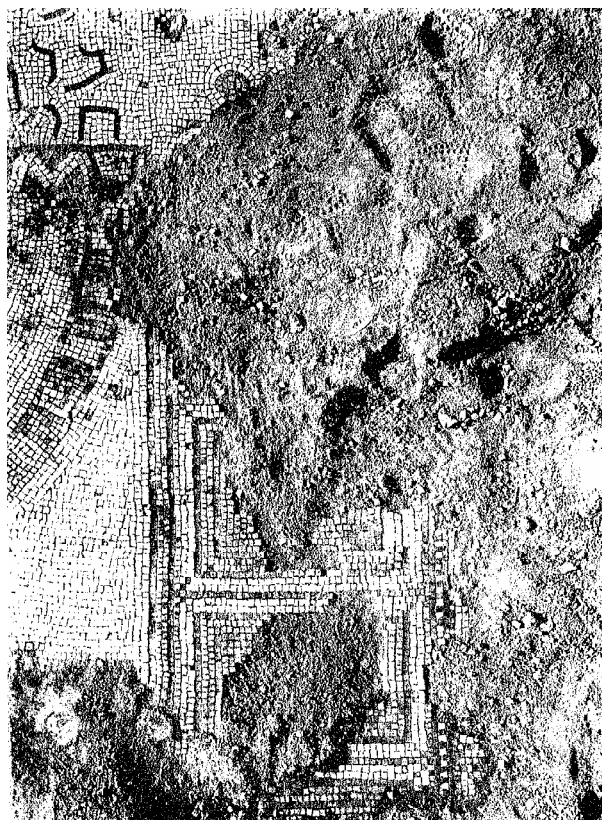
**Fig. 23** Na'aran: The defaced Pisces in the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1932: Pl. 4b).



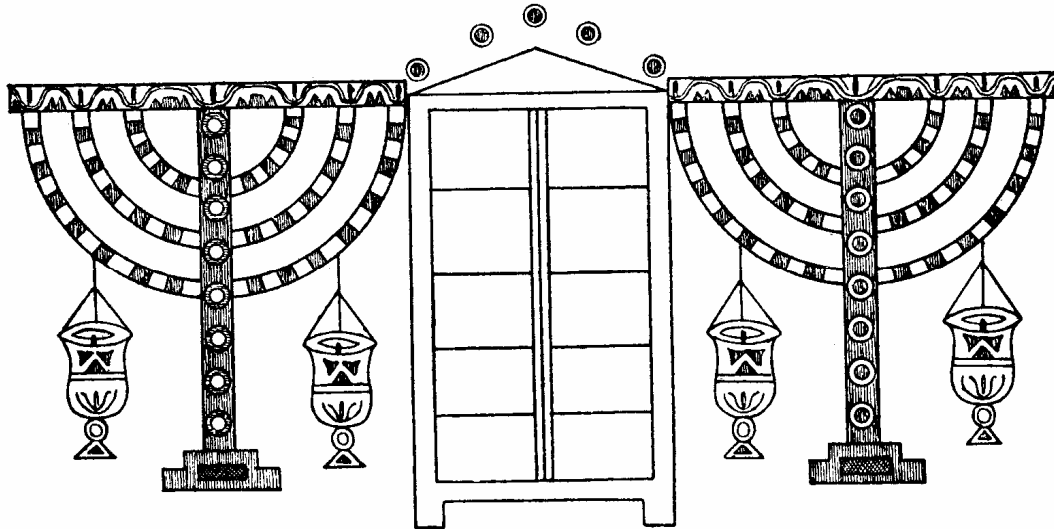
**Fig. 24** Na'aran: The defaced season of autumn in the upper-right corner of the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1932: Pl. 5b).



**Fig. 25** Na'aran: The defaced season of spring in the lower-left corner of the Helios-and-zodiac motif in panel two of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1932: Pl. 5a).



**Fig. 26** Na'aran: The remains of the depiction of the Torah shrine in panel three of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XXII); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 27** Na'aran: Vincent's reconstruction of the Torah-shrine-and-menorahs motif in panel three of the nave (Sukenik 1932: Fig. 27).



**Fig. 28** Na'aran: The remains of the left menorah in panel three of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XXIII); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 29** Na'aran: The remains of Daniel and the lion to the left, with a dedicatory inscription between them, in panel three of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1930: Pl. XVIIIa).



**Fig. 30** Na'aran: The defaced lion on the left side of panel three in the main hall's nave, taken during excavation in 1921; courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 31** Na'aran: Dedicatory inscription above the right menorah, in panel three of the nave, taken during excavation in 1921 (Sukenik 1934: Pl. XVIIIb).



**Fig. 32** Na'aran: The Gazelle Mosaic in the central doorway of the main hall of the synagogue, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. X); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.



**Fig. 33** Na'aran: A jerboa in an inhabited scrolled, having experience both willful destruction and repair, not necessarily in that order, taken during excavation in 1921 (Vincent and Benoit 1961: Pl. XV); courtesy of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem.





**Fig. 34** Na‘aran: A semi-circular medallion mosaic removed by the Anzac soldiers in 1918 and brought to Australia by Maitland Woods. It was donated to St. James’ Church in Sydney where it remains today (Ariotti 2004: Fig. 1).



**Fig. 35** Na‘aran: A semi-circular medallion mosaic removed by the Anzac soldiers in 1918 and brought to Australia, probably by Maitland Woods. It is now in St. John’s Cathedral in Brisbane. Photo by Christine Cahill.

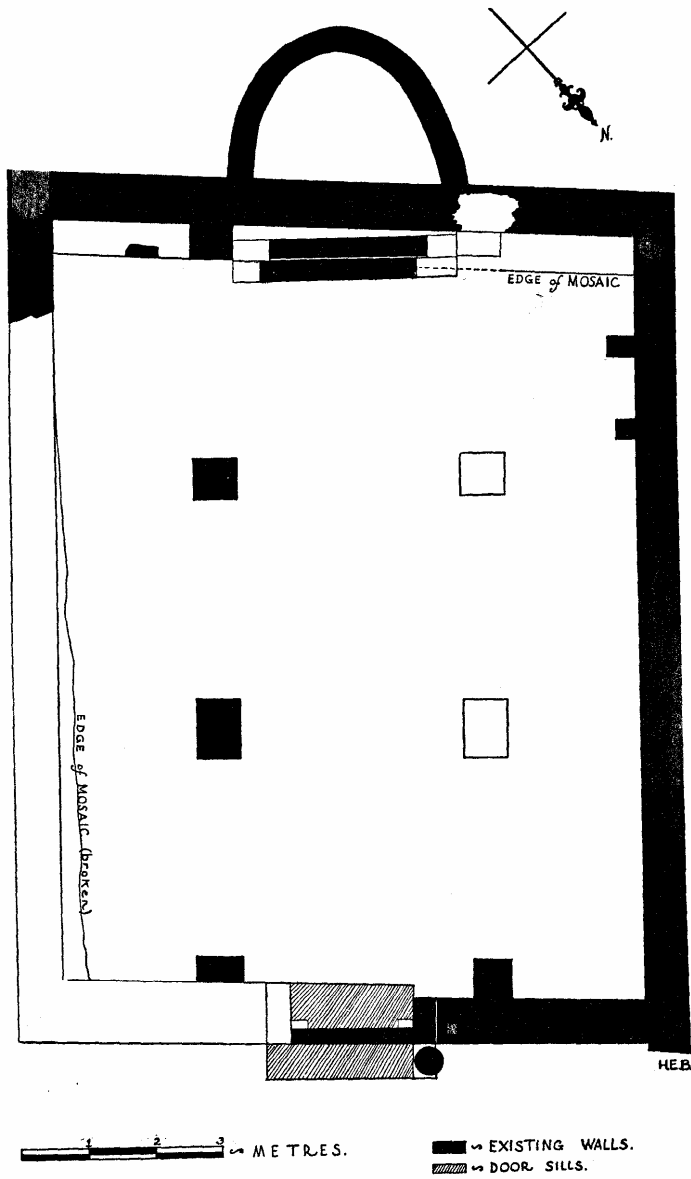


FIG. I.

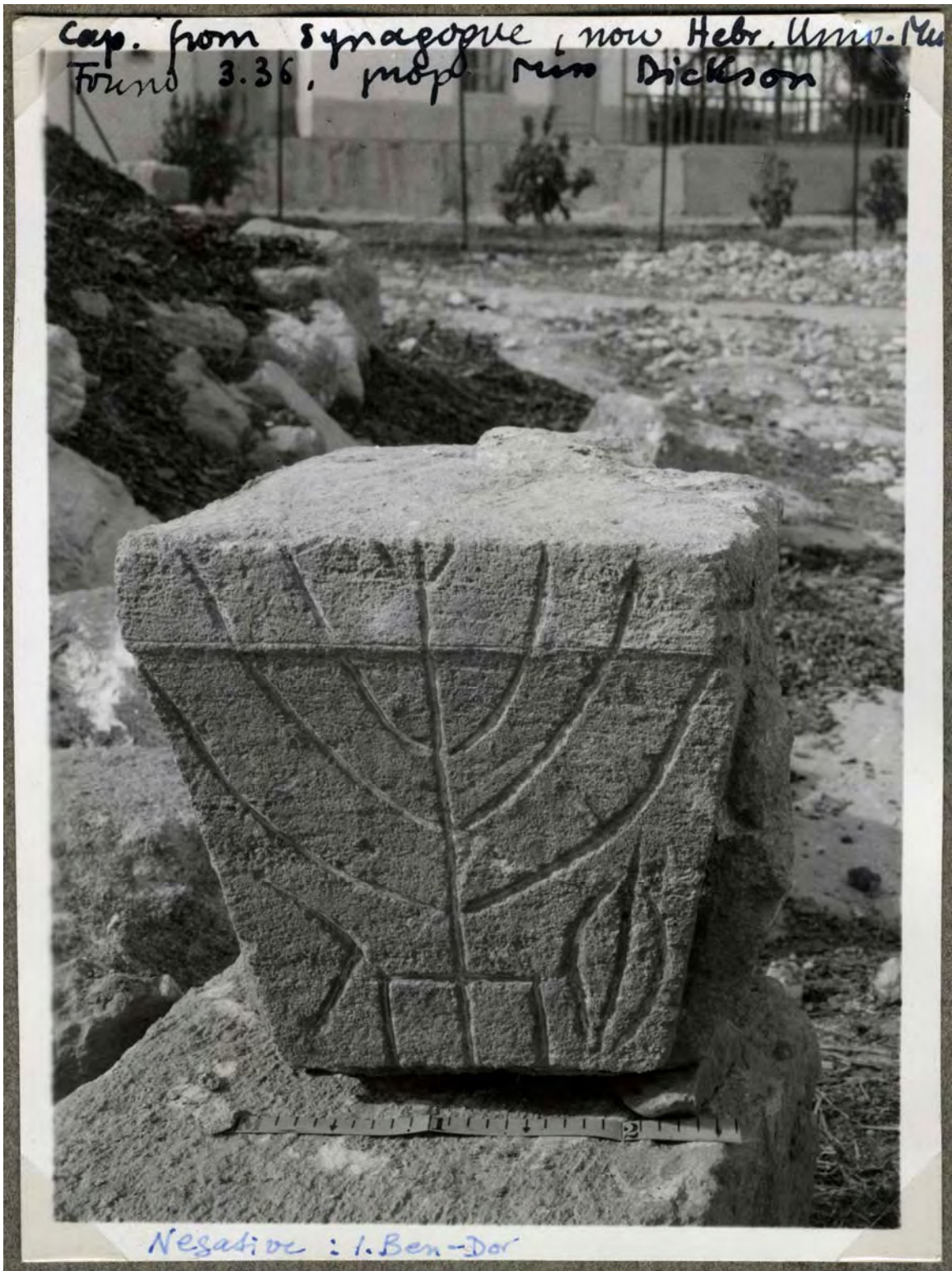
Fig. 36 Jericho: General plan (Baramki 1938: Fig. I.).



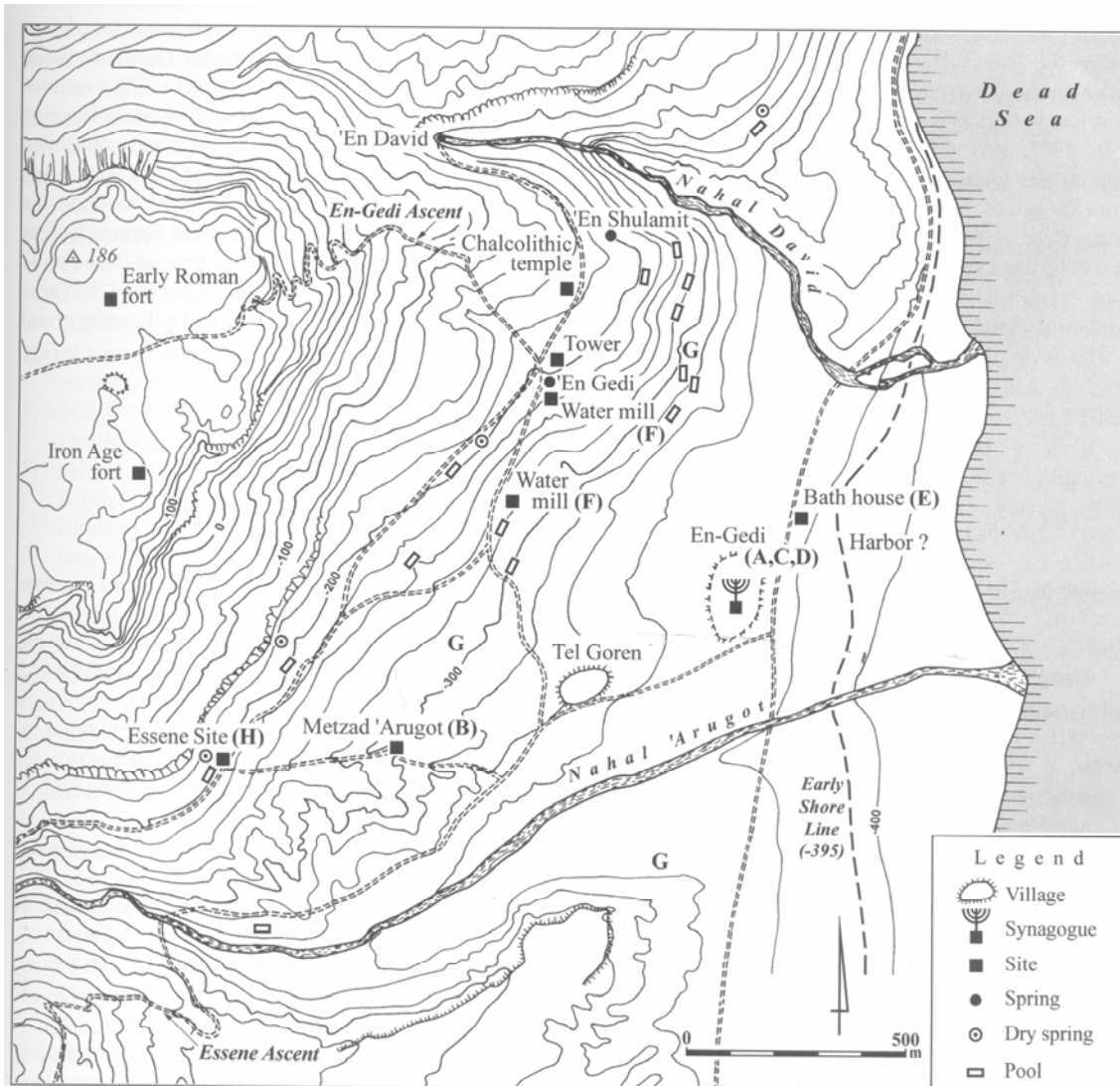
**Fig. 37** Jericho: Photograph of the excavated area, looking south (Baramki 1938: Pl. XVIII.1).



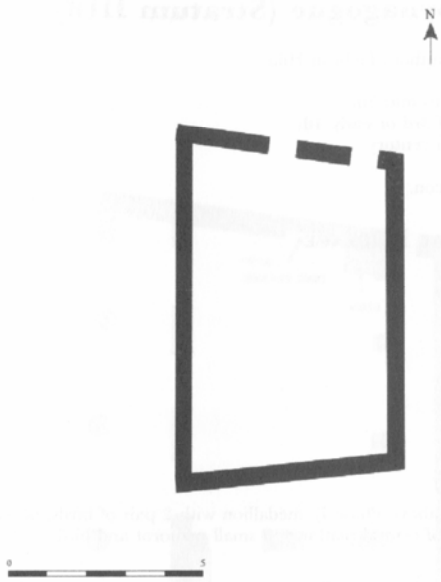
**Fig. 38** Jericho: Photograph of the nave mosaic (modified slightly from Baramki 1938: Pl. XIX).



**Fig. 39** Jericho: Photograph of a decorated architectural fragment (from IAA Archives, Mandate Record Files, file no. 77).



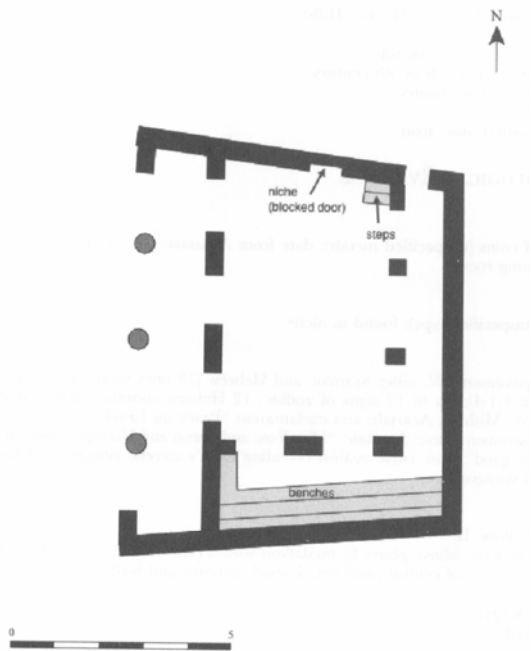
**Fig. 40** En-Gedi: Map of areas excavated around the En-Gedi oasis (from Hirschfeld ed. 2007: 19, Fig. 24).



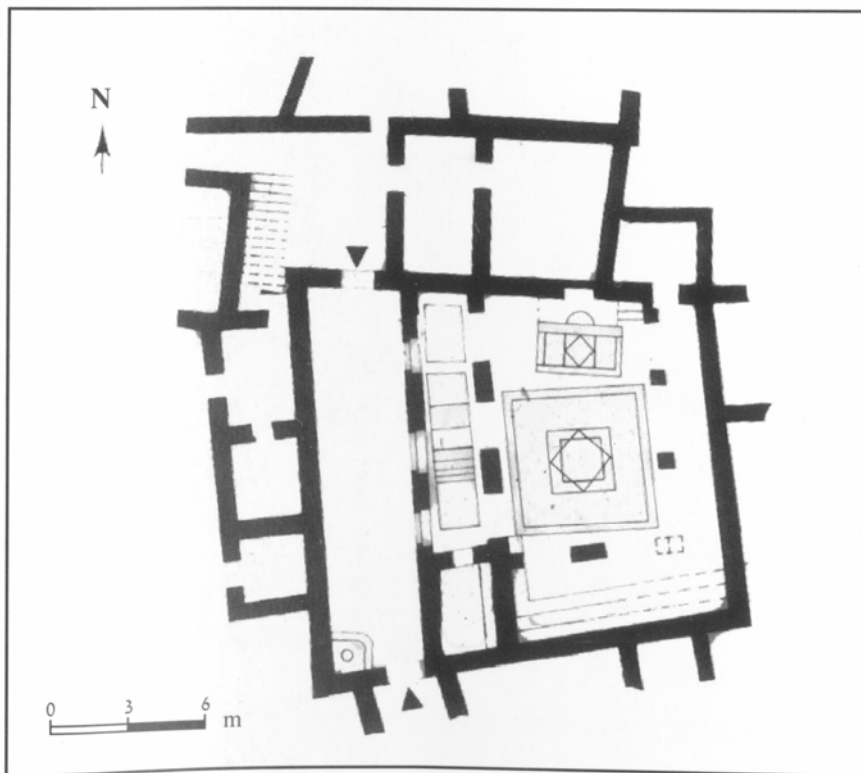
**Fig. 41** En-Gedi: Plan of the synagogue of Stratum IIIB (from Milson 2007: 353).



