A NEW TAKE ON THE ORIGINS OF THE SYNAGOGUE

by

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Mystery shrouds the origins of the synagogue. The synagogue is unknown in Jewish literature until the second century BCE, when it becomes ubiquitous in every Jewish, and many Greco-Roman texts. Likewise, the earliest synagogues in the archaeological record do not emerge until the second century BCE in Israel and the Diaspora, yet even the earliest examples seem to share many common features.

Since the tenth century, scholarship has sought to uncover the origins of the synagogue. Because of the paucity of the evidence, countless theories exist, placing the synagogue in every period from time of the First Temple, through to the period after the destruction of the Second Temple. Without further support, however, it is impossible to validate either the position of the theorists or that of their critics.

The lack of evidence for synagogue origins makes it necessary to approach the question from a new direction. Instead of returning to the old arguments for the origins of the synagogue, this thesis examines all of the evidence for Second Temple synagogue functions to illuminate the origins of the synagogue. While there is little evidence of synagogue origins, both the textual and archaeological record suggest a multitude of synagogue functions. The different uses for the synagogue by its surrounding community can help in the analysis of the various theories of origins, as what the synagogue was for should indicate why it came about.

This thesis isolated four categories of synagogue functions: religious functions from within Judaism, religious functions borrowed from the surrounding Greco-Roman world, community functions, and functions only found in synagogue from specific areas, indicating some degree of regional diversity. After examining all of the literary and
archaeological evidence for the functions of the Second Temple synagogue, it became
evident that the synagogue originated during the Hellenistic period to meet different
needs in the Greco-Roman Diaspora.
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Most examinations of synagogue origins begin with a variation on the phrase first coined by Joseph Gutmann in 1975, “the origins of the synagogue are shrouded in mystery.”¹ Despite more than twenty years of research, Gutmann’s statement is still largely accurate. More evidence for the Second Temple synagogue has been uncovered, but the synagogue’s origins remain an enigma.

Lack of evidence has not hindered the proliferation of scholarly theories about synagogue origins, however. It seems that to be a successful scholar of the early synagogue, one must weigh into the fray. Since the sixteenth century, scholars have proposed a multiplicity of origins ranging chronologically over a period of a thousand years and geographically from Babylon to Greece. As new scholars emerged, they conceived of new variations. Three alternate theories have been posited in the last three years alone: Lee Levine proposes that the synagogue originated in town meetings held at the city gate;² Rachel Hachlili advocates a Palestinian origin;³ and in his recently published Doctoral thesis, Donald Binder suggests that the synagogue grew out of meetings in the courtyards of the Jerusalem Temple.⁴

How can so many competing theories continue to exist? The extreme dates and geography are, of course, on the scholarly fringes, but scholars have advocated the more mainstream theories for more than fifty years. The longevity of these competing theories is due to the lack of evidence. Scholars are forced to embellish, as there are few facts. Often, theories are based on little more than a single line of text in Biblical or apocryphal

accounts. Deficiencies in scholarship allow other scholars to challenge the earlier theories and, then, in turn, to offer their own alternative theory. Rachel Hachlili, for example, provides a thoughtful analysis of the various theories of origins in her recent examination of the early synagogue, but finishes the paper with a suggested origin that does not match the evidence that she has just provided.\(^5\)

Though the lack of evidence might dissuade some from pursuing the question, the importance of the Second Temple synagogue to Jewish, Early Christian and Classical studies dictates the need to understand the way that the synagogue developed. Synagogue studies influence many areas of scholarship of the Second Temple period, including the role of women, the rise and interaction of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, and Jewish/pagan relations. Synagogues also continue to be the premier institution of Judaism in the modern day, and to comprehend the trajectory of the institution throughout its history, one must understand its origins. Finally, one can imagine that it is difficult for scholars studying an area to leave something so important as the synagogue's origins left unanswered. Therefore, it is necessary to approach the issue once again.

1. History of Scholarship:

Second Temple synagogue studies did not begin as a distinct area of study until the 1960s; however, trends in synagogue scholarship that developed over the past hundred years continue to affect modern theories of origin. These trends arose over four periods of scholarship, roughly corresponding to four periods of history: prior to 1950, the 1950s, 1960s and 70s, and post-1980.


1.a. Pre-1950s:

Discussions of architecture characterised the early period of synagogue studies. Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger’s publication of *Antike Synagogen in Galiläa* in 1916 set the stage for synagogue studies as a distinct field. Surveying eleven synagogue buildings in the Galilee and the Golan, they posited an architectural model for synagogue development, namely the “Galilean-type” synagogue, which they dated to the late second and early third centuries CE.\(^6\) Their work was followed by a number of other studies in synagogue archaeology. None was as important, however, as Eleazar Sukenik’s. In the Schweich lectures, delivered in 1934 and published as *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, Sukenik demonstrated what he believed was a later architectural development, the “basilica-type” synagogue.\(^7\)

Trends:

Kohl, Watzinger and Sukenik have had a lasting impact on subsequent archaeological examinations of the synagogue. They created the notion of an architectural typology of the synagogue, establishing the paradigm that all synagogues were in some way architecturally related and developed in a set, linear pattern with one form following the next. Scholars have since used their architectural typology rigidly to date synagogue remains, often discounting archaeological findings that do not agree with the architectural models.\(^8\) The legacy of Kohl, Watzinger and Sukenik is evident also in the overemphasis on architectural similarities between Second Temple synagogue buildings. When scholars

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\(^8\) See, for example, the continued attempts by Gideon Foerster to uphold architectural dating in “The Ancient Synagogues of the Galilee” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee Levine; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 291.
start with the supposition that synagogue buildings are necessarily related to each other, they may fail to see the differences.