**Fig. 42** En-Gedi: Mosaic floor, central panel of Stratum IIIB-A (from Barag 2006: 21, Fig. 32).



**Fig. 43** En-Gedi: Plan of the synagogue of Stratum IIIA (from Milson 2007: 355).



**Fig. 44** En-Gedi: Plan of the synagogue of Stratum II (from Barag 2006: 22, Fig. 34).

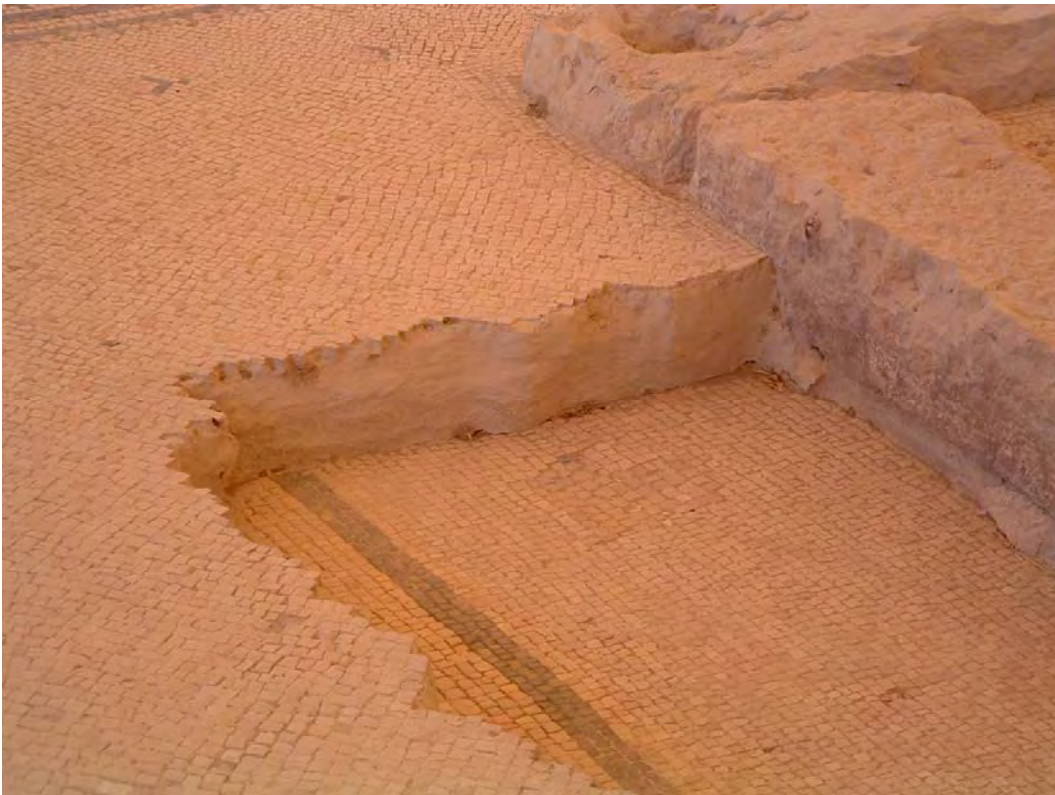




**Fig. 45** En-Gedi: Photograph of the nave mosaic of Stratum II (from Stern ed. 1993: color plate after p. 440).



**Fig. 46** En-Gedi: Photograph of the Stratum II bema, apse, and “*geniza*” (from Barag 2006: 23, Fig. 36).



**Fig. 47** En-Gedi: Conservation work showing the Stratum II mosaic floor above the Stratum IIIB-A mosaic floor, as well as the profile of the north face of the bema, looking northwest. Photo by author.



**Fig. 48** En-Gedi: The Stratum II bema mosaic (from Barag 2006: 23, Fig. 37).



**Fig. 49** En-Gedi: The Stratum II bema, apse, and “*geniza*” (from Mazar 1971).



**Fig. 50** En-Gedi: Goblet and menorah found in the ashy debris to the north of the Stratum II bema (from Barag 2006: 25, fig. 41).



**Fig. 51** En-Gedi: Goblet and coin hoard as uncovered within the ashy debris to the north of the Stratum II bema (from Barag 1993: 408).



**Fig. 52** En-Gedi: The west aisle of Stratum II (from Barag 2006: 24, Fig. 39).



Fig. 53 En-Gedi: Inscriptions 1-4 of Stratum II (from Levine 1981: 141).



**Fig. 54** En-Gedi: Inscription 5 of Stratum II. Photo by author.



**Fig. 55** Kh. Susiya: Aerial view (from *Google Earth* 2008-10).

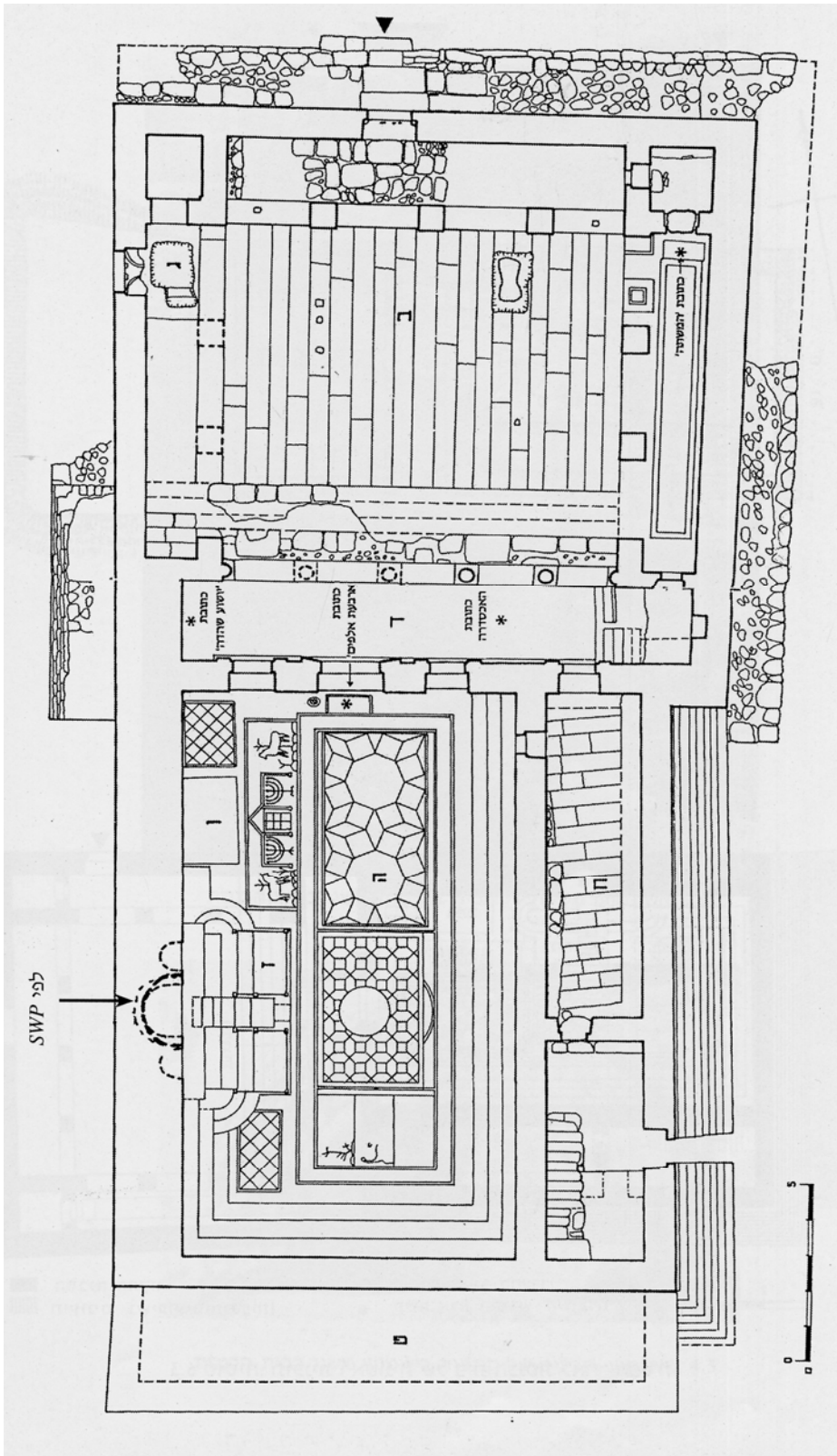


**Fig. 56** Kh. Susiya: A photograph of one of the inscriptions from the main hall at the time of excavation showing the extent of preservation (left), and a recent photograph of the same mosaic showing the conservation work (right). Excavation photo (left) from Gutman et al. 1972: 51 (reproduced in Naveh 1978: 117 and Gutman et al. 1981: 127); recent photo by author.





**Fig. 57** Kh. Susiya: Plan of the excavated structures at the site (from Yeivin 1993c: 7). The amorphous dashed lines denote subterranean caves, while the dotted-line path with arrows and numbers is simply for the benefit of visitors to the site. The plan does not include excavations since 1986.



**Fig. 58** Kh. Susiya: Plan of the synagogue drawn by Yeivin, with modifications (first published in Yeivin 1993c: 16-17; modified by Amit 2003: fig. I.7).



**Fig. 59** Kh. Susiya: Rolling stone of the east entrance to the synagogue courtyard. Photo by author.



**Fig. 60** Kh. Susiya: Synagogue courtyard, looking southeast. Photo by author.



**Fig. 61** Kh. Susiya: Southern portico of the synagogue courtyard, showing the “Rabbi Isai” inscription and the blocked doorway of the southeast-corner room, looking east. Photo by author.



**Fig. 62** Kh. Susiya: The narthex of the synagogue, facing north. Photo by author.



**Fig. 63** Kh. Susiya: The southern section of the narthex, showing the two inscriptions, the remnants of the geometric designs, the ancient repairs, and the modern conservation; facing north. Photo by author.



**Fig. 64** Kh. Susiya: Inscription from the north end of the narthex, showing the remains of the border of the narthex mosaic; note that the large tesserae at the bottom of the image are apparently from modern conservation work, not ancient repairs (cf. the photograph in Naveh 1978: 119). Photo by author.



**Fig. 65** Kh. Susiya: Mosaic detail from narthex, showing an Aramaic dedicatory inscription and repair (from Naveh 1978: 120).



**Fig. 66** Kh. Susiya: The central and northern entrance of the triportal façade, looking west, into the main hall; visible in the background are the two bemas. Photo by author.



**Fig. 67** Kh. Susiya: View of the interior of the main hall of the synagogue, showing the central mosaic carpet, benches in the background, and Bema A off the right; looking west. Photo by author.





**Fig. 68** Kh. Susiya: View of the east panel of the central mosaic carpet within the main hall of the synagogue; looking south. Photo by Justin Winger.



**Fig. 69** Kh. Susiya: Detail of the north-northeast square of the east octagon within the east panel of the central mosaic carpet within the main hall of the synagogue, showing an image of a bird subjected to the scramble-technique of iconoclasm. Photo by author.



**Fig. 70** Kh. Susiya: Detail of the north-northwest square of the east octagon within the east panel of the central mosaic carpet within the main hall of the synagogue, showing an image of a bird subjected to the scramble-technique of iconoclasm, as well as modern conservation. Photo by author.



**Fig. 71** Kh. Susiya: Detail of the east-northeast square of the east octagon within the east panel of the central mosaic carpet within the main hall of the synagogue, showing an image of a rooster subjected to the scramble-technique of iconoclasm. Photo by author.



**Fig. 72** Kh. Susiya: Detail of the west-northwest square of the west octagon within the east panel of the central mosaic carpet within the main hall of the synagogue, showing an image of a bird subjected to the scramble-technique of iconoclasm. Photo by author.



**Fig. 73** Kh. Susiya: Detail of the west-northwest square of the west octagon within the east panel of the central mosaic carpet within the main hall of the synagogue, showing the patch-repair of an iconoclastic episode. Photo by author.



**Fig. 74** Kh. Susiya: Detail of the north-northwest square of the west octagon within the east panel of the central mosaic carpet within the main hall of the synagogue, showing an image of a long-necked fowl subjected to the scramble-technique of iconoclasm. Photo by author.



**Fig. 75** Kh. Susiya: View of the central panel of the central mosaic carpet in the synagogue's main hall, with benches in background; looking south. Photo by author.



**Fig. 76** Kh. Susiya: Remains of the Helios-and-zodiac motif that originally decorated the central panel of the central mosaic carpet in the main hall of the synagogue, looking north. Photo by author.



**Fig. 77** Kh. Susiya: The main feature of the replacement mosaic of the central panel of the central mosaic carpet in the main hall of the synagogue, looking west. Photo by author.



**Fig. 78** Kh. Susiya: The west panel of the central mosaic carpet of the synagogue's main hall, looking south. Photo by author.



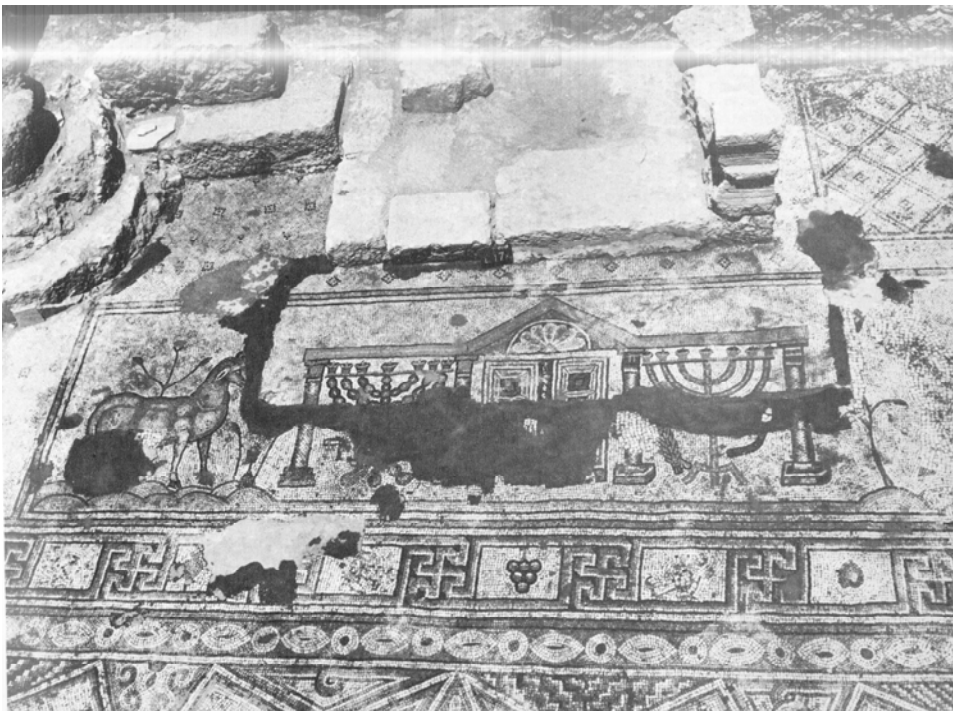
**Fig. 79** Kh. Susiya: The northernmost section of the west panel of the central mosaic carpet of the synagogue's main hall, looking north. The irregularly shaped and paler tesserae are ancient repairs, while the more uniform and regularly-laid tesserae near the bottom of the panel are from modern conservation work. Photo by author.



**Fig. 80** Kh. Susiya: The central section of the west panel of the central mosaic carpet of the synagogue's main hall, looking north. Photo by author.



**Fig. 81** Kh. Susiya: Detail of Daniel as defaced by iconoclasts, with inscription to the left of the head, in the central section of the west panel of the central mosaic carpet of the synagogue's main hall, looking north. Photo by author.



**Fig. 82** Kh. Susiya: Bema B mosaic at the time of excavation (from Gutman et al. 1972: 49; reprinted in *ibid.* 1981: 125, Yeivin 1989: pl. IL.1; 1993b: 1420).

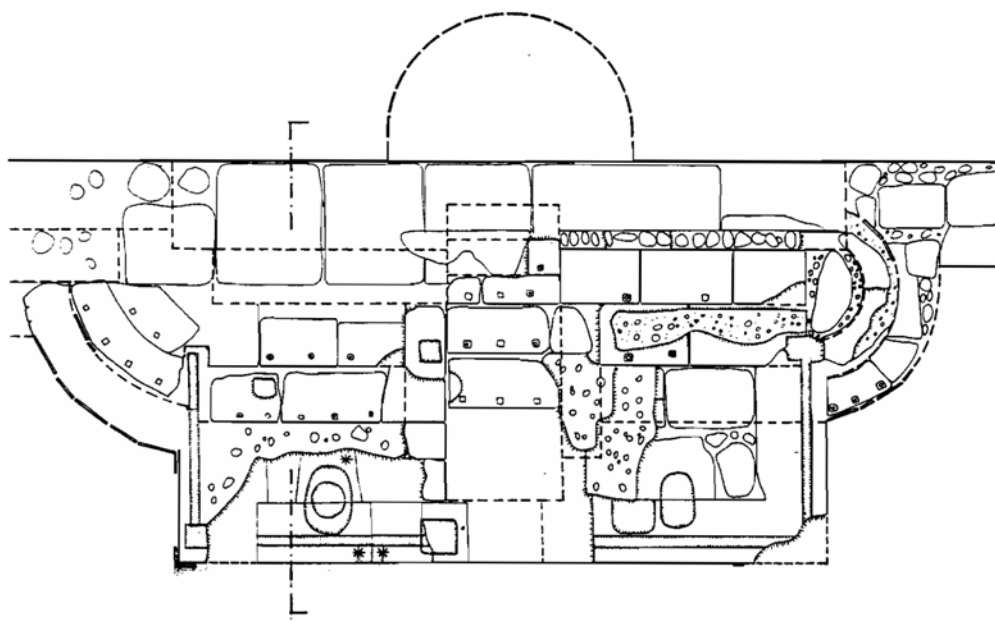




**Fig. 83** Kh. Susiya: Detail of the defaced and repaired ram, flanking the Torah shrine to the east in the Bema B mosaic of the synagogue's main hall. Photo by author.



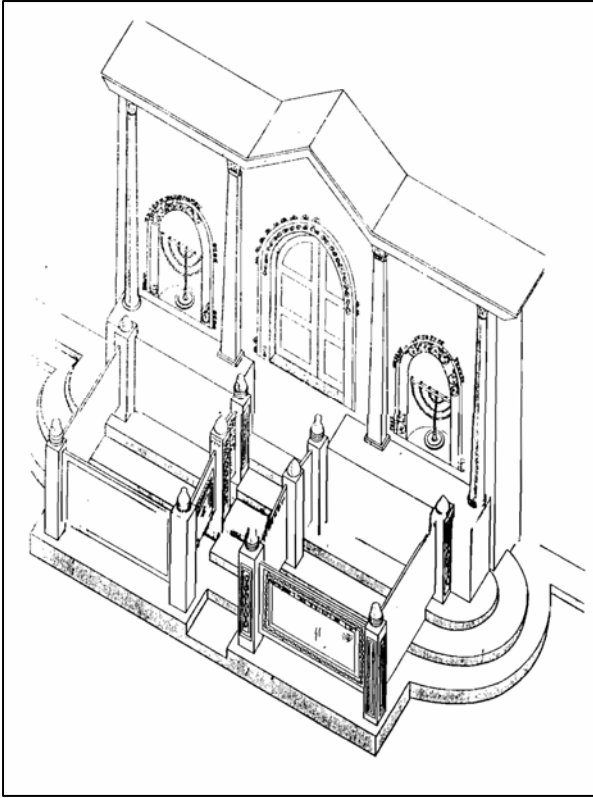
**Fig. 84** Kh. Susiya: The remains of Bema A in the synagogue, looking north. Photo by author.



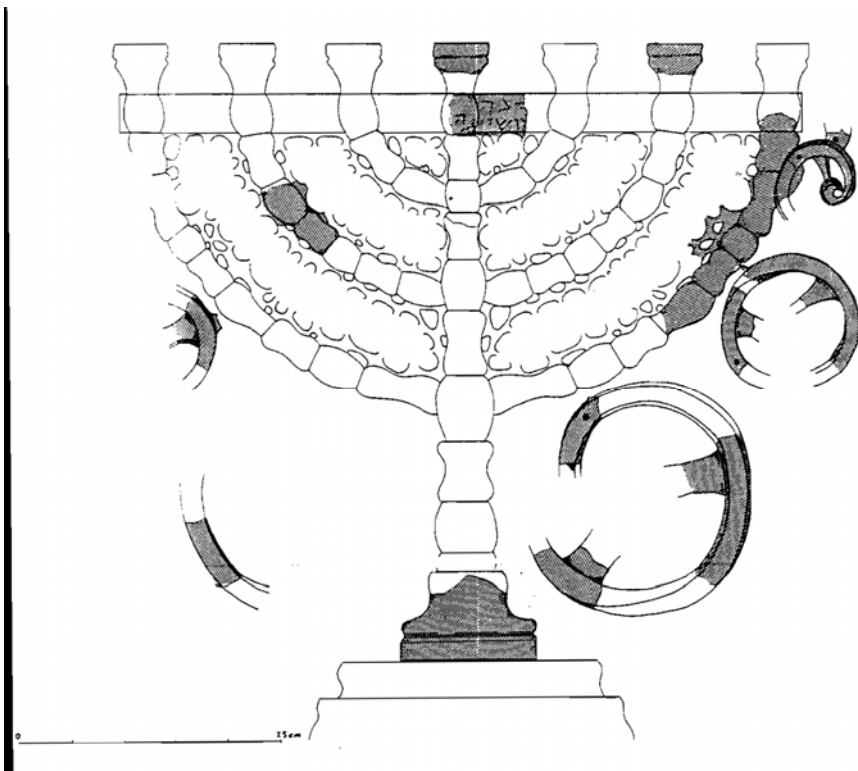
**Fig. 85** Kh. Susiya: Top-plan of Bema A in the synagogue (from Yeivin 1989: fig. 3).



**Fig. 86** Kh. Susiya: The remains of Bema A in the synagogue, looking northeast. Photo by author.



**Fig. 87** Kh. Susiya: The proposed reconstruction of Bema A in the synagogue (from Yeivin 1989: fig. 5).



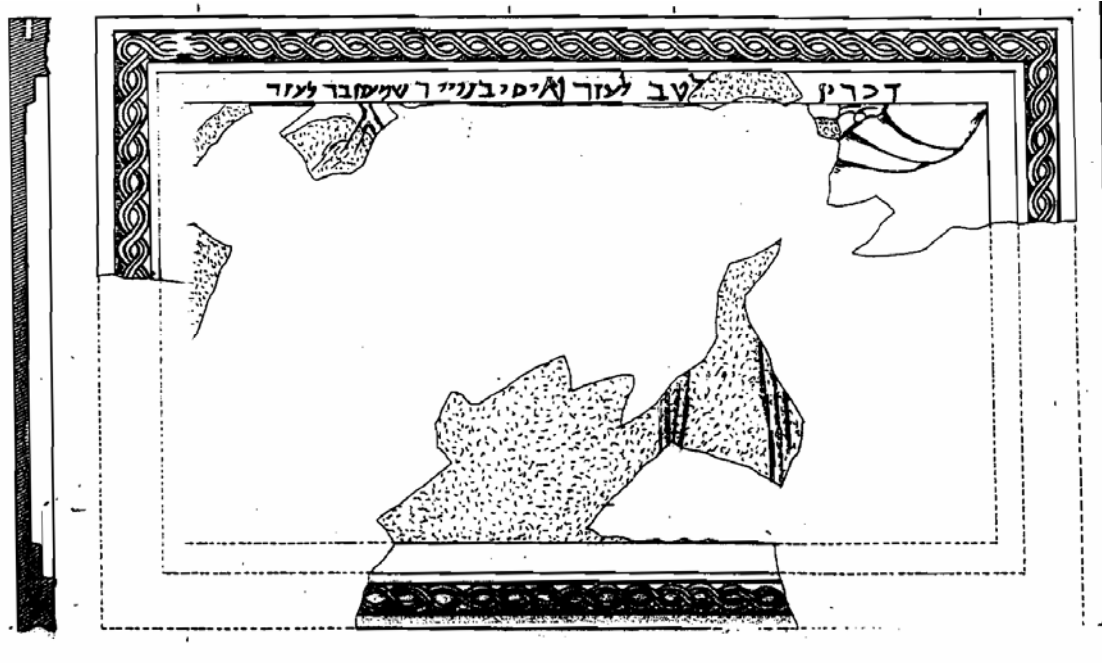
**Fig. 88** Kh. Susiya: Three-dimensional marble menorah (from Yeivin 1989: fig. 13).



**Fig. 89** Kh. Susiya: Decorative marble inlay or fixture from Bema A, during its reconstruction and conservation at the Israel Museum in June 2009. The original section at the crest of the curve shows the fourth marble inscription. Photo by author.



**Fig. 90** Kh. Susiya: Chancel screen and posts of Bema A during reconstruction and conservation at the Israel Museum in June 2009. The heavily reconstructed panel in the foreground is the figurative panel published by Foerster 1989. Photo by author.



**Fig. 91** Kh. Susiya: Reconstruction of a chancel screen panel of Bema A (from Foerster 1989: fig. 14).



**Fig. 92** Kh. Susiya: Chancel screen panel from Bema A showing a date-palm tree flanked by birds. Photo by author.



**Fig. 93** Kh. Susiya: Chancel screen panel from Bema A showing a pomegranate tree flanked by gazelles. Photo by author.



**Fig. 94** Kh. Susiya: Chancel screen panel from Bema A showing a menorah flanked by ritual objects. Photo by author.





**Fig. 95** Kh. Susiya: An openwork plaque from Bema A. Photo by author.



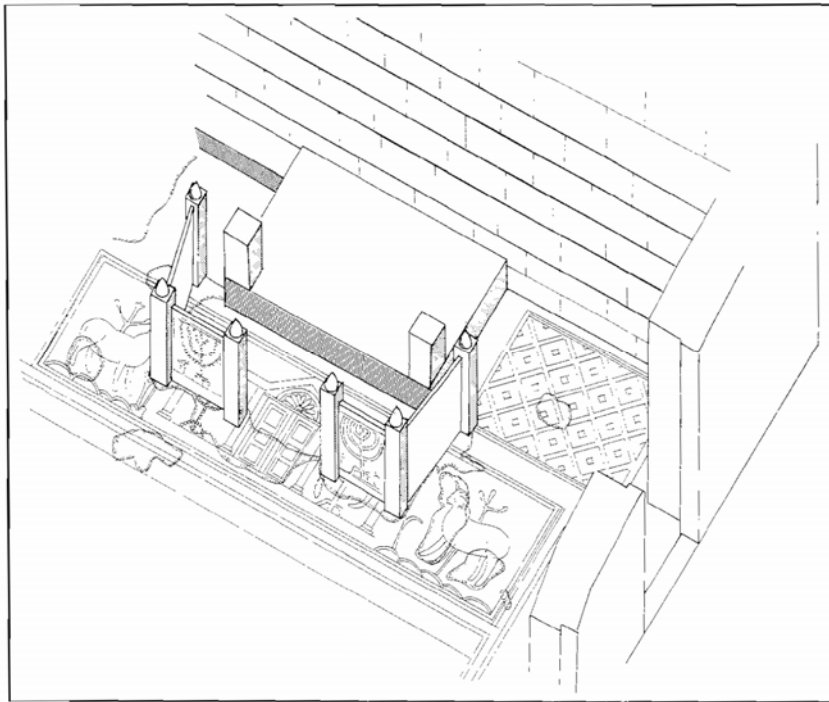
**Fig. 96** Kh. Susiya: Chancel screen post from Bema A. Photo by author.



**Fig. 97** Kh. Susiya: Reconstructed panel from the synagogue's chancel screen showing a lamp atop a tripod base and stem. Photo by author.



**Fig. 98** Kh. Susiya: Bema B of the synagogue's main hall. Photo by author.



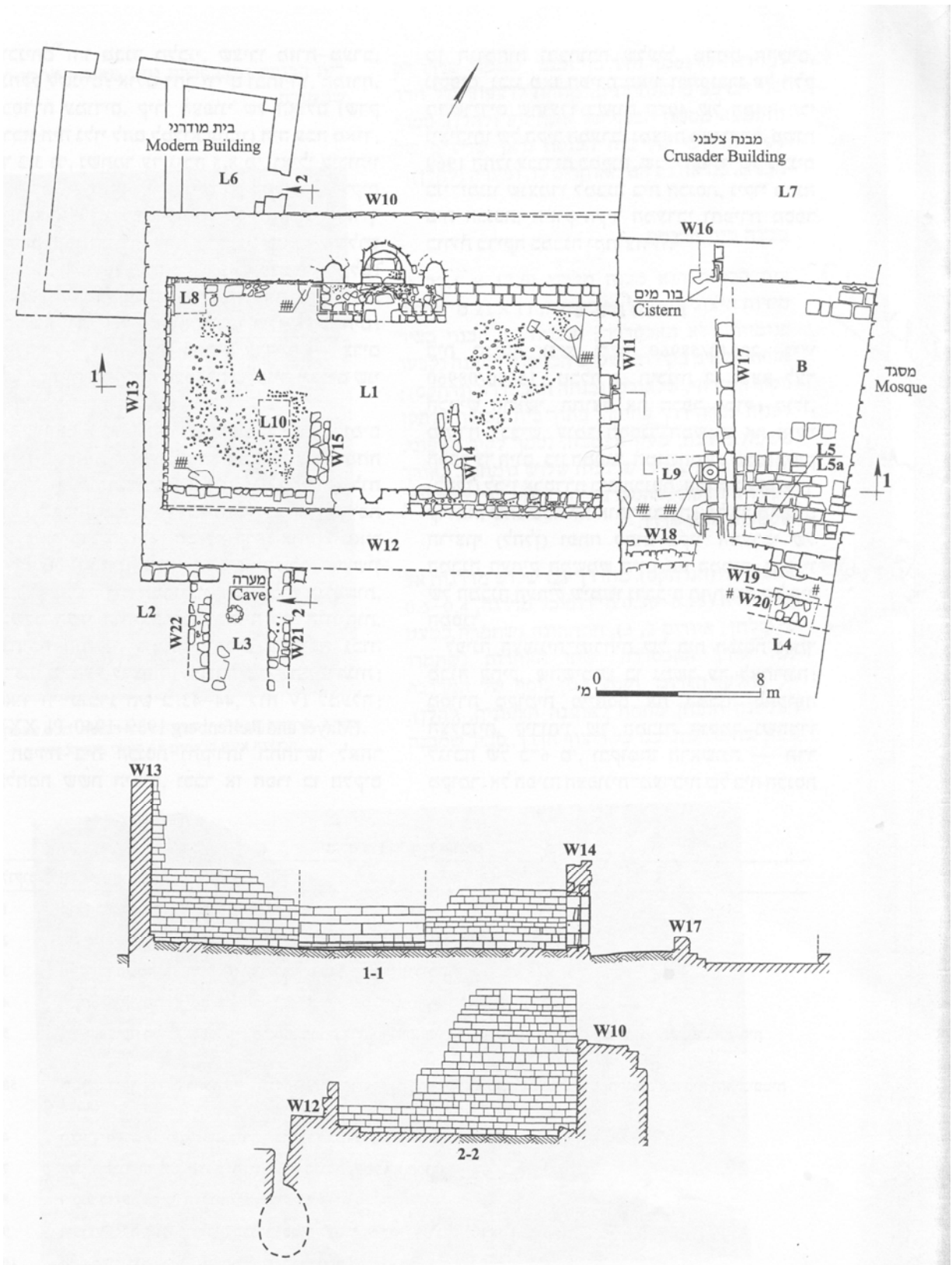
**Fig. 99** Kh. Susiya: Isometric reconstruction of Bema B in the synagogue's main hall (from Yeivin 1993c: 22).



**Fig. 100** Kh. Susiya: southeast room of the synagogue complex, looking west. Photo by author.



**Fig. 101** Kh. Susiya: Stairs leading to the second story, within the southwest room of the synagogue complex, looking west. Photo by author.



**Fig. 102** Eshtemoa: Synagogue plan and profiles (from Yeivin 2004: 61\*, plan 2).



**Fig. 103** Eshtemoa: Interior of the main hall, facing west. Photo by Justin Winger.



**Fig. 104** Eshtemoa: Mosaic patch in southern end of narthex, preserving evidence of the inhabited scrolls motif, as well as the later iconoclastic event (from Yeivin 1993a: 425; republished in Yeivin 2004: fig. 9).



**Fig. 105** Eshtemoa: The eastern triportal façade of the synagogue, showing the decorated doorjambs. Photo by author.



**Fig. 106** Eshtemoa: One of two architectural fragments found within the synagogue, currently on display in the Rockefeller Museum (from Yeivin 1993a: 426, republished in Yeivin 2004: fig. 29:1).





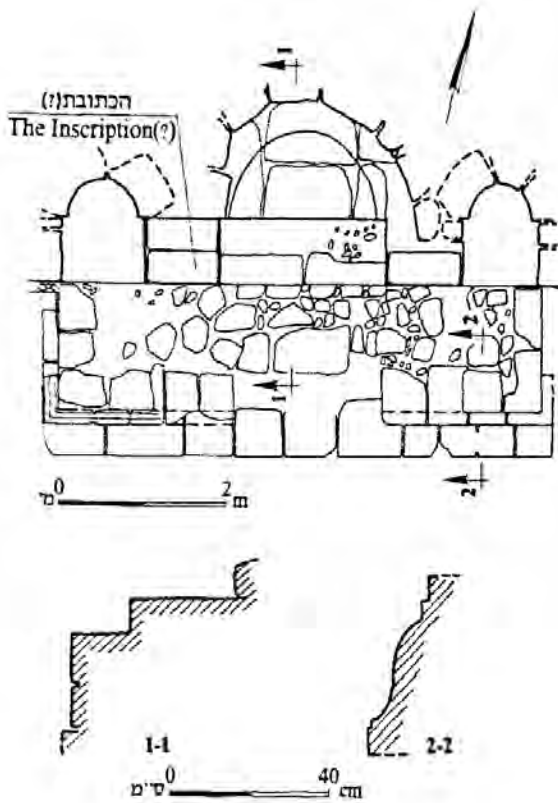
**Fig. 107** Eshtemoa: One of two architectural fragments found within the synagogue, currently on display in the Rockefeller Museum.



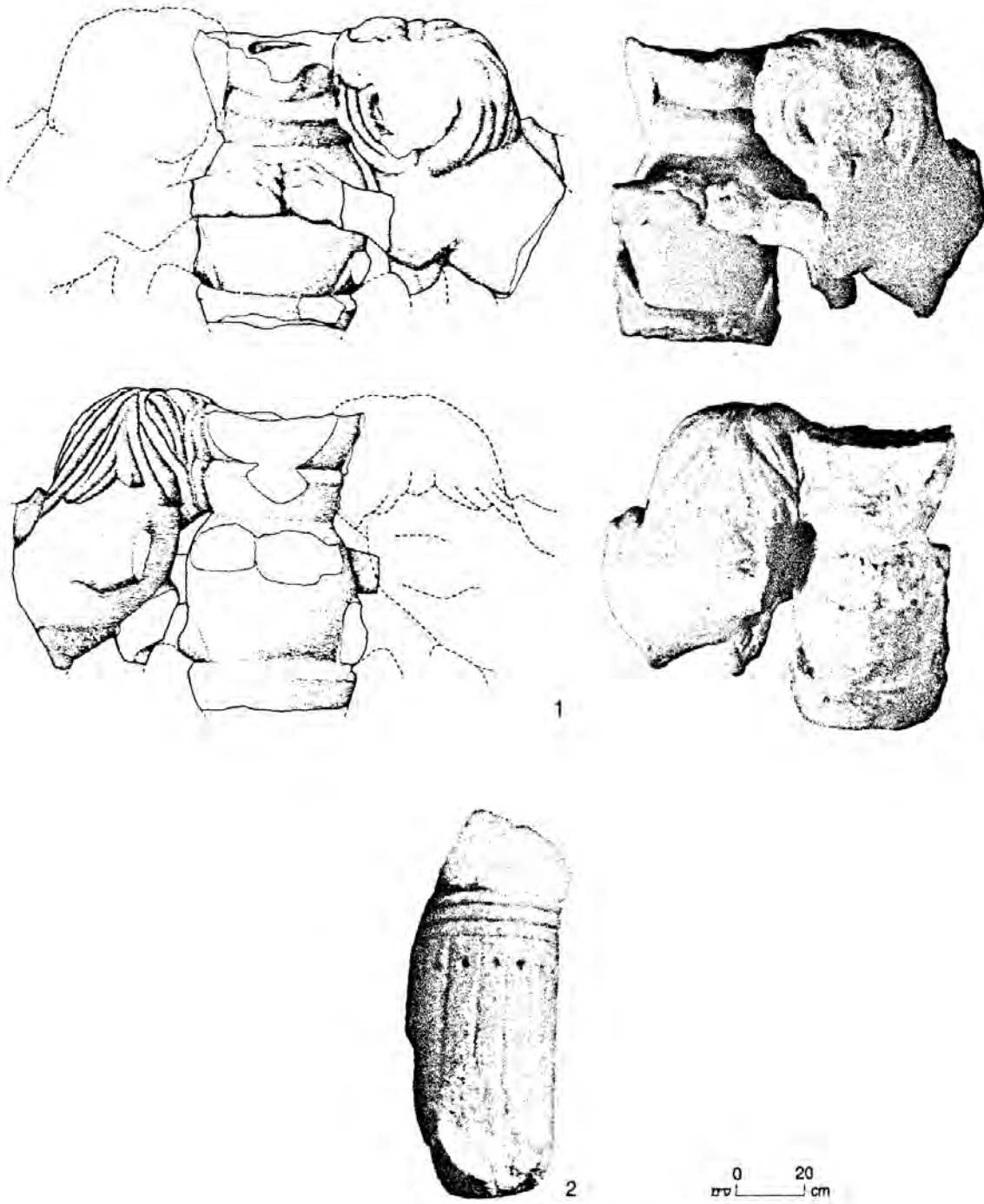
**Fig. 108** Eshtemoa: An architectural fragment found within the village (from Yeivin 2004: fig. 29.3).



**Fig. 109** Eshtemoa: An architectural fragment found within the village (from Hachlili 2001: 61\*, IS4.3).



**Fig. 110** Eshtemoa: Top plan of the niches and bema (from Yeivin 2004: plan 4).



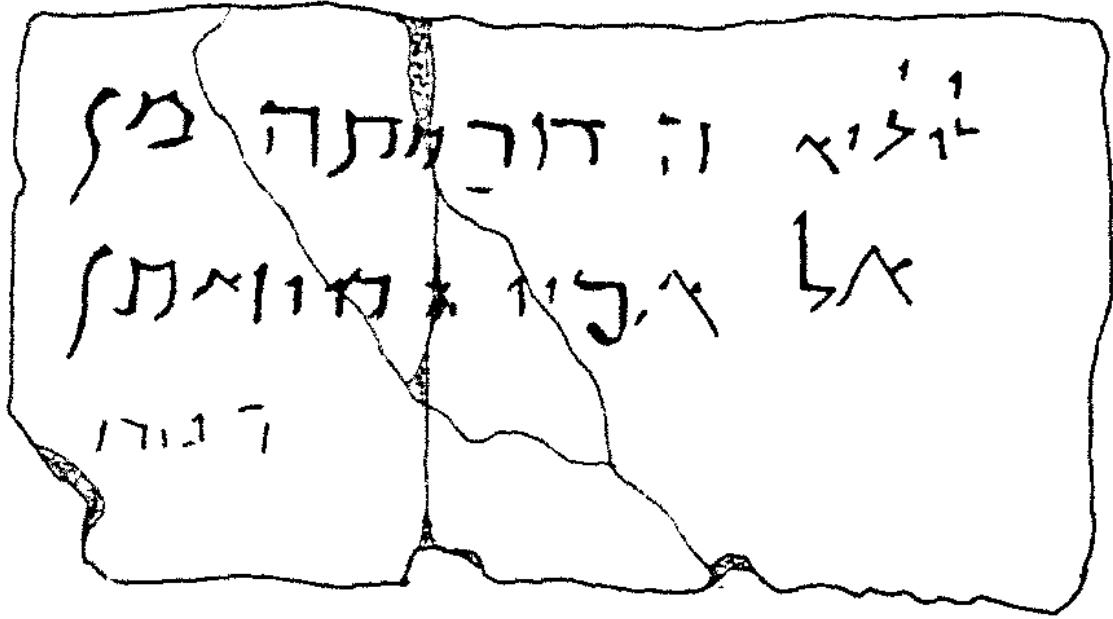
**Fig. 111** Eshtemoa: Fragments of the three-dimensional, marble menorah (from Yeivin 2004: fig. 33).



**Fig. 112** Eshtemoa: Remains of the apsidal feature on top of the bema, facing north, as uncovered by Mayer and Reifenberg in the 1935-36 (from Mayer and Reifenberg 1939-40: pl. XXV).



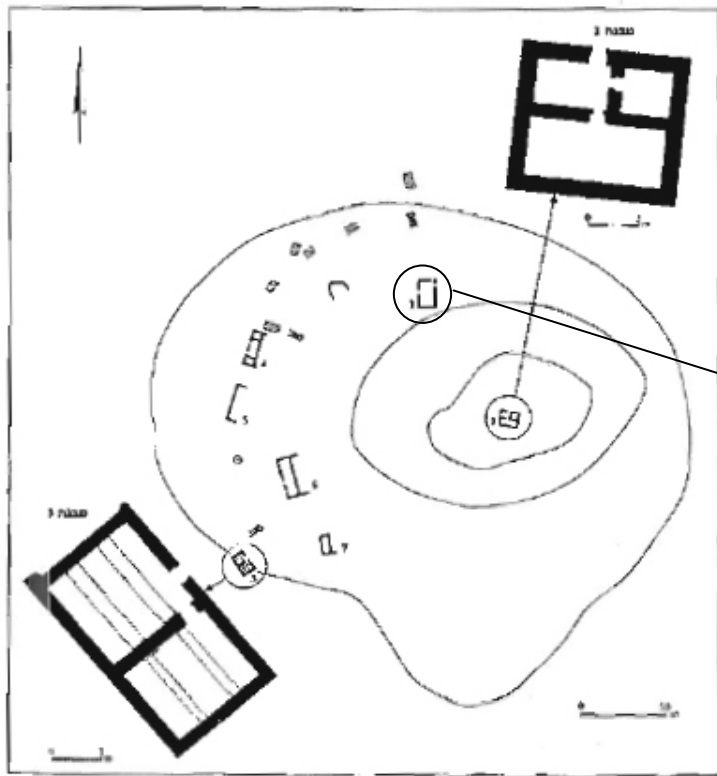
**Fig. 113** Eshtemoa: Remains of the bema and niches along the north wall, facing north, as they appeared in 2009. Photo by author.