1.b. 1950s:

The 1950s were pivotal to the development of modern synagogue studies. As Levine writes, “it was a period of seminal work in all areas of Jewish studies.”\(^9\) In epigraphy, Frey’s second volume of Jewish inscriptions was released posthumously in 1952, while Goodenough essentially created the field of Jewish art. The excavation and publication of the Dura Europas synagogue fuelled the interest of a generation of scholars. These studies were followed by further collections of inscriptions, such as Leon’s important work *The Jews of Ancient Rome*\(^10\) and Lifshitz’ *Donateurs et Fondateurs*.\(^11\) Equally important for this study was the foundation and establishment of the State of Israel. At the time, the political repercussions overshadowed archaeological considerations. Yet since its inception, Israel has maintained a strong commitment to Jewish archaeology, and has invested considerable money and time in exploring ancient Jewish sites.

**Trends:**

The scholars of the 1950s collected a great deal of scattered information into a usable form. These collections have made a variety of different data available to scholars of the synagogue since the 1950s, allowing for a more varied approach. Where scholars might once have had to spend their whole careers with texts or epigraphic data from one site, now scholars could now access evidence from across different disciplines in their studies. Though these collections are problematic for various reasons, they set the pattern

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for future work, and the multidisciplinary approach of synagogue studies that developed in the 1980s owes much to the work of these compilers.

1.c. 1960s and 70s:

The emergence of new synagogue data continued into the 1960s. As the Israeli government acquired more land from its Arab neighbours, archaeologists had better access to Jewish sites. Prior to the 1960s, the synagogue on Delos was the only pre-70 CE synagogue that was archaeologically attested; however, excavations in the 1960s and 70s uncovered Second Temple synagogues at Masada (1963), Herodium (1967), Capernaum (1968), and Gamla (1976). Scholarly interest in synagogues in the Mediterranean basin also increased during the 1960s and 70s. A.T. Kraabel’s work on the Sardis synagogue inspired him to focus his career on the form and function of the Diaspora synagogue. Philippe Bruneau re-excavated the Delos building. His work was the first to consider the synagogue as an integrated part of the social and religious system of the surrounding culture, rather than as distinct from it.

Scholarship in Hellenistic Judaism in the 1960s and 70s, though not directly related to synagogue studies, helped shape notions of how synagogues operated in the Diaspora. A. Tcherikover, E. Bickerman, and Martin Hengel redefined the way that scholarship considered Judaism’s interaction with its Greek neighbours. These scholars proposed that Jews in the Greek world interacted with the world around them, speaking...
and reading Greek and incorporating Greek thought into their notion of Judaism. They challenged the dominant paradigm, which considered that the Jewish community struggled to maintain its isolation from Greek influences. Kraabel’s work on the Diaspora synagogue depended on the reinterpretation of Judaism provided by this paradigm shift.  

**Trends:**

The 1960s anticipated the development of contemporary approaches to synagogue studies. New data became available to scholars from archaeology, and trends in research outside synagogue studies allowed for new interpretations of how synagogues functioned in relation to the surrounding culture. This change led directly to theories of Diaspora origins for the synagogue. In some ways, the impact of Jewish and Greek interaction in the Hellenistic world is only now being felt in synagogue studies.

**1.d. Post-1980:**

New methodologies for both archaeological and literary materials have changed the ways that synagogue scholars consider evidence. The work of Jacob Neusner in reassessing the historical reliability of the Mishnaic materials has had a profound effect on Judaic, early Christian and synagogue studies. Likewise, Eric Meyers’s and James Strange’s work on the archaeology of the synagogue has altered the way that archaeological investigations of synagogues are undertaken. Their joint publication on the synagogue at Meiron set the standard for synagogue archaeological reports.

Recent synagogue studies have been characterised by a holistic approach to the study of the synagogue. Since the publication of Ancient Synagogues Revealed and The

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15 Levine, The First Thousand Years, 11.
Ancient Synagogue: the State of Research in 1981, most of the important work on synagogues has been published in collections. These collections attempt to bring scholars from different areas together to pool their expertise and to approach the synagogue from as many directions as possible. A recent collection on the synagogue, for example, contains articles by Biblical, New Testament and Rabbinic scholars, Roman historians, and archaeologists.\textsuperscript{18} Collections of articles translated from modern Hebrew have also been important to the recent study of the synagogue. Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery, edited by Dan Urman and Paul Flesher, is an excellent example.\textsuperscript{19}

2. Origins:

Ancient Jewish writers do not discuss the origins of the synagogue. The only Jewish literary evidence from the period of formative Judaism, the Jewish intertestamental writings, remain mostly silent. In the apocrypha, only Susanna mentions community meetings in the synagogue.\textsuperscript{20} There does not seem to be any mention of synagogue structures in the sectarian literature of Qumran, either.\textsuperscript{21} Only Philo and Josephus give clear literary references to synagogues, and by then each writer attests that synagogues are widespread, found in every sector of Alexandria and throughout Rome.

Since the 1970s, the study of the Second Temple synagogue has been essentially the study of synagogue origins. Scholars have suggested a wide range of theories;

\textsuperscript{16} D. Binder, Temple Courts, 11.
\textsuperscript{17} Levine, First Thousand Years, 187.
\textsuperscript{19} Dan Urman and Paul Flesher, eds., Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery (Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995).
\textsuperscript{20} Sus 1:4.
however, the various theories can be grouped into six categories: origins in First Temple Judaism, the Babylonian exile, the return under Ezra and Nehemiah, the Greco-Roman Diaspora, Pharisaic or proto-Rabbinic Judaism, and after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

2.a. First Temple Judaism:

In the first half of the twentieth century some began to suggest that the synagogue may have begun before the Babylonian exile.\(^{22}\) They found proof for a pre-destruction synagogue in texts like Ps 74:8: "all the meeting places in the land" and Jer 39:8: "the houses of the people."\(^ {23}\) There have been a number of different possibilities suggested as to which specific incident brought about the development of the synagogue. Levy, for example, argued that it developed out of the custom of meeting with a prophet to engage in communal prayer.\(^ {24}\) More recently, Josiah’s Deuteronomic reformation in the First Temple period in 621 BCE has become the more popular suggestion. When the King reformed temple worship and destroyed all of the sites for worship outside of Jerusalem, the people had a religious void that they filled by continuing to meet at the same worship sites for communal religious observance.\(^ {25}\)

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Problem:

There is no evidence for this theory. The synagogue is not mentioned in any of the literature from this period, and no buildings identifiable as synagogues have been found.

2.b. Exilic Period:

Ancient Rabbinic sources first suggested the Babylonian exile as the impetus for the synagogue’s origins, which remained the position of the majority of scholars until the 1970s. It is argued that the Jews, after the destruction of the Temple and the exile to Babylon, needed some focus for their worship and communal activities. They formed synagogues to keep their traditions and practices alive. This theory addressed Talmudic, and later Rabbinical references to specific synagogues in Babylon, which the sources claim were built during the exile.

Problem:

The first challenges to this theory began during the 1930s, with scholars suggesting the alternatives listed here. It has only been since the 1970s, however, that significant questions have been raised. These primarily involve the anachronistic use of Rabbinic evidence. For instance, part of the proof of the synagogue’s origins in Babylon comes from Rabbinic references to two synagogues that were allegedly built during the Babylonian exile. In his study of the evidence, however, Aharon Oppenheimer showed that the only supporting evidence for the early date of these synagogues came from the Babylonian Talmud, a document composed a thousand years after the synagogues were

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supposedly erected. The references were likely included, he suggests, because Babylonian Jews considered themselves instrumental to the development of Judaism.29

Further, a post-exilic Babylonian origin of the synagogue likely would have found its way into the literary record. In the apocryphal book of Tobit, for example, when Tobit tells his son how to live properly, it would seem appropriate for him to mention synagogue attendance.30 There is also no epigraphic or archaeological evidence linking the origin of synagogues to Babylon. The sole supporting evidence for this theory comes from the Talmud, a document compiled 1000 years after the origin supposedly took place.

2.c. Ezra and Nehemiah:

A third theory places the origins of the synagogue in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is argued that the Torah reading ceremonies in the Temple court, which began during this time, grew into a set ritual, and eventually took on an architectural form.31 Those who advocate this view disagree as to when exactly it developed into a set structure, but all suggest a gradual, not radical, growth.32

Problem:

All of the early evidence for the synagogue is found outside of the Holy Land. If the practice of Torah reading was really responsible for the development of the synagogue, it would seem reasonable to assume that the earliest evidence would be from

29 Aharon Oppenheimer, "Babylonian Synagogues with Historical Associations," in Analysis and Discovery, 40.
32 A variation on this theory has been suggested by Lee Levine. He argues that the synagogue developed out of the practice of meeting at the city gate ("Origin," 425-448).
Palestine. Furthermore, as with the previous two theories, there is no supporting evidence.

2.d. Greco-Roman Diaspora:

Increasingly, scholars consider synagogues to have originated in the western, Greco-Roman Diaspora. The earliest inscriptions mentioning *proseuchē* are found in Egypt, and the earliest identified synagogue building is on the Greek island of Delos, which pre-dates Palestine synagogues by a hundred years. While some scholars have challenged both the epigraphic and archaeological evidence, the great preponderance of it suggests their doubts are unfounded. It may be possible to disprove one synagogue’s authenticity, but not that of the whole of the discovered corpus. Jewish inscriptions from Panticapeum on the Black Sea, Rome, and the Fayum Oasis in Lower Egypt make reference to synagogues. It has even been suggested that there may have been an early synagogue in the *agora* in Athens.

Problem:

There is only circumstantial evidence to support Diaspora origins. The Mediterranean basin contains the earliest evidence for synagogues, but that does not necessarily mean that they originated there.

2.e. Pharisaic/Proto-Rabbinic Judaism:

The fifth theory argues that the synagogue grew out of the Pharisaic and proto-Rabbinic movements in the Second century BCE. Advocates believe that the discussions

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34 See the discussion of Kee and Horsley’s position below.

of legal questions and the ritual Sabbath practices created a need for a building for the assembly of scholars.\textsuperscript{36}

**Problem:**

The earliest evidence for the synagogue predates the development of Pharisaic Judaism and suggests that it originated prior to the second century BCE.

**2.f. Post-70 CE:**

The final theory, and one advocated most strongly by Horsley and Kee, is that the synagogue began well after the destruction of the Second Temple, and did not gain prominence before the Third century CE. The synagogue originated, they argue, in the local village councils that were the focal point for the community outside of the household. These groups met in the city square where the community leaders would try criminals and hear petitions, much as the elders in Susanna do.\textsuperscript{37} Structures for these meetings only began in the Third Century and were modelled on the Roman basilica. Thus, it is claimed, none of the prior evidence for synagogues found in Palestine is interpreted accurately. These scholars suggest that the buildings dated from the first century were not synagogues. Instead they argue that the buildings at Gamla and Masada were private houses.\textsuperscript{38} They discount the evidence from Josephus and Philo and claim that the term *proseuchē* in the epigraphic record does not refer to synagogues.\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{38} Horsley, *Galilee*, 224. See the discussion of these buildings below.