**Fig. 114** Eshtemoa: Inscription from the apsidal feature in the main hall (from Yeivin 2004: fig. 21).



**Fig. 115** Ma'on (in Judea): Aerial view of the site (from *Google Earth* 2008-10).

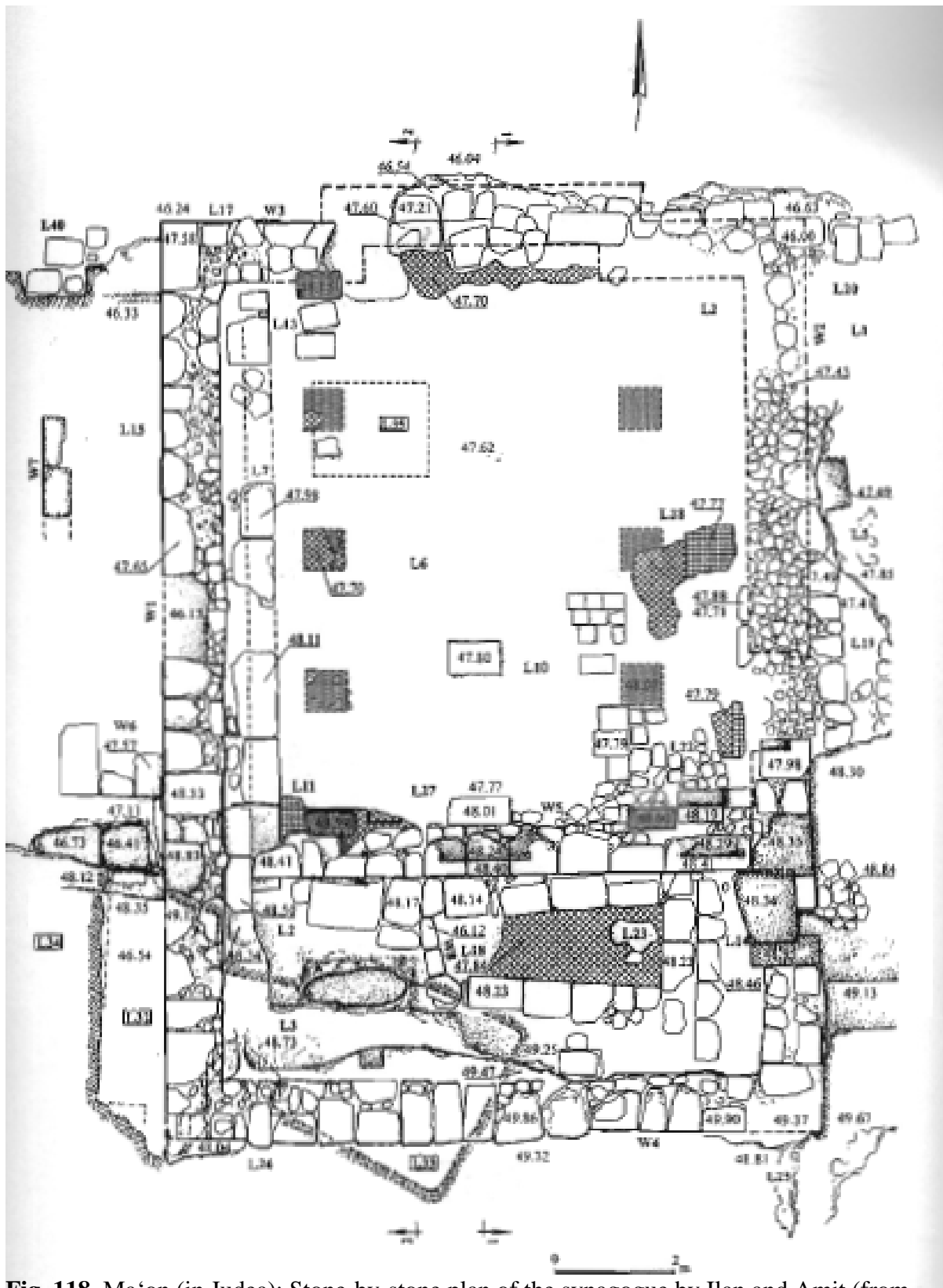


**Fig.116** Ma'on (in Judea): Plan of the Roman and Byzantine period remains as surveyed by Hirschfeld; the synagogue is labeled as no. 1 (modified from Amit 2003: fig. 4.2).

Synagogue

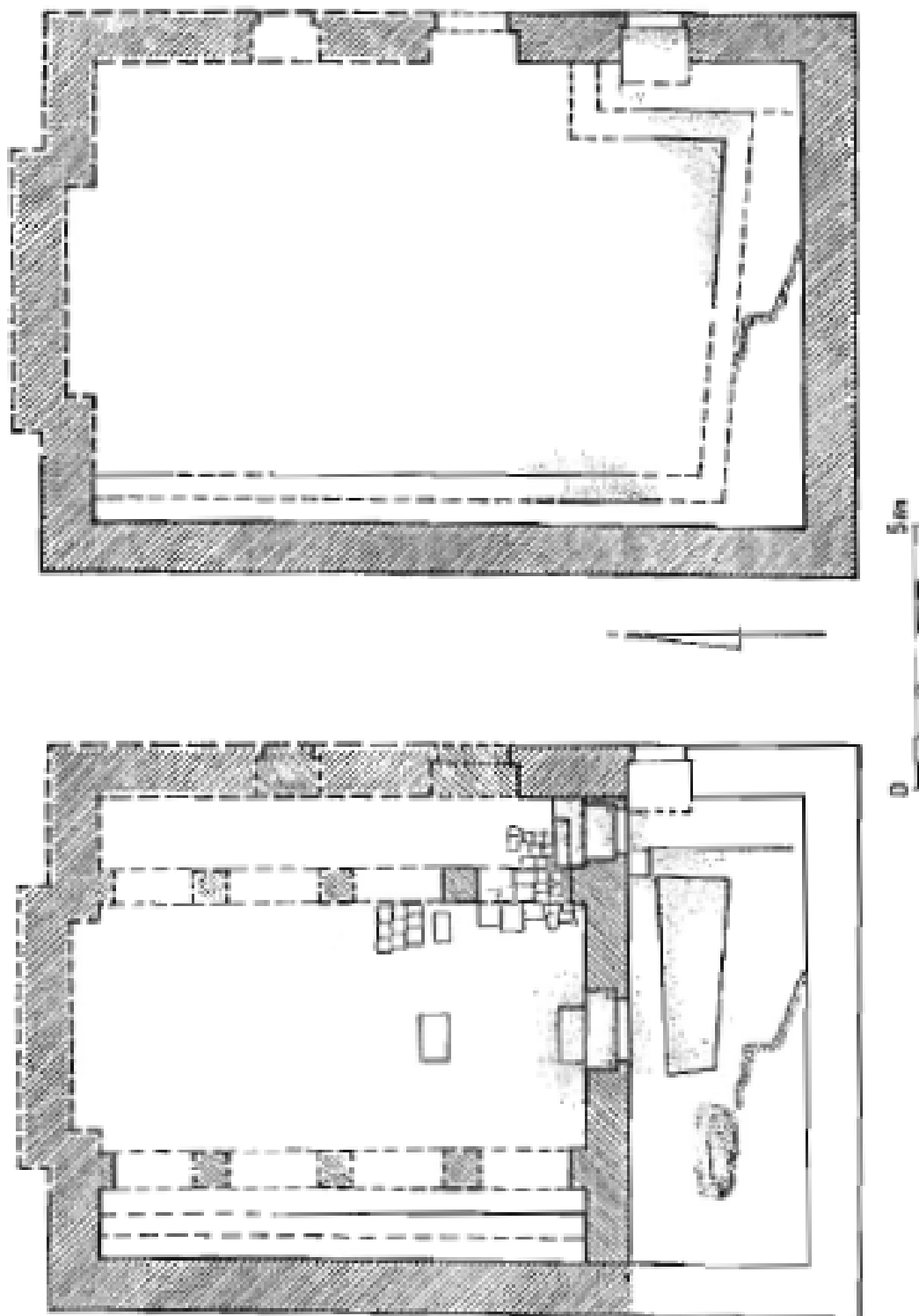


**Fig. 117** Ma'on (in Judea):General view of the excavated area of the synagogue as it appeared in 2009; facing northwest. Photo by author.



**Fig. 118** Ma' on (in Judea): Stone-by-stone plan of the synagogue by Ilan and Amit (from Amit 2003: fig. 4.5).





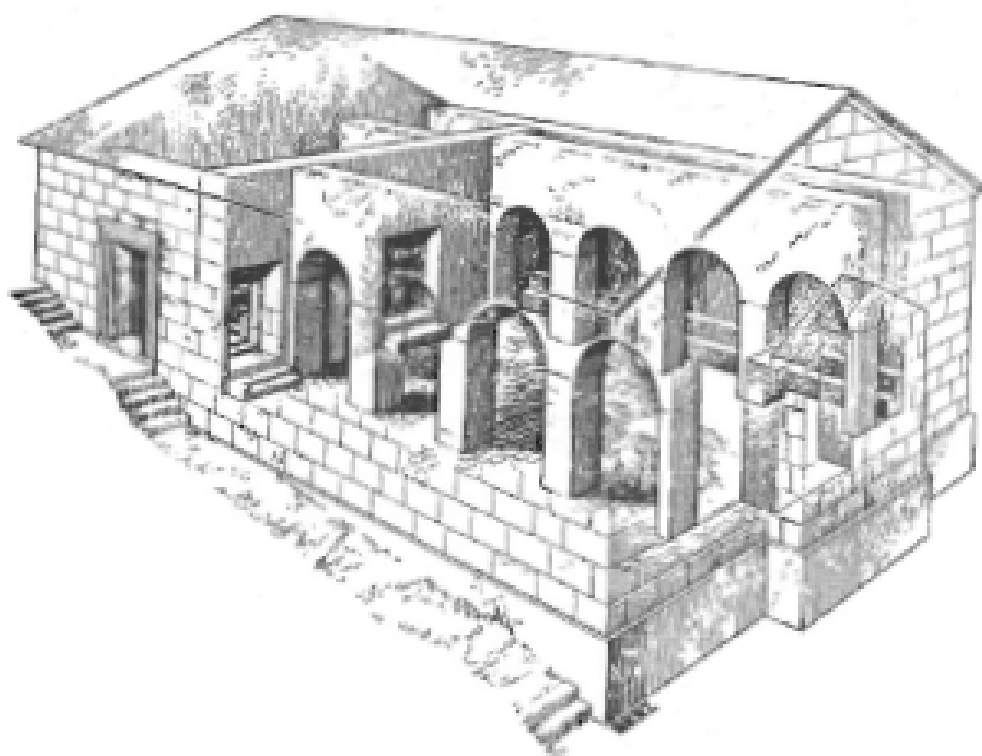
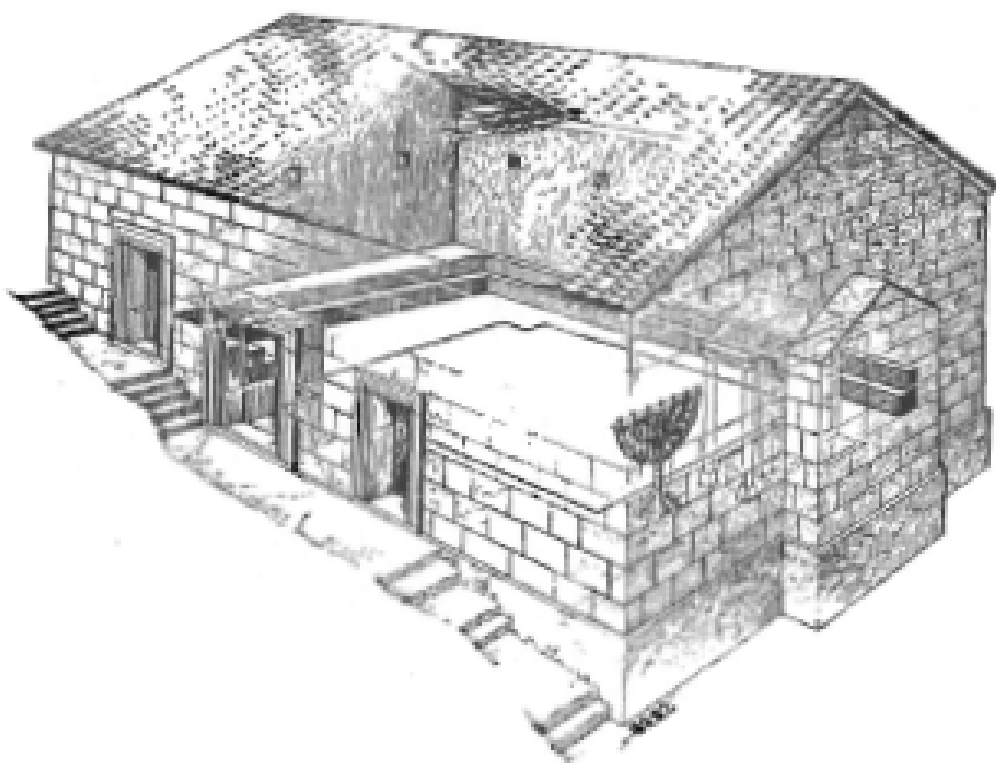
**Fig. 119** Ma'on (in Judea): General plan of the synagogue showing the two phases: phase 1 (right) and phase 2 (left) (from Amit 2003: fig. 4.8).



**Fig. 120** Ma'on (in Judea): The exterior of the northwest-corner of the synagogue, viewed facing southeast, showing the large ashlars that formed the exterior of the building's walls. Photo by author.



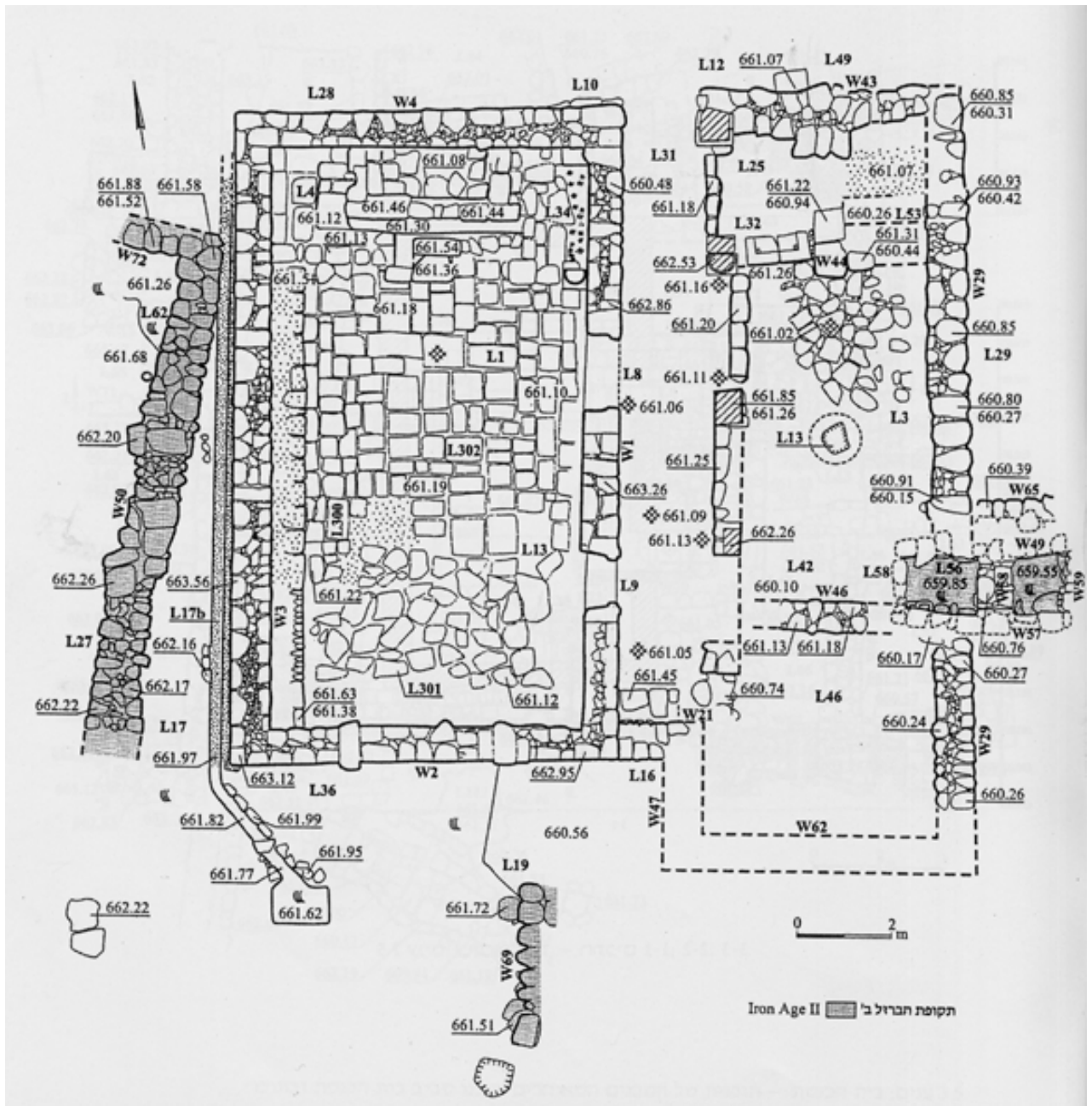
**Fig. 121** Ma'on (in Judea): Section of preserved mosaic floor as found in excavation (from Amit 2003: fig. 4.10).



**Fig. 122** Ma'on (in Judea): Isometric reconstruction of the synagogue in phase 1 (top) and phase 2 (bottom) by D. Amit (from Amit 2003: fig. 4.9).



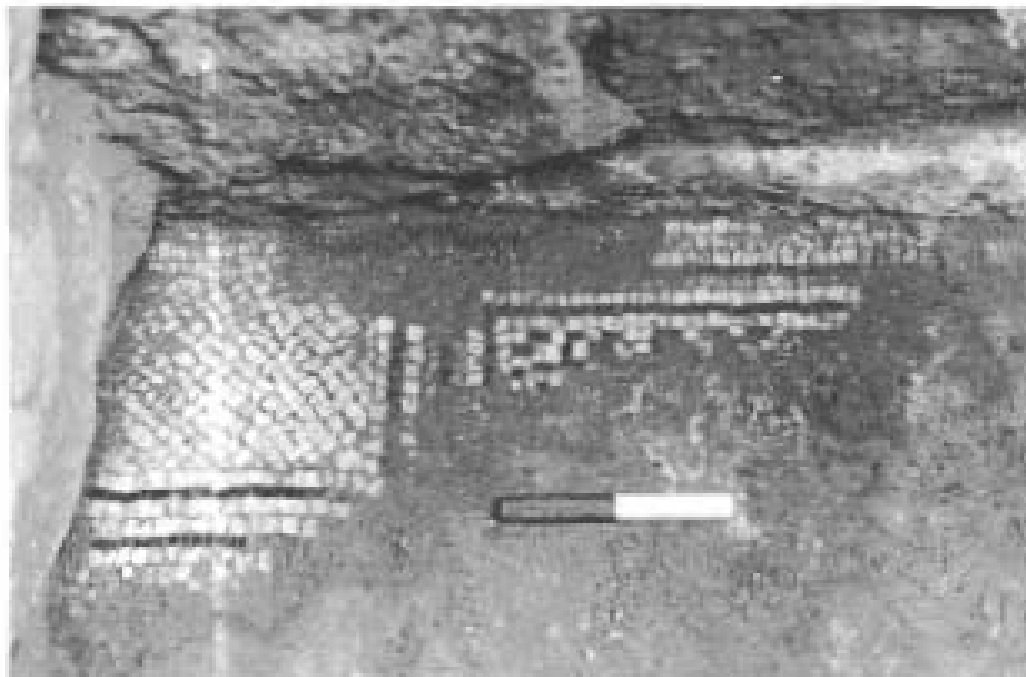
**Fig. 123** H. ‘Anim: Aerial view of the site (from *Google Earth* 2008-10).



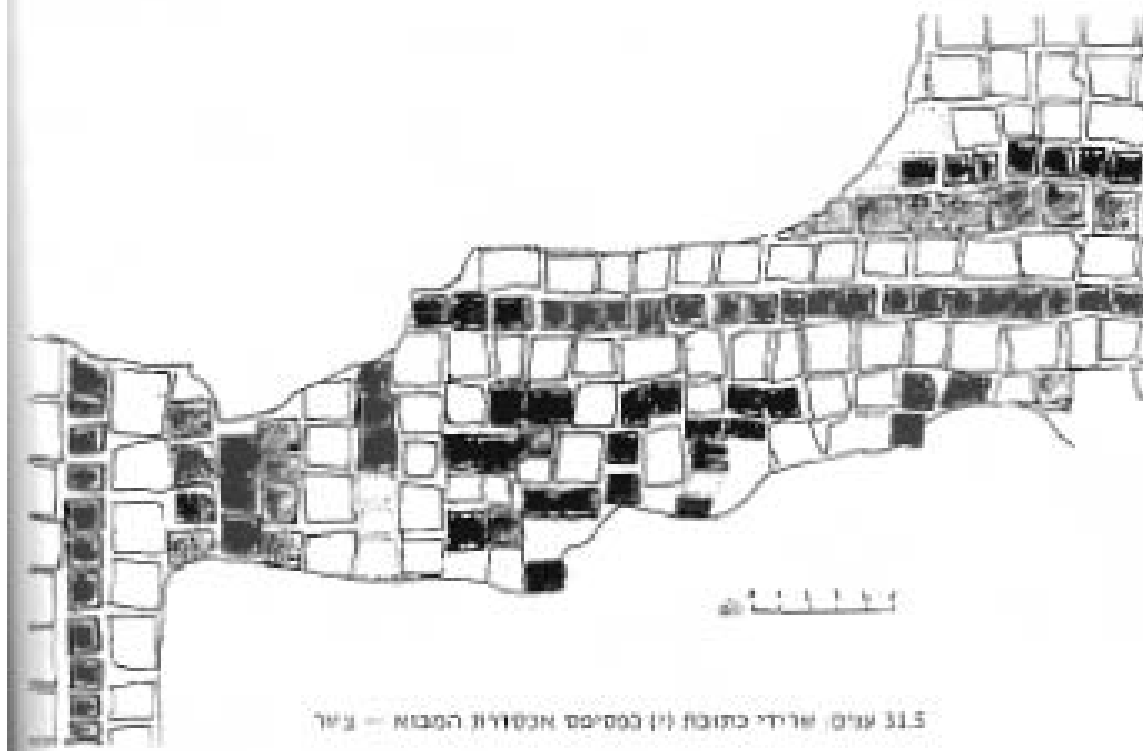
**Fig. 124** H. 'Anim: Plan of the synagogue complex in phase II (from Amit 2003: fig. 5.1).