Problem:

In the words of Lee Levine, however, advocates of this position are “patently wrong.”\textsuperscript{40} There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that supports the existence of synagogues before the third century CE. Not only are synagogues mentioned by Philo, Josephus, and early Christian authors, but in numerous inscriptions also. The connection between \textit{proseuchē} and \textit{synagogē} is certain,\textsuperscript{41} and there is no doubt that these were buildings and did exist. Writers arguing for this theory are forced to spend all of their time discounting evidence to prove their ideas rather than examining the evidence to understand the question better.\textsuperscript{42}

2.g. Overall Problems with the Theories of Origin:

Most of the above theories are based on the assumption that the synagogue developed out of a specific religious or social crisis in Judaism. Scholars examine literary evidence for a particularly traumatic event and then posit an origin. They ignore the evidence from the synagogue itself.

Further, all of these theories are based on little more than supposition. Many of the theories are viable suggestions, but lack sufficient support to make them certain. Many criticisms of specific theories are also insufficient and are forced to argue from silence. The lack of evidence has created a seemingly unbreakable impasse.

3. Proposition:

The debate may not be hopeless, however. Though there is little evidence for synagogue origins, many ancient sources refer to various functions of the Second Temple synagogue. I propose to examine the evidence for specific activities that took place in the

\textsuperscript{40} Levine, “Origin,” 444.
\textsuperscript{41} See the literary definition section below.
Second Temple synagogue, to see if the functions of the synagogue can be used to illuminate the synagogue's origins.

The literary and archaeological evidence for the Second Temple synagogue suggests that synagogues served a variety of functions. Thus it may be that the synagogue's origins were multivalent. Rather than there being a single origin, the synagogue may have developed gradually and independently in each community throughout the Greco-Roman world, reacting in response to each community's needs.

I will examine the literary and archaeological evidence for the Second Temple synagogue, suggest some idea of synagogue functions as implied by the evidence, and then see what conclusions may be drawn about the origins of the synagogue. I realise that mine is an imperfect method and I will endeavour not to fall prey to the errors of my predecessors, especially as I have taken them to task for their misuse of evidence. It may be, for example, that by connecting synagogue origins and functions I am taking the evidence too far. However, the evidence for origins is ultimately too ambiguous to be of use, and if function can help to illuminate the dark corners of the synagogue's origins, it should not be neglected.

4. Methodological Concerns:

It is impossible to analyse the function of the Second Temple synagogue without making some assumptions. I will try to keep them to a minimum, and will support my assumptions with evidence from the Second Temple period rather than relying on later Rabbinic evidence for my arguments.

Though some Rabbinic evidence may relate to the Second Temple period, little of it is useful to a discussion of the Second Temple synagogue. Previous generations of

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42 See the recent articles by Kee and Horsley in Kee and Cohick, *Evolution of the Synagogue*. 
scholars of the synagogue were quick to use Rabbinic evidence; however, the work of J. Neusner has called much of that reliance on Rabbinic sources into question.\(^{43}\) He argued that the pre-70 traditions revealed no useful information about the synagogue.\(^{44}\) Paul Flesher maintains the same position, that, none of the rabbinic texts published prior to about 250 C.E. refer to synagogues prior to 70. The tannaitic midrashim – The Mekhiltas, Sifra, the two Sifrēs – rarely mention synagogues at all and never in a pre-70 context. The Mishnah, while it discusses synagogues in a number of places, never depicts them prior to 70 either... It is not until the later texts, such as the Tosefta and the Talmuds, that synagogues are mentioned that supposedly existed prior to 70. The lateness of these texts, particularly in light of the silence of the earlier texts, renders the information from the later sources extremely suspect.\(^{45}\)

Given these methodological difficulties, Rabbinic sources will not be used.

5. Definitions:

5.a. Literary:

While many of the Second Temple period’s literary sources make reference to synagogues, the use of ambiguous terminology complicates literary analysis with regard to synagogue function.\(^{46}\) The textual and epigraphic evidence for the Second Temple synagogue uses a number of different terms for the synagogue including: proseuchē, synagogē, hieron, sabbateion, didaskalon, and amphitheatron (see figure 1). Historically, most of the arguments have revolved around proseuchē and synagogē, the two most common terms used for the synagogue.

\(^{43}\) For example, Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70 CE* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1:2.  
\(^{46}\) The attempts by Kee, Horsley, and Flesher to challenge the existence of the first century synagogue are all based on challenging the meaning of the terms (H.C. Kee, "Defining the First Century Synagogue: Problems and Progress," in Kee and Cohink, *Evolution of the Synagogue*, 12; Horsley, *Galilee*, 224; and Flesher, “Palestinian Synagogues,” 29.)
5.a.i. proseuchē

The term proseuchē has been challenged on two fronts: that it does not refer to a building, and that it is not exclusively a Jewish term. The internal evidence from the inscriptions and papyri leave no doubt that proseuchē refers to a building. One inscription from 180 - 145 BCE, for example, clearly refers to architectural additions to an existing structure:

On behalf of King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra and their children, Hermias and his wife Philotera and their children (gave) this exedra to the proseuchē.

An exedra was an open sided room which was annexed to a main hall and could not have been free standing. Papyrological evidence supports this contention as well, detailing land zoning and water usage for the building. There is even a story of a thief escaping to the proseuchē to hide.

The second claim, that proseuchē does not necessarily refer to a Jewish building, is also erroneous. Irina Levinskaya has demonstrated that the term is never used to denote a non-Jewish building. Invoking Goodenough’s claim that epigraphists should presume that any inscription which uses the word is probably Jewish unless other evidence contradicts it, Levinskaya examined all uses of the word, and showed that, while proseuchē was never used in Classical, and rarely in Hellenistic sources, it is found

50 According to a reference in Plutarch, it is used to provide seating for philosophic and communal debate (Bru. xiv, 2. Cited by Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions, 49).
51 CPJ 1.129.
extensively in Jewish ones. Furthermore, writers like Juvenal use the Latin *proseucha*, meaning synagogue, without differentiating between it and non-Jewish buildings.

In the earliest epigraphic and literary evidence from Egypt, *proseuchē* is always the term used for the synagogue building.\(^{54}\) It continued to be used in Egypt into Roman times and also seems to have been the term most commonly used in much of the Diaspora through the first century CE. *Proseuchē* was used by Josephus and Philo and was uncovered in inscriptions from the Bosporus Kingdom on the north shore of the Black Sea.\(^{55}\)

5.a.ii. *synagogē*:

The development of the term *synagogē* is difficult to trace, and has been the source of some debate. In the Septuagint, the term *synagogē* is frequently used to translate both ‘*edah* and *qahal* as the assembled congregation of Israel.\(^{55}\) In the apocryphal writings and epigraphic sources, *synagogē* was used to denote the local community.\(^{57}\) By the first century BCE, however, it also came to be associated with the building that the community gathered in. The earliest reference to *synagogē* as a building comes in the Old Greek version of Susanna, dated to the second or first century BCE (see below). There are a number of references to *synagogē* as a building in the New Testament material also.\(^{58}\) Josephus and Philo both use the term, though it is interesting that in both cases it is used for a building in Palestine.

\(^{56}\) Schrage, “*synagogē*,” 7:802.
\(^{57}\) Schrage, “*synagogē*,” 7:806.
\(^{58}\) These continue to be challenged by Kee. See below for further detail.
5.a.iii. Theories about *synagogē* and *proseuchē*

There have been four major theories concerning the meaning and use of *proseuchē* and *synagogē*: 1) that the terms were date specific, 2) that they were based on geographical location, 3) they denoted different functions; or 4) they were simply two different ways of saying the same thing. According to the first theory, *proseuchē* was used to denote the building in the early years of synagogue development, and *synagogē* the community.\(^\text{59}\) Later, however, the buildings themselves became known as synagogues. This theory does seem to have some merit; later synagogue buildings tended to be called *synagogē*, while the use of the term *proseuchē* seems to drop off. There is enough overlap to make it unlikely, though. *Proseuchē* was still being used in the same geographic region after *synagogē* gained popularity. This is evident in an Egyptian inscription from the 1st or early 2nd Century CE,

Papous built the *proseuchē* on behalf of himself and his wife and children.  
In the fourth year, Pharmouth 7.\(^\text{60}\)

The suggestion of a geographical basis for the difference in terminology is also intriguing. Throughout the Diaspora, the building was commonly called a *proseuchē*, but in the earliest evidence from Palestine it is referred to as a *synagogē*. Everywhere from Egypt to the north shore of the Black Sea, *proseuchē* is the only term in evidence. There is at least one exception to this, however. Josephus, in the passage where he detailed the meeting of the community in Tiberias during the Jewish revolt, referred to the meeting place as a large *proseuchē*.\(^\text{61}\)

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61 This is the only reference to a Palestinian *proseuchē* found in Josephus. Binder offers the intriguing suggestion that this might be because the *Life* was written well after Josephus arrived in Rome, where *proseuchē* was the common term for the synagogue building. Binder, *Temple Courts*, 117.
Another piece of evidence for a geographical connection comes from Philo. In his works, he always referred to the *proseuchē* as being the building and the *synagogē* as being the community except when discussing the Essenes in Palestine, where he used *synagogē* to mean the meeting place.\(^{62}\)

A further theory that attempts to justify the terminology, argues that the differences between the two terms are based on the functions evident in the names. The *proseuchē*, from the verb “to pray”, was a prayer-hall, used in the Diaspora communities to worship through prayer, because they were too far from the Temple in Jerusalem to engage in ritual. The *synagogē*, on the other hand, from the verb “to gather together”, was simply a meeting place to deal with community concerns and weekly Sabbath observance for those near the Temple. Because those in Palestine were in close proximity to Jerusalem, it is argued that there was no need to engage in prayer.\(^{63}\) Some have furthered this argument to suggest that, in fact, the *proseuchē* did not prefigure the *synagogē* at all, but eventually developed into a different institution altogether, the “house of study.”\(^{64}\) The accuracy of this theory is challenged, however, by the existence of the Temple of Onias in Lower Egypt. The rival temple in Egypt was structured after the Jerusalem one, and was capable of fulfilling the needs of Egyptian Jewish worshippers, yet the term *proseuchē* was used most prominently in Egypt.\(^{65}\)

More scholars are beginning to believe that all of the terms meant the same thing. Whether the community used *proseuchē*, *synagogē*, *topos*, or any number of other terms

\(^{62}\) Providence, 82.
\(^{64}\) See Dan Urman, “The House of Assembly and the House of Study: Are They One and the Same?” in Urman and Flesher, Analysis and Discovery.
\(^{65}\) Aryeh Kasher, “Synagogues as ‘Houses of Prayer’ and ‘Holy Places’ in the Jewish Communities of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt,” in Urman and Flesher, Analysis and Discovery, 206.
was based on the building's significance to the community, not a set function. It is thought that each early synagogue developed within its own community and was a reaction against the surrounding community, not within a global Jewish framework.