**Fig. 125** H. 'Anim: View of the courtyard, narthex, and east façade of the main hall (W1) toward the southwest. Photo by author.



30.1 מ'ים, שרידי כתובת (א) מוקפת מסערת בסימנים אכסדרית המבוא -- תצלום



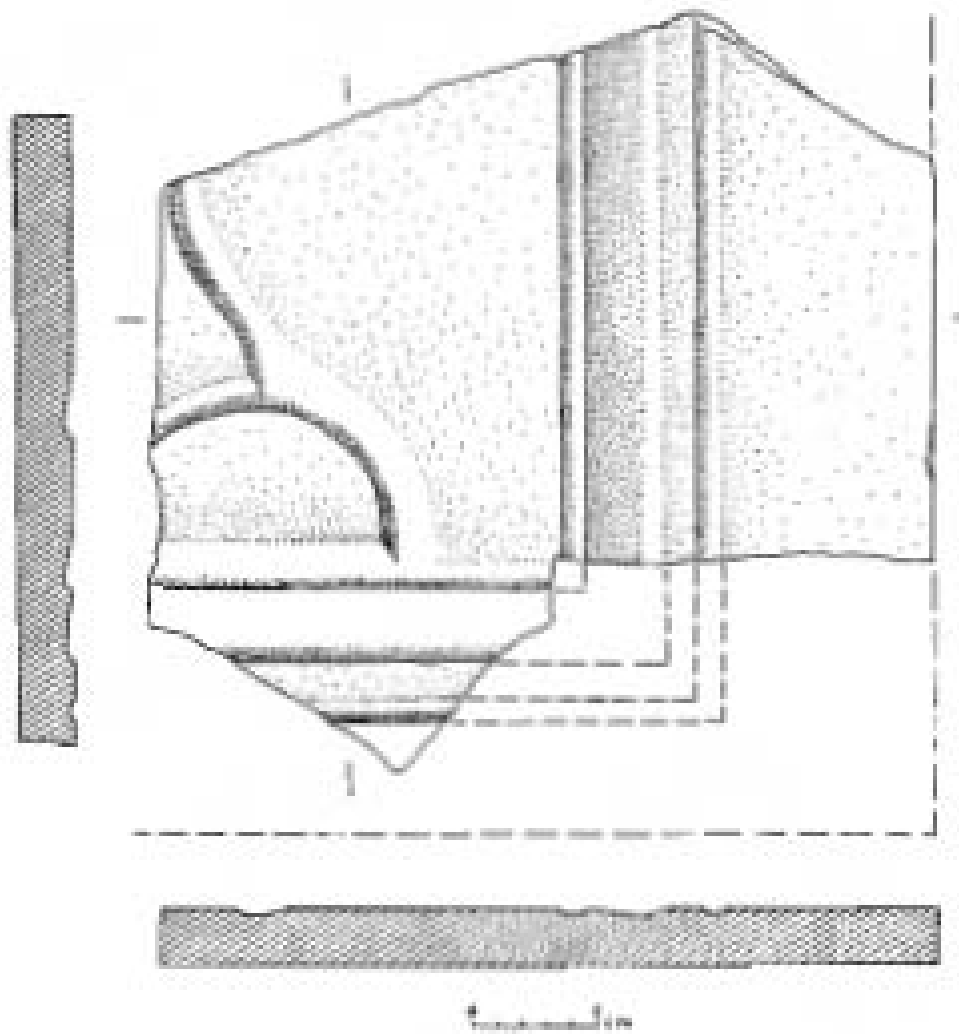
31.5 מ'ים, שרידי כתובת (א) בסימנים אכסדרית המבוא -- ציור

**Fig. 126** H. 'Anim: Photograph and sketch of narthex inscription found along W1 (from Amit 2003: figs. 5.30-31).

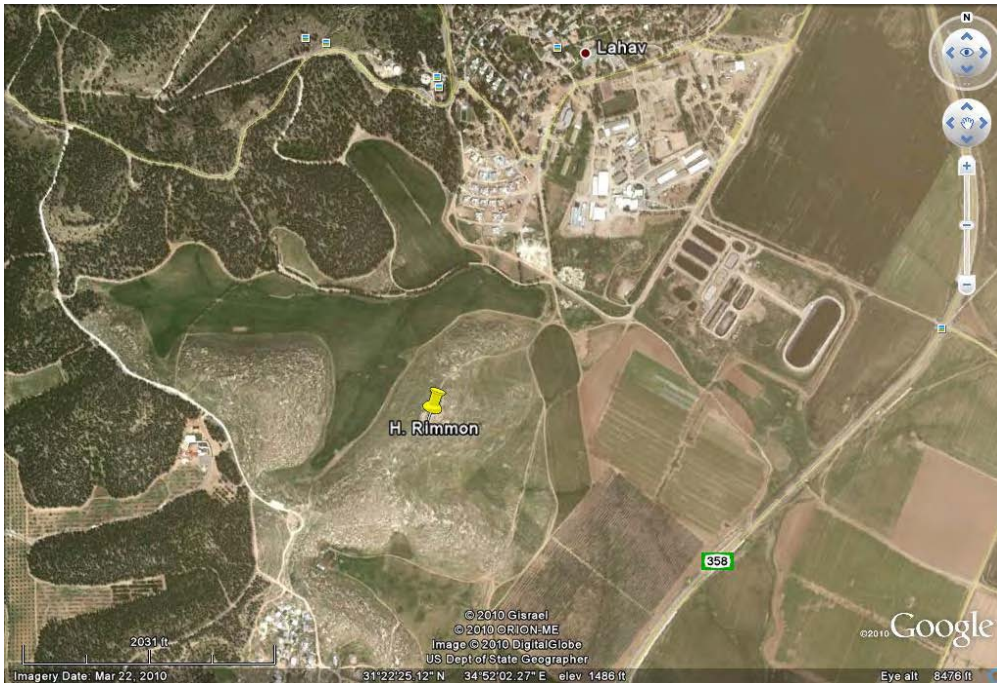


**Fig. 127** H. 'Anim: Exterior view of the south entrance through the E-façade (W1).  
Photo by author.





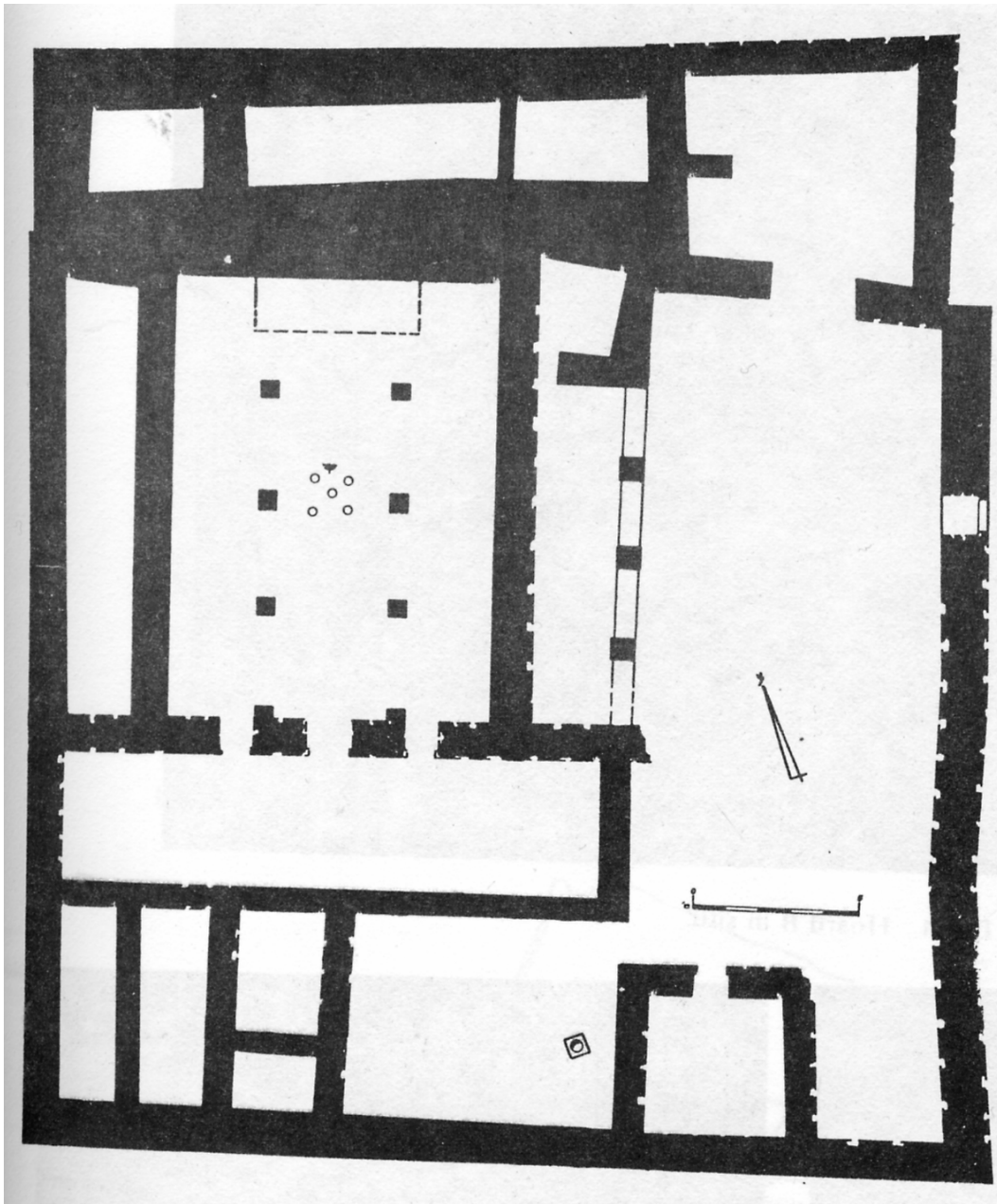
**Fig. 128** H. 'Anim: Decorated marble fragment from chancel screen (from Amit 2003: fig. 5.19).



**Fig. 129** H. Rimmon: Aerial view of the area surrounding the site (from *Google Earth* 2008-10).



**Fig. 130** H. Rimmon: East stylobate of Synagogue I (W50), as reused in the later phases, facing north. Photo by author.



**Fig. 131** H. Rimmon: Plan of the synagogue complex in phases II and III (from Kloner 1989: pl. XXV.1).



**Fig. 132** H. Rimmon: Narthex of phases II and III, facing west. Photo by author.



**Fig. 133** H. Rimmon: Main hall of the synagogue in phases II and III, facing southwest. Photo by author.



**Fig. 134** H. Rimmon: west room (L148) of the synagogue complex, facing north. Photo by author.

**Fig. 135** H. Rimmon: The “carpet” of pavers in the center of the main hall of the synagogue, facing north. Photo by author.





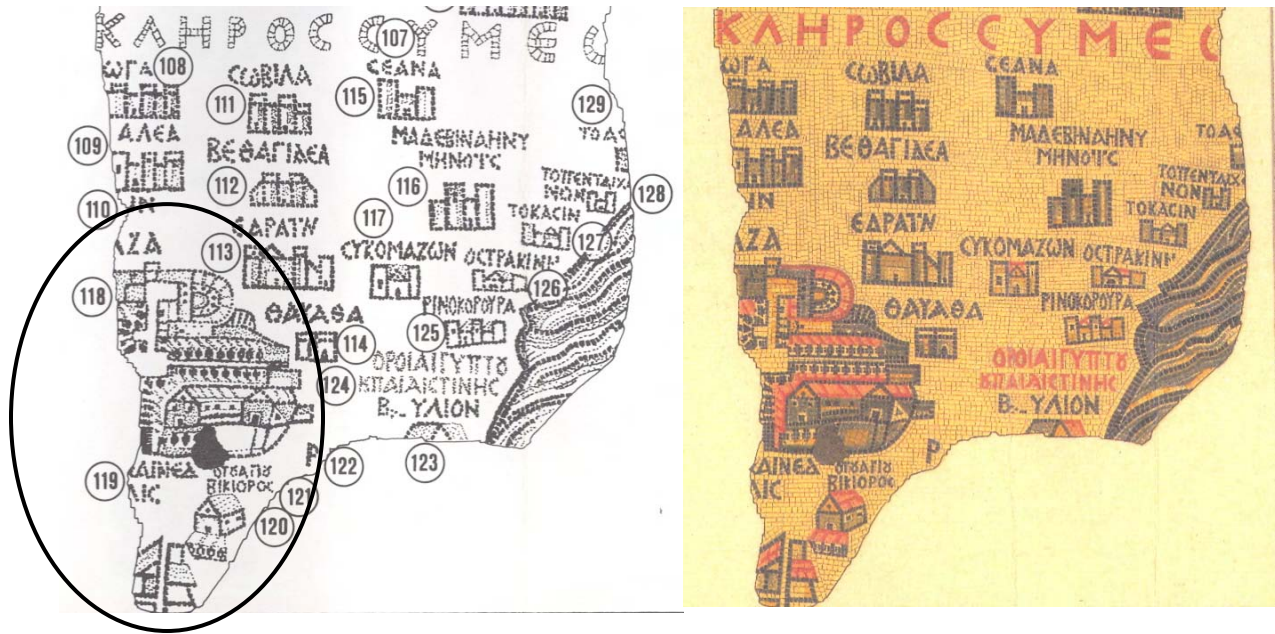
**Fig. 136** H. Rimmon: Incised menorah in the center of the main hall of the synagogue, facing north. Photo by author.



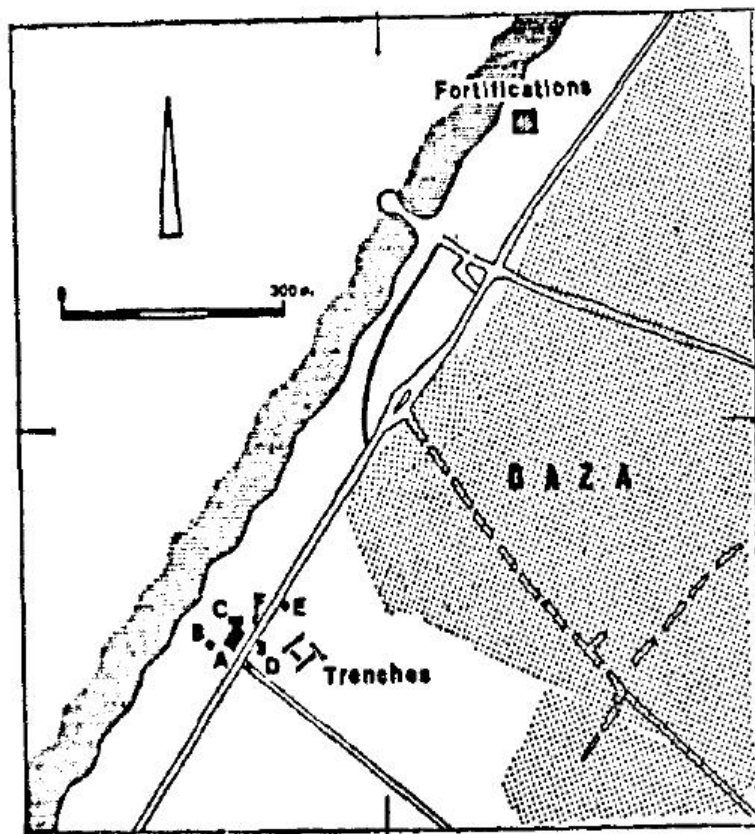
**Fig. 137** H. Rimmon: The remains of the bema along the north wall, facing northeast. Photo by author.



**Fig. 138** H. Rimmon: The amulet found in the west room (from Naveh and Shaked 1985: pl. 9).



**Fig. 139** Gaza-Maiumas: Detail of Gaza area in the Madaba Map (from Donner 1992).

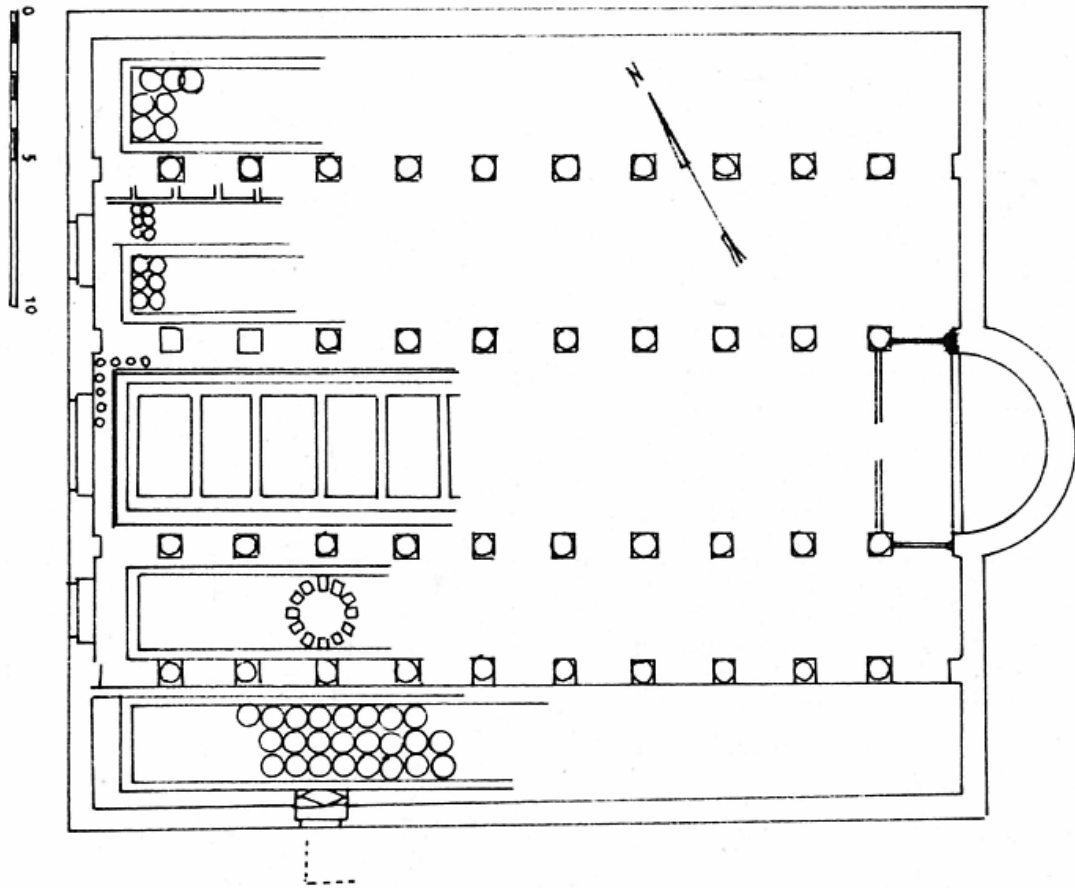


**Fig. 140** Gaza-Maiumas: Locations of the areas excavated by Ovadia, where Area A is the synagogue and the wavy band running diagonally represents the coastline (from Ovadia 1977: fig. 1). Since this sketch was published, the modern city has encroached over the excavation areas.

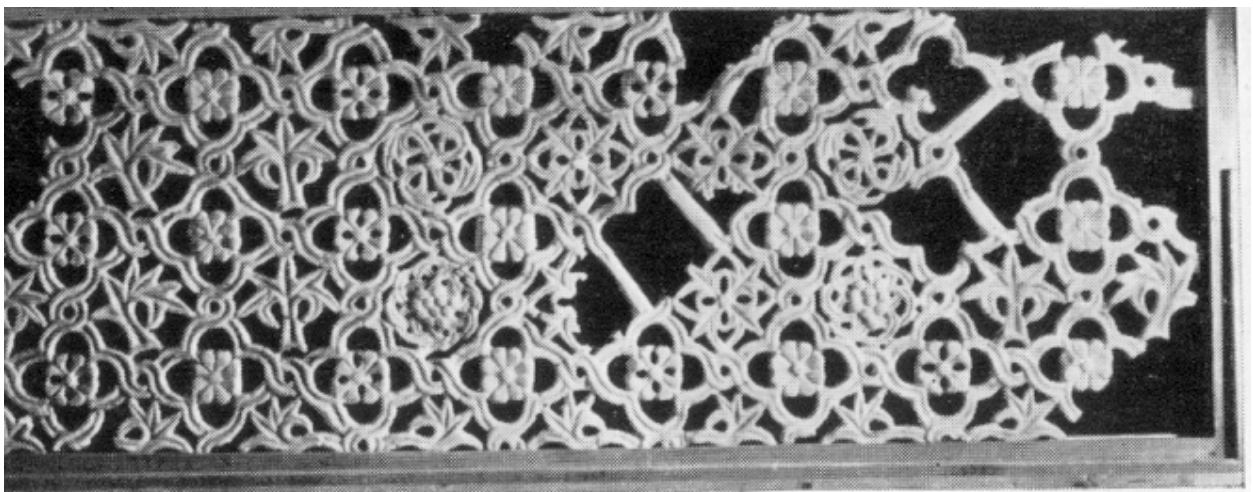




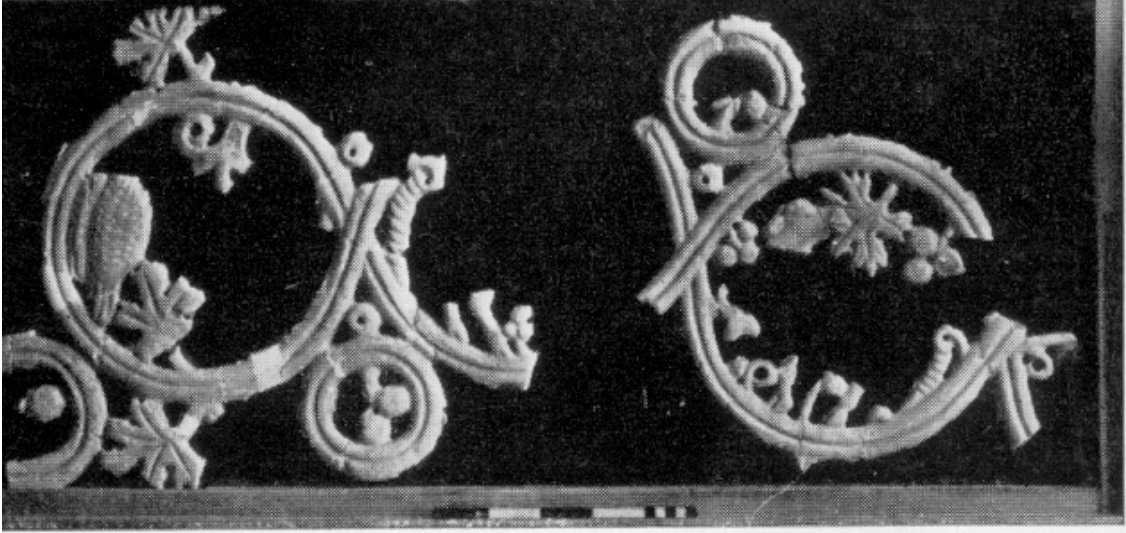
**Fig. 141** Gaza-Maiumas: Photograph of area excavated below and outside of the synagogue to the west at the time of excavation, looking west (from Ovadiah 1969: pl. 18). The building in the foreground predates the synagogue, the remains of which were found above. The street running between the two buildings apparently existed at the time of the synagogue.