5.b. Archaeological:

Surprisingly, many examinations of the synagogue do not provide a specific architectural definition for the synagogue. Even when the architectural form of the synagogue is outlined by scholars, the definition either only applies to post-70 CE synagogues, as it is based on their use of common artistic motifs like the lulab, ethrog and shofar, or is created by examining the archaeological evidence for buildings currently believed to be synagogues. Definitions are applied on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on whether the scholar wants to prove or disprove the identification of a building as a synagogue.

If I am to assess the functions of the synagogue that are implied by the archaeological evidence, I must therefore be certain of how to identify a building as a Second Temple synagogue. I have formulated six criteria for identifying buildings as synagogues. The first four are the most convincing, and no building in this study will be

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67 Lee Levine’s magnum opus, the 748 page *The First Thousand Years* never defines what is or is not a synagogue, for example; neither does all of *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* nor A.T. Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity Among Diaspora Synagogues,” in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel* (eds. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).
69 The process for the identification of synagogues tends to be quite circular. In the case of Masada, Herodium, and Gamla, for example, each building's architectural plan is used to prove the identity of the others. Binder also bases his definition on the archaeological evidence, *Temple Courts*, 88-89. His suggestion that synagogues can be identified by analogy with the Galilean-type model as a guide is badly outdated.
considered a synagogue unless all are present. All four are attested or inferred from Second Temple literary evidence. The fifth is only attested in Egypt, and may be a regional characteristic. The last is only attested in later Rabbinic texts and may not represent a legitimate way to identify the Second Temple synagogue.

5.b.i. Definite Identifiers:

1. Size:

The size of a building is not often brought into its identification as a synagogue. Yet the notion of synagogē (to gather together), especially as applied to a community, suggests that size must play some factor. The synagogue needed to be big enough for the community to assemble. Various texts record that the community met in the synagogue on the Sabbath,\(^71\) to pass judgements,\(^72\) and render punishment.\(^73\) Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence for the necessary size of a building either from Second Temple or Rabbinic texts. For the purposes of this study, I will assume that to be a synagogue a building must be larger than a regular house in whichever town it is found.

2. Jewish Occupation:

One must identify a Jewish presence at a specific building in order to classify it as a Second Temple synagogue. In the Diaspora, archaeologists generally do not categorise a building as a synagogue unless it has Jewish inscriptions or art.\(^74\) Jewish art seems not
to have developed into a distinctive form at this early stage,\textsuperscript{75} and so only buildings that can be securely connected with Jews through epigraphic evidence should be considered synagogues. Conversely, archaeologists in Israel tend to label any building that could have held a large group of people a synagogue.\textsuperscript{76} A large building with seats in a Jewish context may not necessarily be a synagogue, however. Essentially, the question relates to the building’s purpose. Proponents of the theory that all community buildings in Jewish towns are synagogues assume that the synagogue was just a large community building. Was a local council building the same thing as a synagogue? I would argue that some religious connection is necessary.

3. Seats:

The gospel accounts, epigraphic evidence, and Susanna all point to the existence of seating in early synagogues. The author of Matthew wrote that the scribes and Pharisees took the best seats in the synagogues.\textsuperscript{77} In the Old Greek version of Susanna, the elders and judges “stood up” twice during Susanna’s trial. An inscription from the first century BCE in Berenike might also point to the existence of seating.\textsuperscript{78} The term used for the building is “\textit{amphitheatron}”. If the term denotes a synagogue, as is argued below, it likely reflects the seating arrangement similar to a Greek \textit{bouleterion}.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{75} Ma’oz has identified the palm frond and rosette as specifically Jewish in this period. “The Synagogue at Gamla and the Typology of Second-Temple Synagogues,” in Ancient Synagogues Revealed, 39. Neither of these symbols were new or particular to Jewish art, however. See Goodenough
\textsuperscript{76} As J. Strange, “The Jewishness of [the Israeli synagogues] is given by their context, not by their building elements.” “Ancient Texts, Archaeology as Text,” in Kee and Cohick, Evolution of the Synagogue, 44.
\textsuperscript{77} Matt 23:6.
\textsuperscript{78} CJZC 70. See the discussion below (Chapter 2).
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{LSJ}, \textit{amphitheatron}: a double theatre, amphitheatre, a space wholly surrounded by seats rising one behind another, so as to command a view of the whole arena. According to Duane Roller, most amphitheaters were temporary structures until after the time of Augustus. No stone amphitheaters were built outside of Italy until after the time of Caesar (The Building Program of Herod the Great [Berkeley: University of California, 1998], 83).
4. **Available Water Source:**

A number of the sources suggest that Second Temple synagogues were built close to water. In Acts, for example, Paul went to a riverside because he knew that he could find the synagogue there.\(^{80}\) Josephus quotes similar evidence from an edict from the Greek city of Halicarnassus: “and [the Jews] may build their places of prayer near the sea, in accordance with their native custom.”\(^{81}\) Philo may provide some reason for this practice in his *On God* 7-9. Philo exhorts his audience not to enter the *hiera* unclean, but to wash in the water first. Binder suggested that *hiera* may refer to synagogues.\(^{82}\) His argument seems reasonable; the word is in the plural and so is not likely referring to the Jerusalem Temple. The passage is not referring to pagan temples, as it is an exhortation to the Jews not to act like the pagans, but to cleanse themselves before entering the buildings.

5.b.ii. **Possible Identifiers:**

5. **Surrounding structures or rooms:**

The existence of structures surrounding the synagogue is only attested in papyrological and epigraphic evidence from Egypt. A land survey from Arsinoë-Crocodilopolis, written in the early part of the first century BCE, records a consecrated garden next to a *proseuchē*.\(^{83}\) A number of inscriptions also provide evidence for appended buildings, revealing the presence of *exedra*,\(^{84}\) and other appurtenances

\(^{80}\) Acts 16:13: “On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer.”