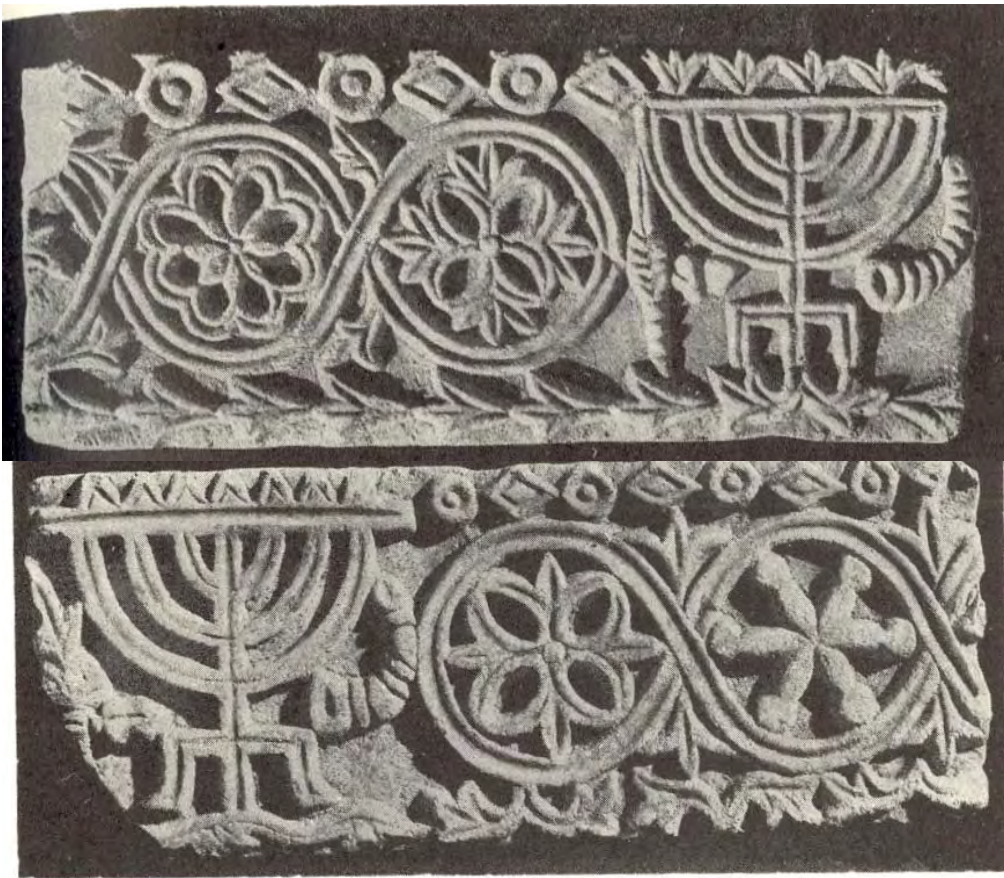
**Fig. 142** Gaza-Maiumas: Reconstructed plan of the synagogue (from Ovadiah 1981).



**Fig. 143** Gaza-Maiumas: Chancel screen section in crisscrossing grill-pattern (from Ovadiah 1969: pl. 17c).



**Fig. 144** Gaza-Maiumas: Chancel screen section in inhabited scrolls pattern (from Ovadiah 1969: pl. 17b).

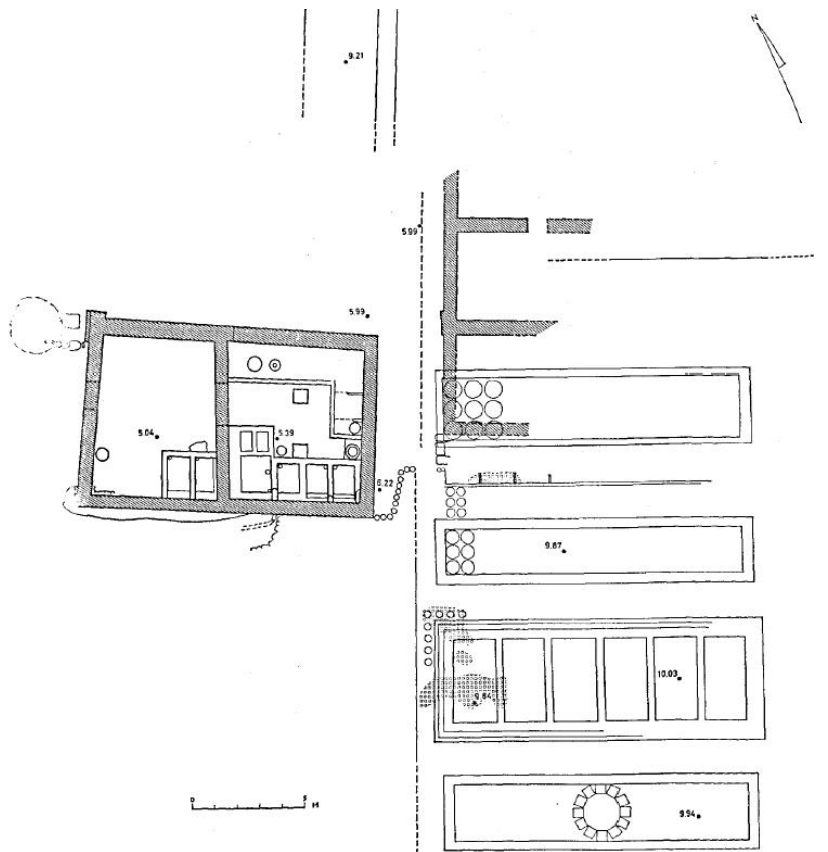


**Fig. 145** Ashkelon: Chancel screen sections uncovered out-of-context (from Goodenough 1953-65: III, nos. 575-576).



**Fig. 146** Gaza-Maiumas: Chancel screen fragment depicting menorah, shofar, and lulav (from Goodenough 1953-65: III, no. 583).

**Fig. 147** Gaza-Maiumas: Plan of west end of the synagogue, showing the industrial complex adjacent to the synagogue (walls shaded in gray) and the outlines of the mosaic panels postulated by the excavator (from Ovadia 1969: fig. 1).

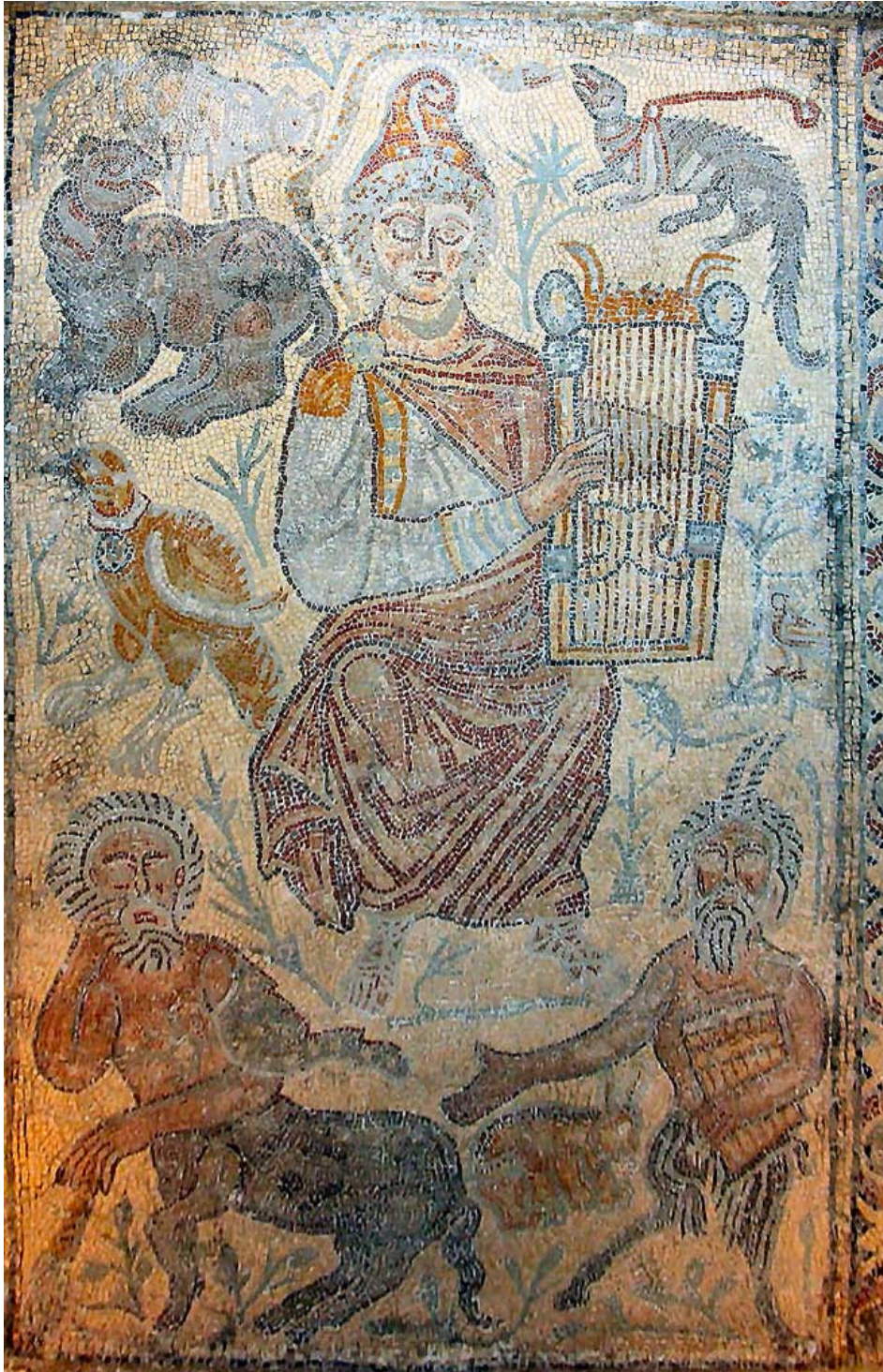




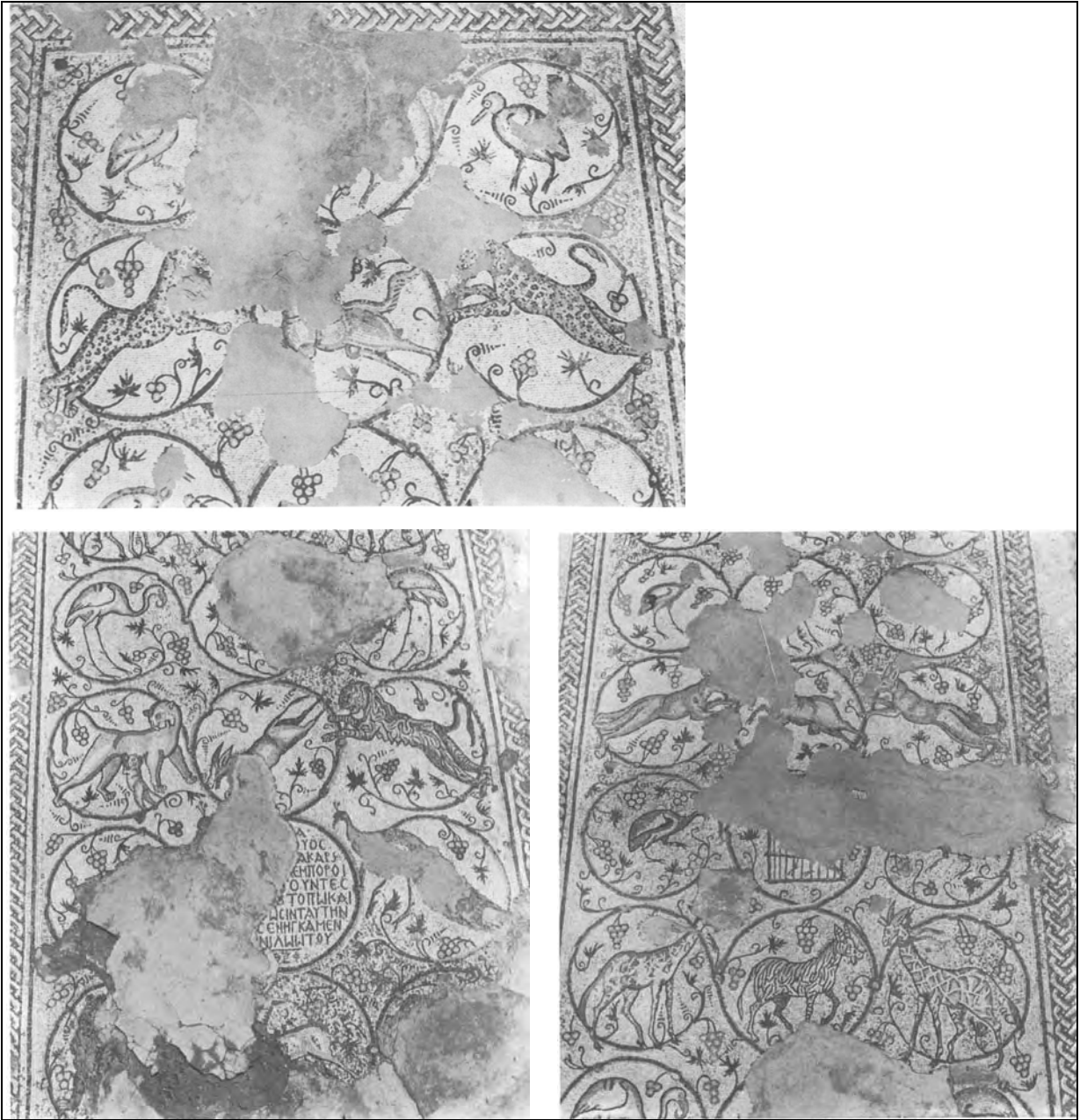
**Fig. 148** Gaza-Maiumas:  
The “David Mosaic” in the  
central nave of the synagogue  
at the time of discovery (from  
Ovadia 1969: pl. 15A).



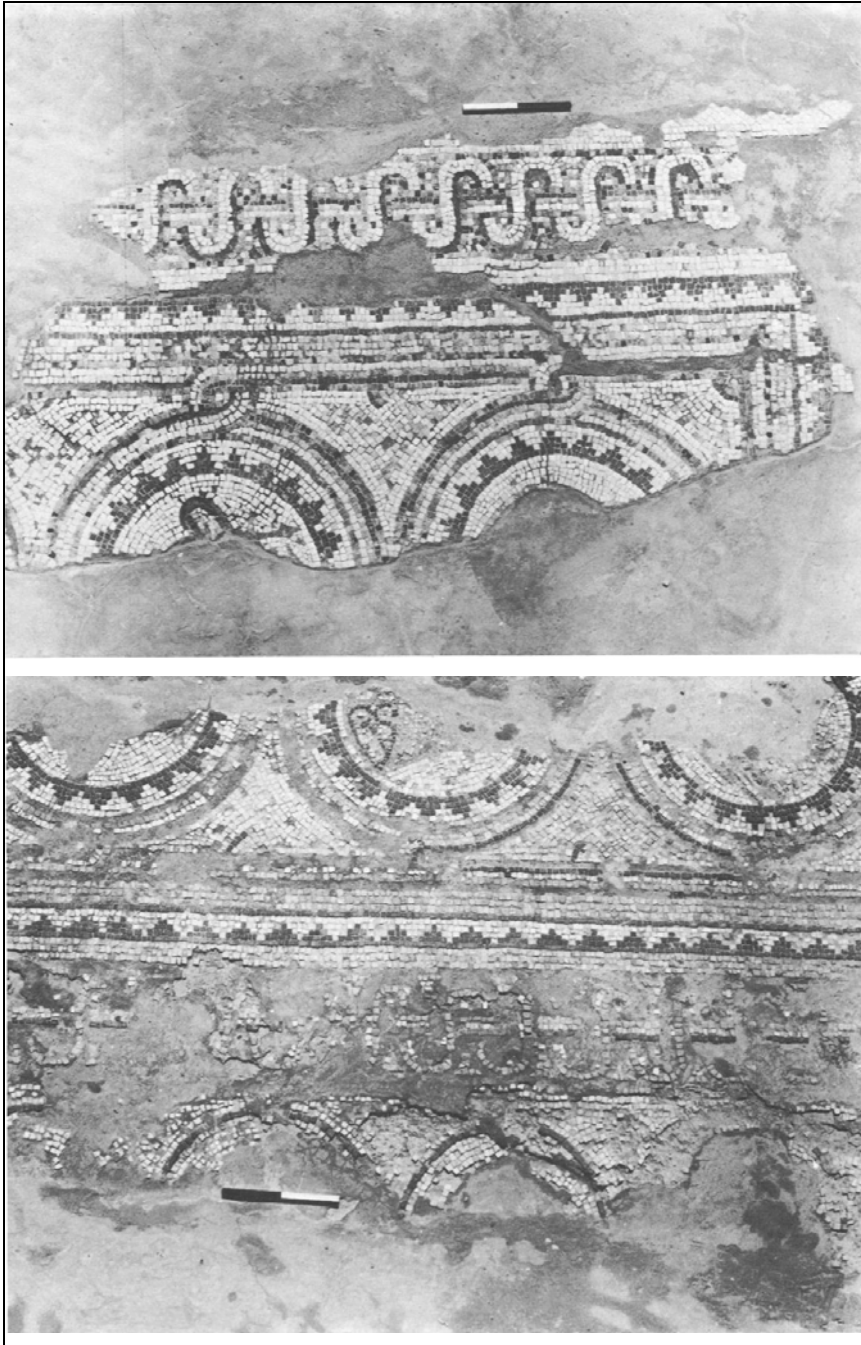
**Fig. 149** Gaza-Maiumas:  
The “David Mosaic” in the  
central nave of the synagogue  
following the defacement  
(from Ovadia and Ovadia  
1987: pl. 178).



**Fig. 150** Jerusalem: Orpheus mosaic found northwest of the Damascus Gate, now in the Istanbul museum (from Grabar 1966: fig. 119).

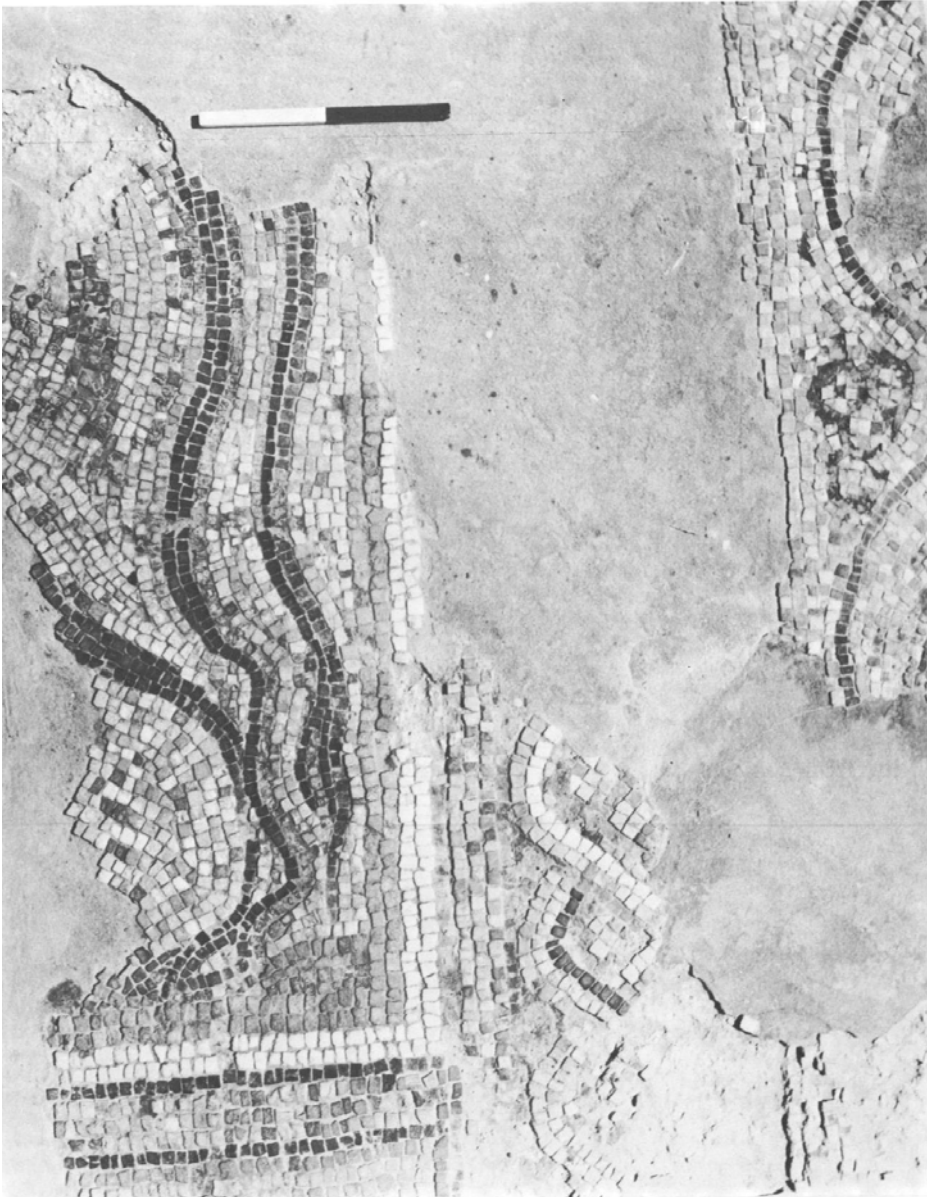


**Fig. 151** Gaza-Maiumas: The mosaic pavement of the outer southern aisle of the synagogue (from Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: pls. LII:1, LIII:1-2).

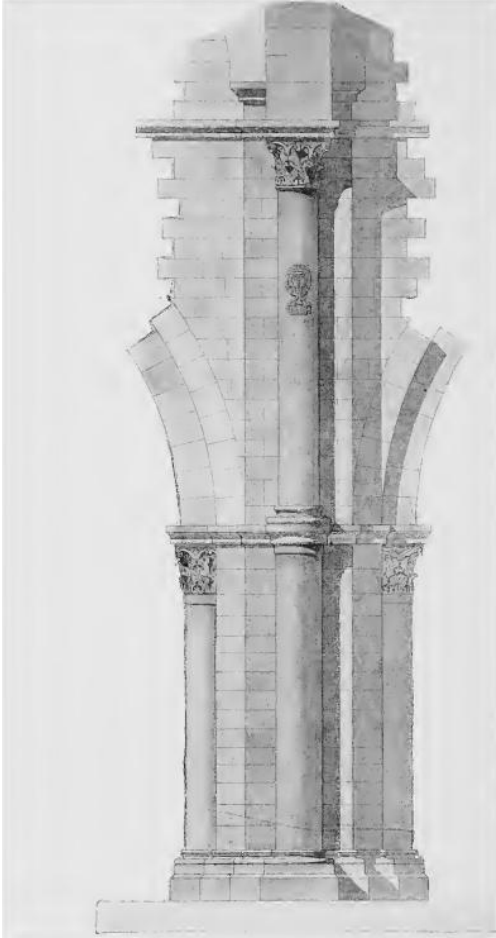


**Fig. 152** Gaza-Maiumas: The mosaic pavement of the inner northern aisle of the synagogue (from Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: pls. LX:1-2).





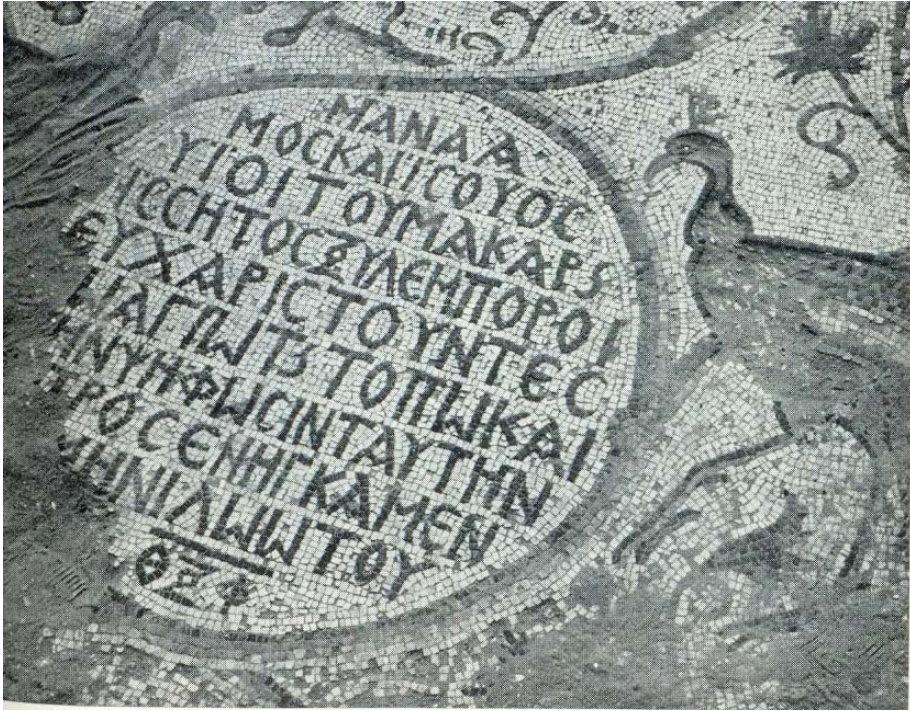
**Fig. 153** Gaza-Maiumas: The mosaic pavement of the intercolumniation, between the inner and outer northern aisle of the synagogue (from Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: pl. LXI).



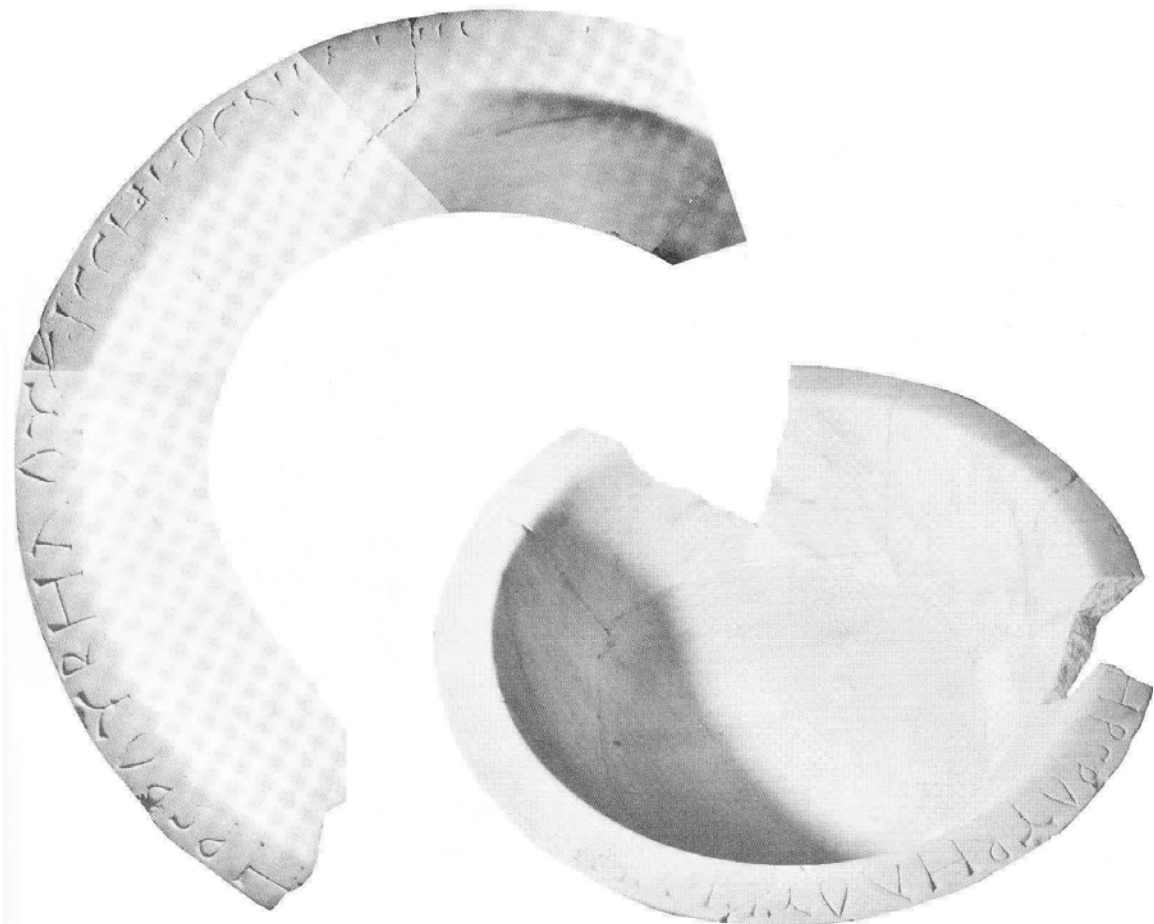
**Fig. 154** Gaza: Sketch of the column in secondary use in the Great Mosque of Gaza (from Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 392).



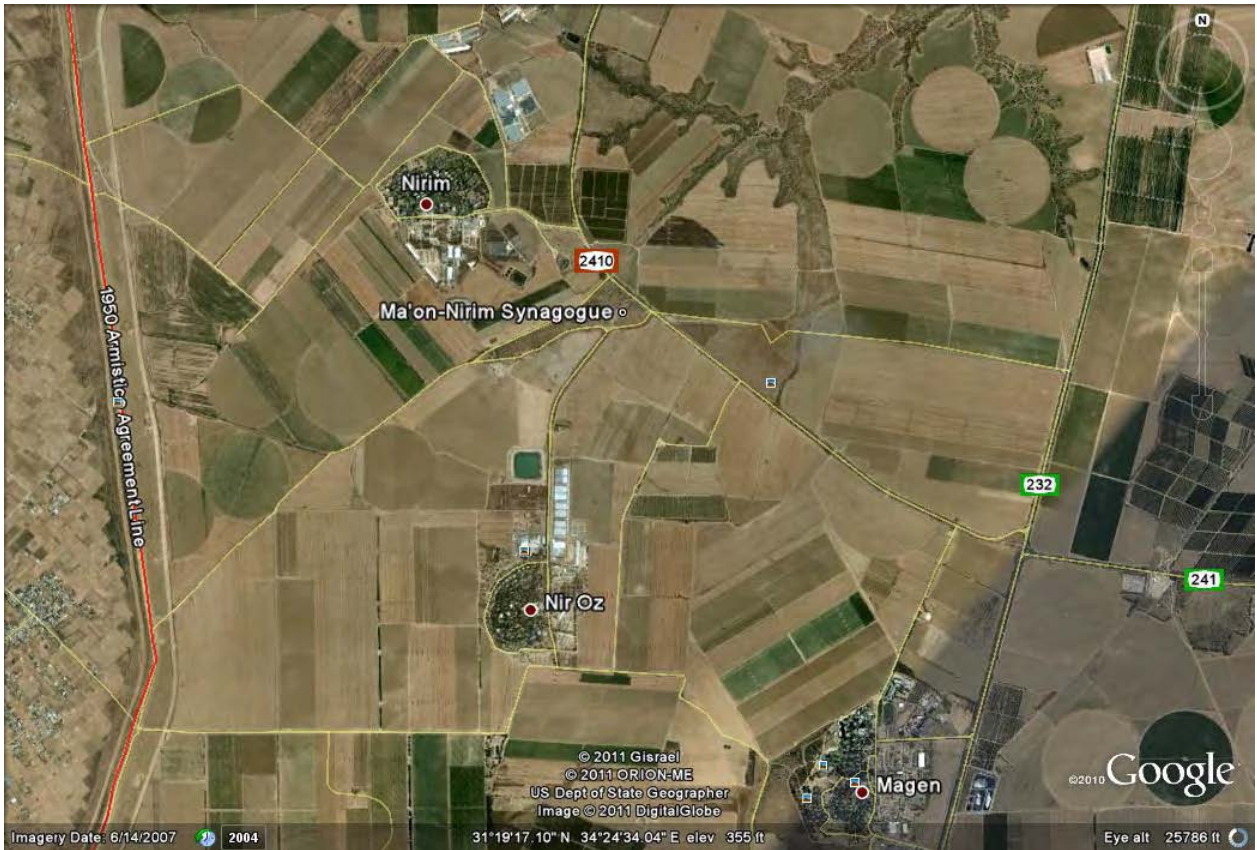
**Fig. 155** Gaza: Sketch of the bas-relief carving on the column in secondary use in the Great Mosque of Gaza (from Clermont-Ganneau 1896: II, 393).



**Fig. 156** Gaza-Maiumas: The dedicatory inscription from the outer southern aisle (from Ovadia 1969: pl. 15B).



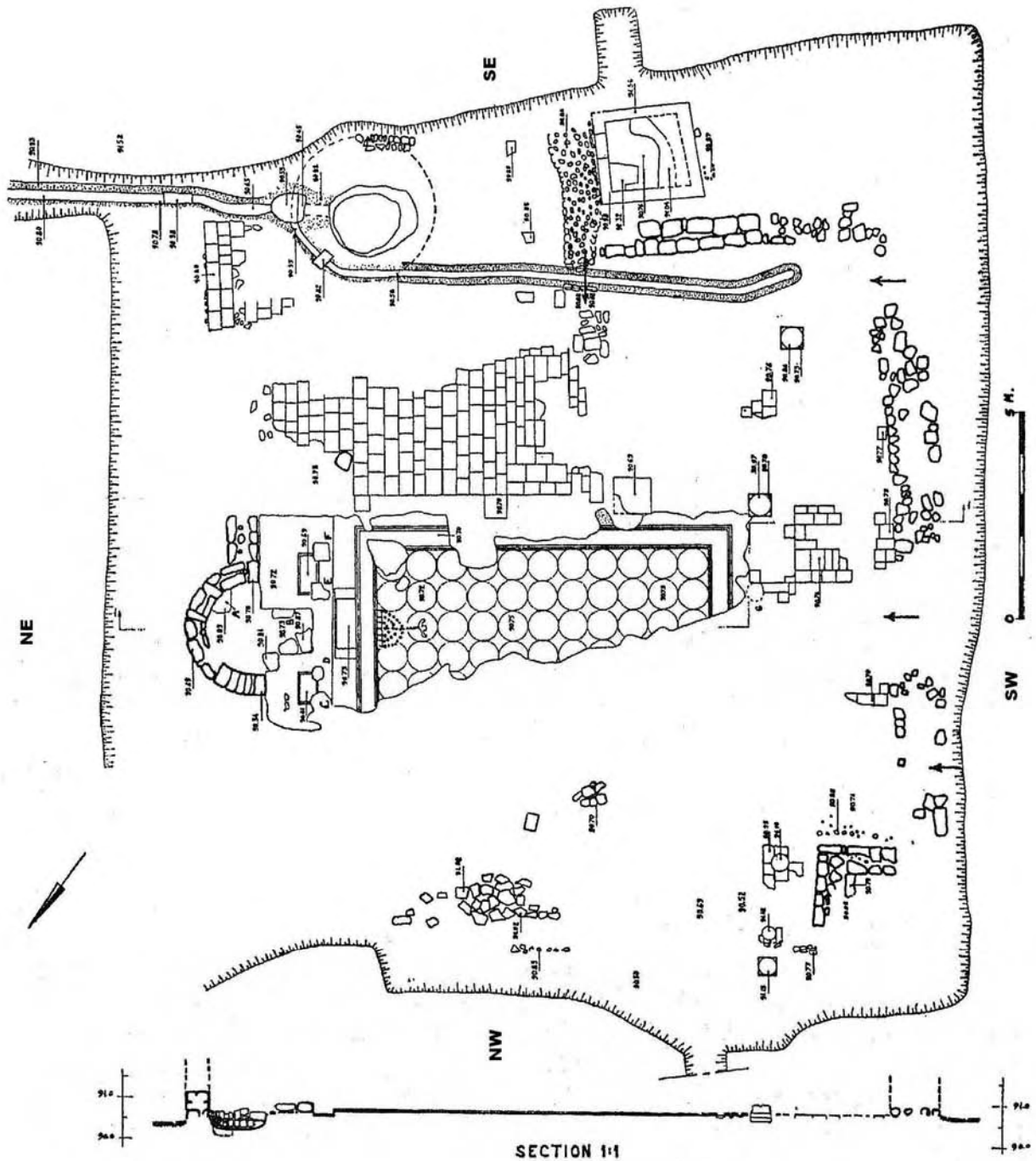
**Fig. 157** Gaza-Maiumas: The marble basin as it was found (left) and as it was restored (right). The Greek inscription is visible along the rim (from Roth-Gerson 1987: 100, figs. 47 and 48).



**Fig. 158** Ma'on-Nirim: Aerial view of the site (from *Google Earth* 2008-11).



**Fig. 159** Ma'on-Nirim: Detail of Menois in the Madaba Map (from Donner 1992).

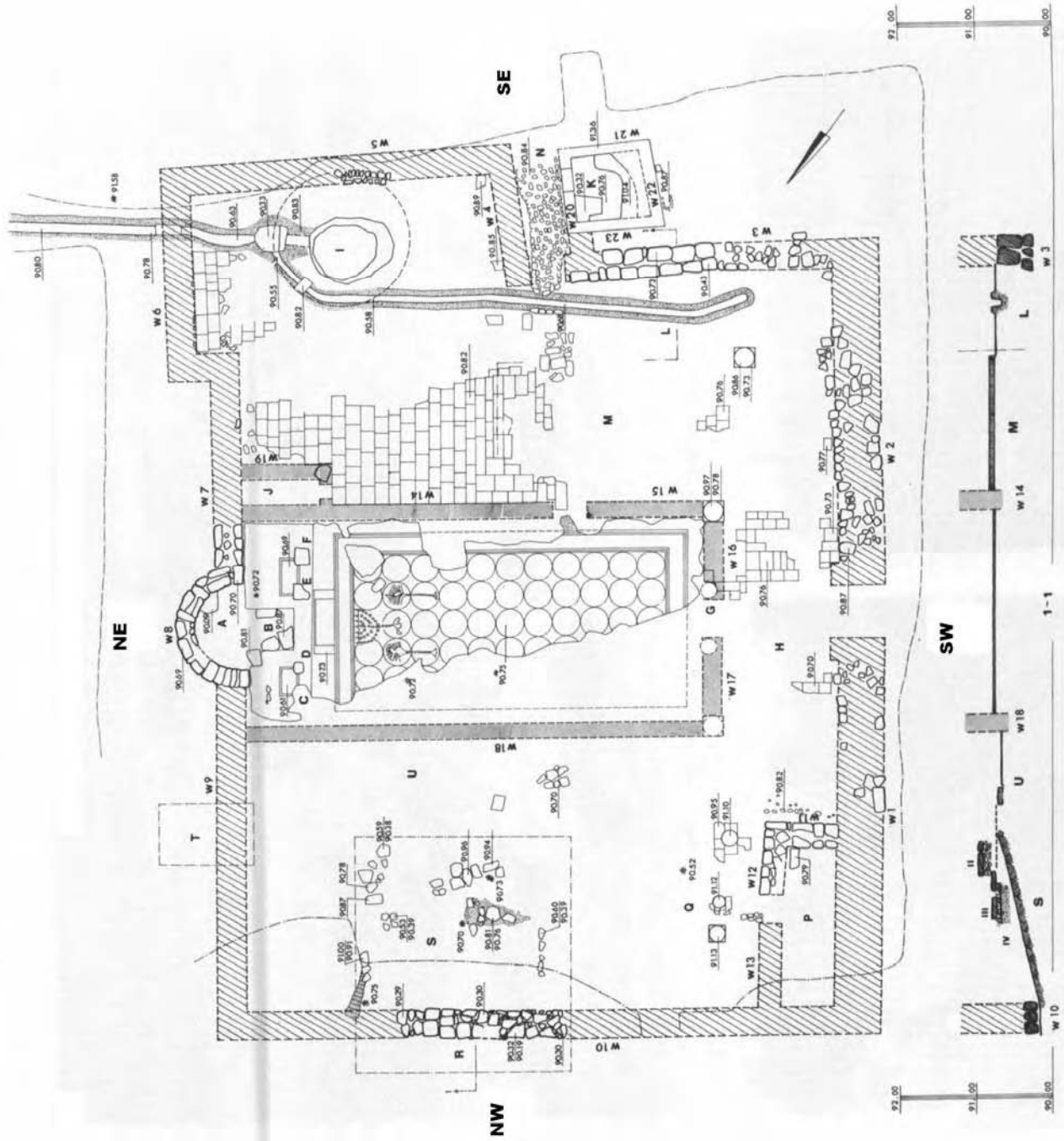


**Fig. 160** Ma'on-Nirim: Plan of the synagogue site after the 1957-58 excavations (from Levy 1960: fig. 2).



Fig. 13.

**Fig. 161** Ma'on-Nirim:  
 Sketch of the mosaic carpet  
 of stratum II/Syn 2 (from  
 Avi-Yonah 1960a: fig. 13).



**Fig. 162** Ma'on-Nirim: Plan of the synagogue site after the 1980 excavations, showing the wall-lines proposed by Yogev (from Yogev 1987: fig. 1).