\(^{81}\) *Ant.*, 14.258


\(^{83}\) *CPJ* 1.134. The *proseuchē* covers 3 13/16\textsuperscript{th} *parmouths* of land. According to Binder, that represents c. 10,427 m\(^2\) or over 2½ acres. *Temple Courts*, 238.

equivalent to temple storage chambers.\textsuperscript{85} No evidence exists in the literary record for this practice outside Egypt, and so it is impossible to know how widespread the use of additional rooms was for the Second Temple synagogue.

5.b.iii. Unlikely Identifiers:

6. Orientation:

Orientation towards Jerusalem seems to be a factor in later synagogue construction; however, there is no literary evidence from the Second Temple period to support orientation as an identifier. Rabbinic evidence from \textit{Tosefta Megillah} 4.22 suggests that, the Temple, the synagogue entrance should be built on the east side of the building. Synagogues from Late Antiquity seem to face towards Jerusalem, however. Levine has suggested that the increased significance of orientation may relate to an increased sense of religiosity after the destruction of the Temple. He therefore warns against considering orientation a factor in Second Temple synagogues.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{85} Horbury and Noy, \textit{Jewish Inscriptions}, 25.
\textsuperscript{86} Levine, \textit{First Thousand Years}, 181.
Chapter 2 - Literature

Jewish and Christian literature, papyri, and epigraphic evidence provide a great deal of information about the functions of the Second Temple synagogue. I will analyse each text and then will group specific synagogue references thematically to come to some conclusions about the functions of the synagogue in the texts of the Second Temple period. Each text will be examined in terms of five categories: the author’s background, definite synagogue references, possible synagogue references, problems, and implications for the function of the synagogue.

The literature of the Second Temple period alludes to a number of synagogues throughout Palestine and the Diaspora. For the sake of brevity, I will not catalogue all of the references to Second Temple synagogues. Many of the ancient sources provide little more than a passing mention of the existence of a synagogue in a certain place. There is no need to discuss these passages, as I am not trying to prove the geographical spread of the synagogue. Synagogue references will be discussed only when they provide more information than a simple mention of a synagogue. To maintain a transparent process, however, in a footnote at the start of each section, I will provide all of the synagogue references in each author’s work.

87 The ancient sources located synagogues in a wide range of areas of both Palestine and the Diaspora, including: Judaea, the Galilee, middle and lower Egypt, Cyrenaica, Syria, Asia, the Bosphoran kingdom, Macedonia, and Italy. For a recent catalogue of all references to Second Temple synagogues, see Binder, Temple Courts.
I. Jewish Historical Evidence

a. Josephus:

1. Historical Background:

Flavius Josephus has been called "the single most important source for the history of the Jewish people during the first century C.E." Though he did not go so far as to leave a detailed description of the origin and function of the synagogue, Josephus' work is extremely useful to scholars of the Second Temple synagogue. Josephus' references to synagogues may be divided into two main categories. First, he provides evidence of synagogues and their functions throughout all of his books. Second, Josephus records a series of Greco-Roman edicts and letters by Emperors, Roman magistrates, and Greek cities, primarily in Asia Minor, that outline the Jews' legal rights in the Roman world and cast some indirect light on synagogues.

2. Definite Synagogue References:

The familiarity with which Josephus refers to synagogue buildings suggests that the synagogue was already a well-established institution during his lifetime. In narrating his conduct in the Jewish war, for instance, Josephus mentions a city meeting that took place in a proseuchē at Tiberias. He described the synagogue as a "huge building, capable of accommodating a large crowd"; claiming that the entire community of Tiberias fit


90 Vita, 302. Kee continues to challenge the reference to a building at Tiberias. His argument tends to cloud the issue rather than illuminate it. Kee disregards the word proseuchē and instead focuses on the descriptor, oikema. He argues that, as oikema could mean "dwelling," "storehouse," or "brothel," the proseuchē was not a purpose built structure, but rather one that was used for specific religious meetings. His argument seems absurd. Josephus uses oikema, a general word for a building, in his description of how big the specific building is ("Defining," Kee and Cohink, Evolution of the Synagogue, 13).
within its walls. Elsewhere Josephus suggests that the *boule* of Tiberias was 600 people; the *proseuchē* would have been quite a large building.

Josephus records a number of religious functions of the synagogue, including Torah reading, meeting on the Sabbath, and the education of children. Josephus suggests that the weekly reading of the Torah was a practice which dated back to Moses. In Nicolaus of Damascus' letter to Agrippa, complaining about the mistreatment of Jews in Asia Minor, Josephus records that the Jews "give every seventh day over to the study of [their] customs and law" in the synagogue. Josephus discusses the importance of education, writing that "children shall be taught to read and shall learn both the laws and the deeds of their forefathers." The synagogue is a setting for this process too.

Josephus also relates a number of incidents that suggest that the synagogue was the focus of anti-Jewish violence in the Greek cities. In his *Jewish War*, for example, he describes the desecration of the Jewish synagogue at Caesarea during a dispute about Jewish rights in that city (the Greeks sacrificed a pigeon in front of the doorway). The incident is so serious that Josephus suggests that the Greek attack on the synagogue was one of the causes of the war. Josephus records a similar incident at Dora in Phoenicia. Greek youths brought an image of Caesar into the synagogue. The governor, at the behest of Agrippa, chastised the youths for challenging Claudius' edicts that gave the Jews the right of inviolability of their synagogue. He also denounced their impiety both towards the Jews and Caesar. His edict, quoted in Josephus, is telling:

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91 *J.W.* 2.641.
93 *Ag. Ap.* 2.175.
94 *Ant.* 16.43.
95 *Ag. Ap.* 2.204.
You have thereby sinned not only against the laws of the Jews, but also against the emperor, whose image was better placed in his own shrine than in that of another, especially in the synagogue.\footnote{J.W. 7.285-292.}

Evidently the Greek community considered the synagogue a religious focal point of the Jewish community.