**Fig. 163** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a peacock, located across the inner- and outer-right column, bottommost row. Photo by author.



**Fig. 164** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a flamingo, located in the inner-right column, third row from the bottom. Photo by author.





**Fig. 165** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of an elephant, located in the inner-right column, eighth row from the bottom. Photo by author.



**Fig. 166** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a bull, located in the inner-right column, fourth row from the bottom. Photo by author.



**Fig. 167** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a rabbit, located in the inner-right column, sixth row from the bottom. Photo by author.



**Fig. 168** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a moose, located in the outer-right column, seventh row from the bottom. Photo by author.



**Fig. 169** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a dog, located in the outer-right column, ninth row from the bottom. Photo by author.



**Fig. 170** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of an eagle, located in the central column, second row from the bottom. Photo by author.



**Fig. 171** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a hen and egg, located in the central column, eighth row from the bottom (from Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: pl. CLXXXVI.1).



**Fig. 172** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of a caged bird, located in the central column, ninth row from the bottom. Photo by author.



**Fig. 173** Ma'on-Nirim: Mosaic depiction of the menorah, located in the central column, tenth and eleventh rows from the bottom (uppermost rows). Photo by author.



**Fig. 174** Ma'on-Nirim: The synagogue inscription, located beyond the northeast border of the mosaic carpet (sketch from Yeivin 1960: fig. 14). Photo by author.



**Fig. 175** Ma'on-Nirim: The chancel area of the synagogue, showing the (now filled in) posthole of the chancel screen. Photo by author.



**Fig. 176** Ma'on-Nirim: The most extant portion of the flagstone pavement, to the southeast of the mosaic, as it appeared in 2009; viewed from the SW. Photo by author.



**Fig. 177** Ma‘on-Nirim: The *miqveh*, or southeast water installation (Area K, W20-23), as it appeared in 2009; viewed from the southeast. Photo by author.



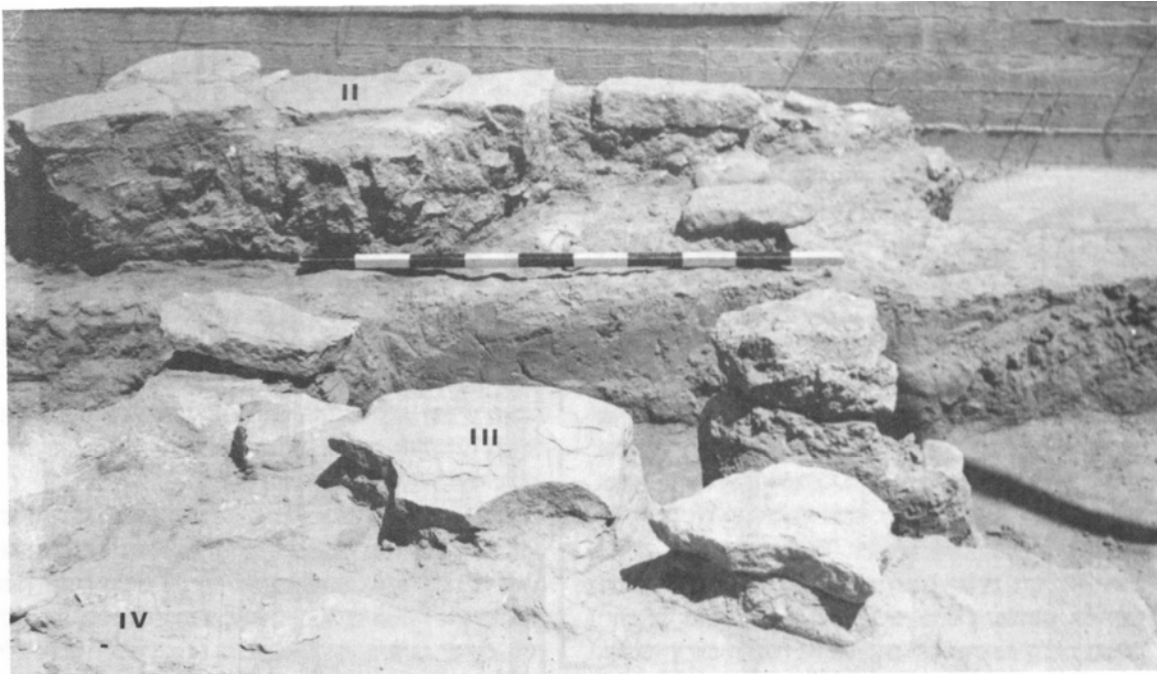
**Fig. 178** Ma‘on-Nirim: The circular cistern (Area I), as it appeared in 2009, viewed from the southeast. Photo by author.





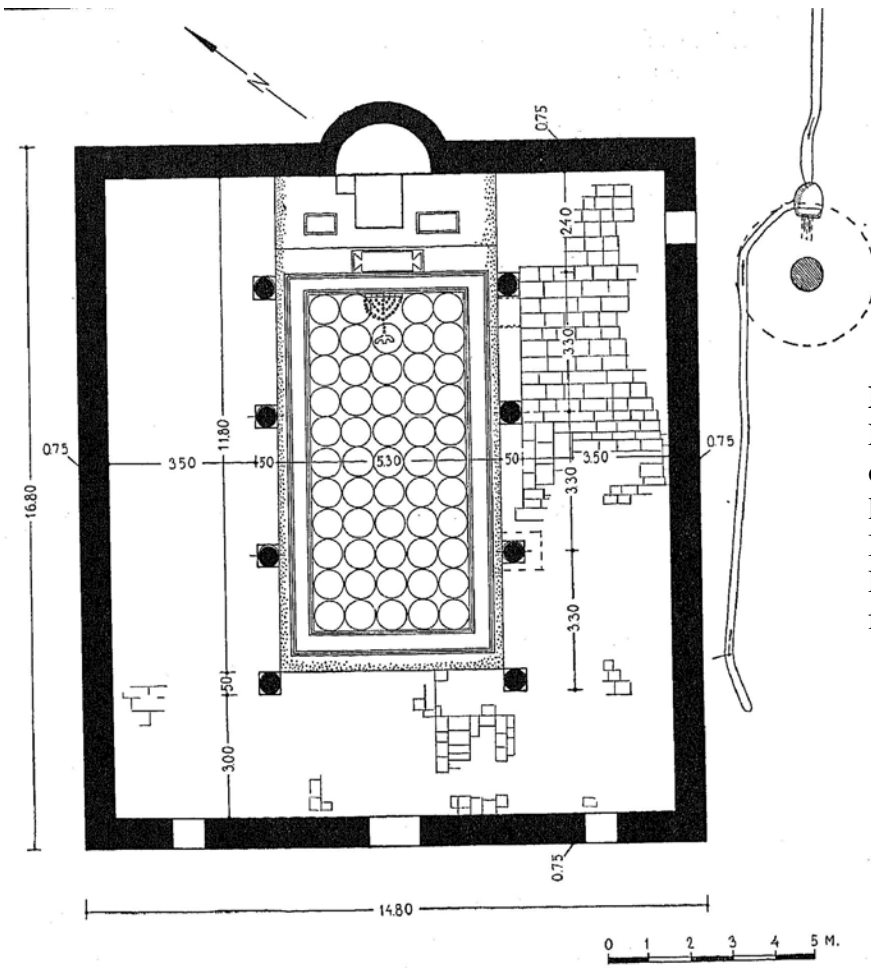
**Fig. 179** Ma'on-Nirim: The water channel (Area L), as it appeared in 2009, viewed from the southeast. Photo by author.

**Fig. 180** Ma'on-Nirim: Area S, excavated by Yogev in 1980, viewed from the northwest, with Strata II-IV labeled according to the excavator's assignments (from Yogev 1987: fig. 2).

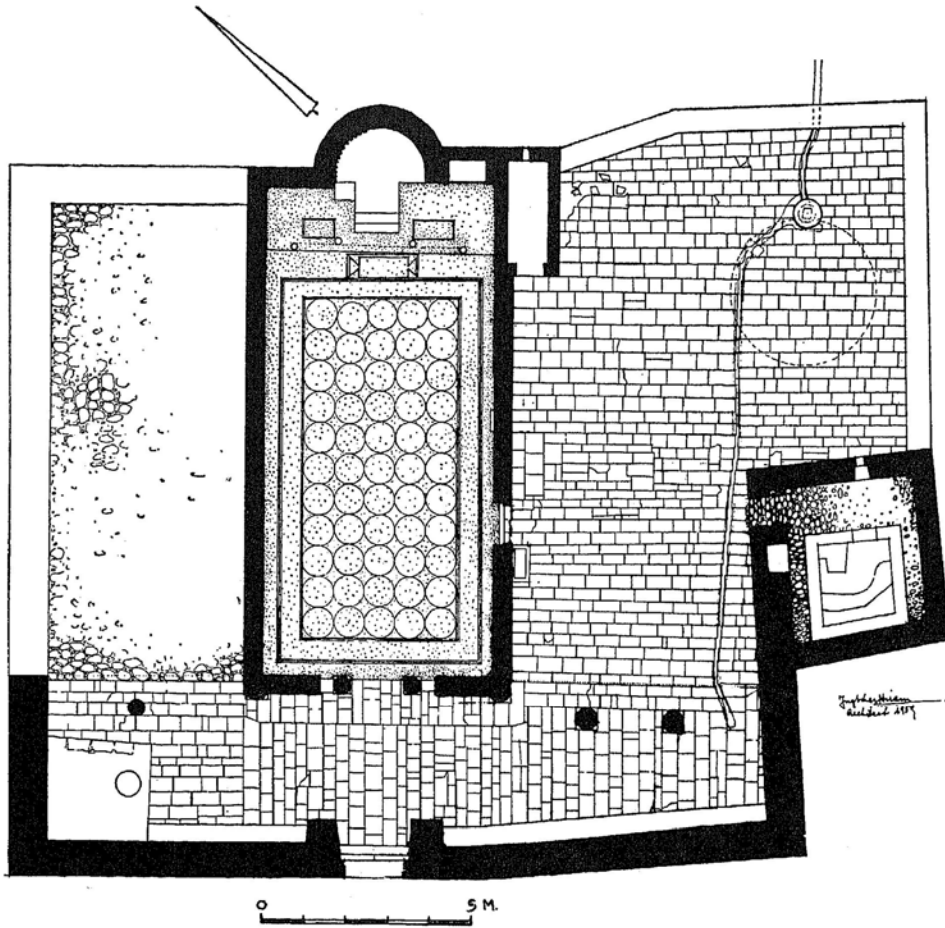




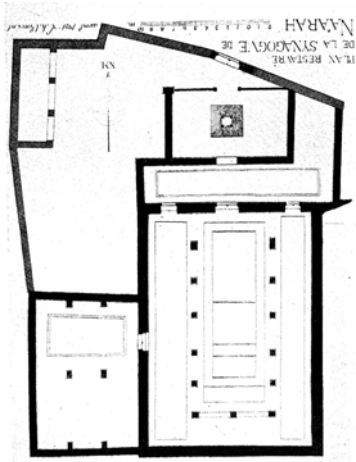
**Fig. 181** Kh. Susiya: Circular depression in the floor just inside and next to the central entrance of the triportal facade. Photo by author.



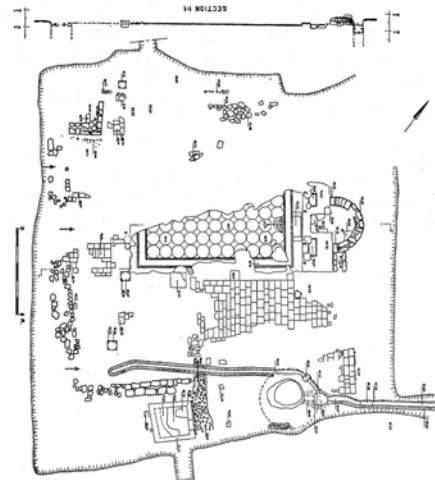
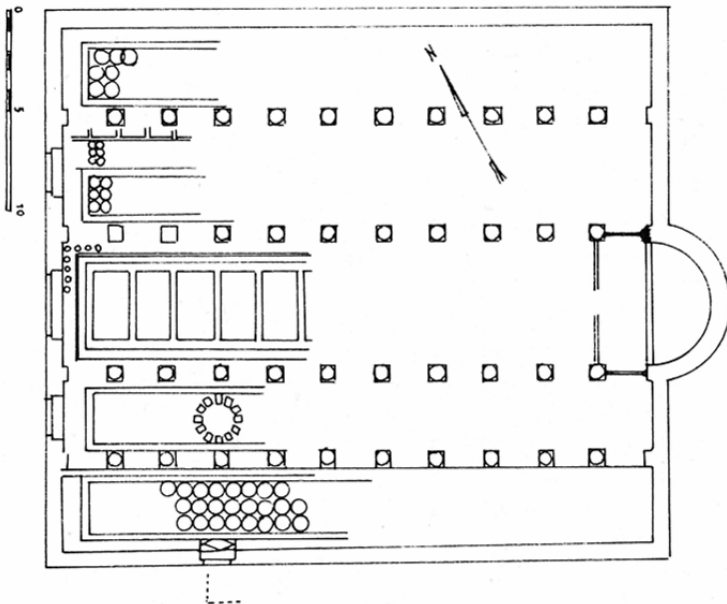
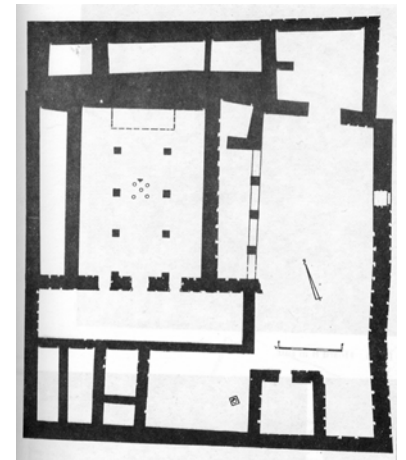
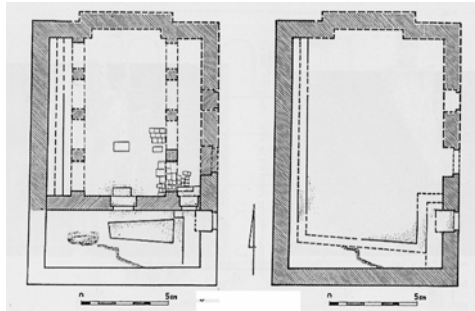
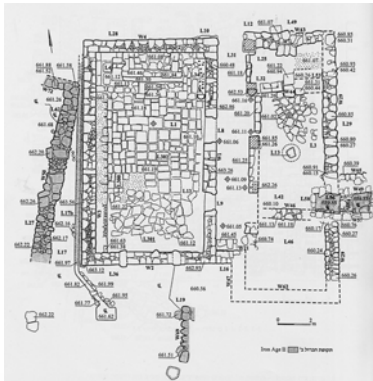
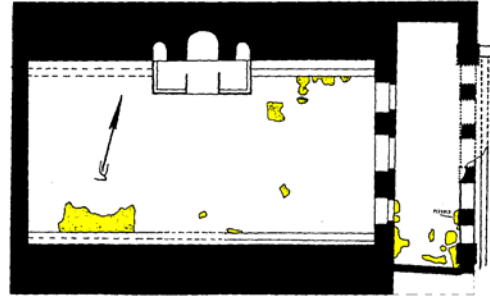
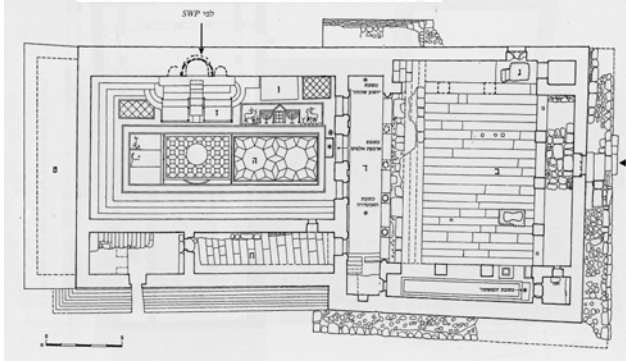
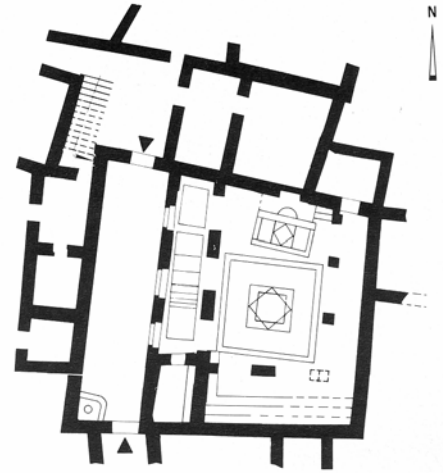
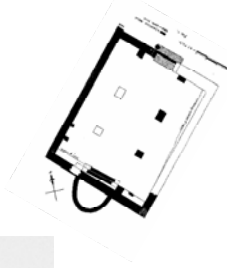
**Fig. 182** Ma'on-Nirim: Reconstruction of the synagogue's layout, as proposed by I. Dunayevsky (from Dunayevsky 1960: fig. 12).

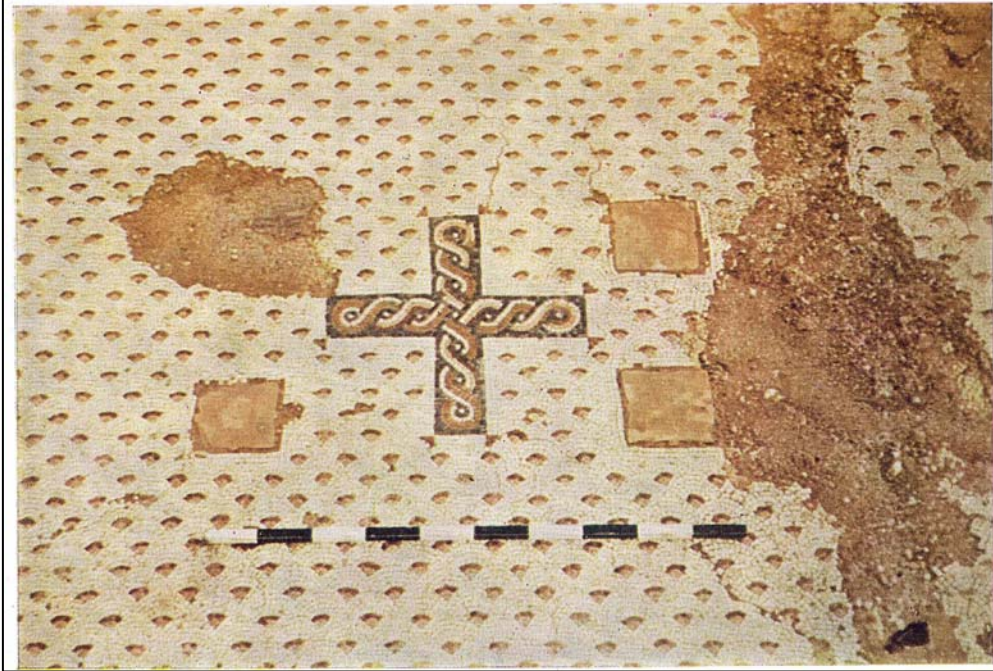


**Fig. 183** Ma'on-Nirim: Reconstruction of the synagogue's layout, as proposed by A. S. Hiram (from Hiram 1960: fig. 10).

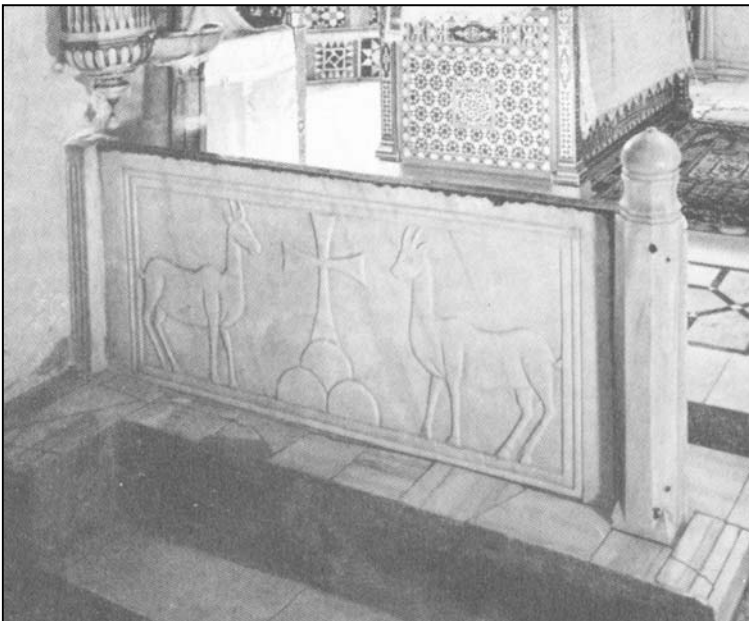


**Fig. 184** Comparison of the building plans of the ten southern synagogues.





**Fig. 185** Cross in mosaic pavement from church at Shavei Zion (Prausnitz et al. 1967: 48, pl. XXXVIIIb).



**Fig. 186** Three-hills motif in the Church at St. Catherines (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973: Pl. LXXXIV).



**Fig. 187** Byzantine-period metal lamp on pricket stand (from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund 1961, No. 61.114.2a, b).

**Fig. 188** Examples of church iconoclasm from the Church of St. Stephen at Umm er-Rasas and the Church of the Apostles at Ma'in (Jordan). Photos by author.