Scholars of the synagogue have mined Josephus' collection of edicts and inscriptions extensively for information about the rights and practices of Jews in the synagogues of the Roman world. The collection consists of thirty documents from Jewish Antiquities chapters 14 and 16 that represent the bulk of our information about the legal status of Jewish communities within the Roman world. It is a mixture of complete and fragmentary documents, some with very little corruption and others with a number of errors. Corruption in the edicts seems to correlate with their date of issue. The decrees from the time of Julius Caesar have many more errors and are more fragmentary than those from the time of Claudius.\footnote{M. Pucci Ben-Zeev, Jewish Rights in the Roman World (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 360.} In sections 14.190 to 14.216 of the Jewish Antiquities, Josephus set out a series of edicts made by Julius Caesar. The edicts are followed by a series of decrees made by the Roman Senate and other officials confirming the rights of the Jews to assemble and not to be liable for military service.\footnote{Ant. 14.219-230.} Josephus then provides a series of edicts confirming the rights of Jews in various communities in the Diaspora.\footnote{Ant. 14.231-265.} Further support for Diaspora Jews from Mark Antony, Agrippa, Augustus, and other Roman dignitaries follows.\footnote{Antony: 14.306-323; Agrippa: 16.58-60, 167-171; Augustus: 16.162-166; and Roman dignitaries: 16.172-173.}
Though not all of the edicts are directly related to the synagogue, many of the rights that the documents outline either explicitly relate to actions that are undertaken within the synagogue (e.g. the protection of sacred monies) or actions which are associated with the synagogue (e.g. the right of the community to carry out judgements). In his book, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, E.P. Sanders offers a valuable list of the 'rights' included in the Roman edicts:

1. The right to assemble or to have a place of assembly (14.214-16; 227; 235; 257; 260)
2. The right to keep Sabbath (14.226, 242, 245, 258, 263)
3. The right to have their ‘ancestral food’ (14.226, 245, 261)
4. The right to decide their own affairs (14.235, 260)
5. The right to contribute money (14.214, 227)\(^{102}\)

The rights of sacrifice, inviolability, and self-protection should be added to Sanders's list. The decree from Sardis records that Jews were given the right to sacrifice.\(^{103}\) The right to sacrifice is assumed to represent a misunderstanding of Jewish practice on the part of the authorities,\(^{104}\) and may just illustrate the fact that the Jews were being given similar rights to those of temples. Many of the edicts include the protection of sacred money and texts, making interference with them sacrilegious.\(^{105}\) The decree from Ephesus suggests that the Jews had the ability to punish wrongdoers outside of the Jewish community. Those caught robbing the synagogue were to be handed over to the Jews themselves rather than to the Roman authorities, as happened elsewhere.\(^{106}\)

\(^{103}\) *Ant.* 14.260.
\(^{105}\) The general edict of Augustus, for example (*Ant.* 16.164).
\(^{106}\) *Ant.* 16.168.
3. Possible Synagogue References:

The synagogue as the centre of hostility may be inferred as well from Josephus’ description of Titus’ triumph. Josephus describes a number of burning hiera included in the re-enactment of victories. Binder has suggested that these might have been intended to represent synagogues. The Romans may have considered each burning synagogue as representing a Jewish community conquered by their forces.

4. Problems:

The edicts are important to the discussion of the Second Temple synagogue functions. Not only do they provide information about the extent of the powers of the synagogues within the Roman world, but they also suggest some of the actions undertaken in them. From these documents it is possible to get a sense of what the Jews in the Diaspora communities were doing in the synagogues.

Roman decrees were not universal in the way that laws are today. Roman laws were ad hoc and localised and were primarily responses to specific requests or problems. Though a few of the edicts recorded here are generalised, most relate to specific cities. The laws likely reflected local norms rather than Empire-wide practice. That said, the reaction of the citizens of Antioch showed that they felt the Roman edict did have some force. Josephus reports that the Antiochenes petitioned Titus to expel the Jews from Antioch. After Titus refused, they asked him to remove the tablets which recorded the

107 J.W. 7.144.
108 Binder, Temple Courts, 155. Levine also suggests that occasionally Josephus used hiera as a designation for the synagogue (“Second Temple Synagogue,” 13).
109 Rajak, “Jewish Rights,” 23. Rajak goes on to argue that none of the grants should be seen as ‘rights’, but rather as verbal gestures of goodwill towards the Jews. The Hellenistic cities were largely independent, and Roman laws would not have had a great deal of effect on them.
110 The difference in the legal rights of the Jews throughout the Empire may be reflected in the different terms used to define the Jews within the cities. Levine, First Thousand Years, 106.
rights of the Jews at Antioch. Thus, the presence of the tablets in some way validated Jewish rights.

The reliability of the evidence is of primary concern. Two possibilities need to be examined before the information from the Roman documents can be confidently used: was the material a pure fabrication by Josephus and if not, how trustworthy were his sources. The documents are unlikely to be forgeries by Josephus. Josephus would not likely falsify his evidence when his work would be scrutinised by his many critics.

Before listing the various decrees, Josephus justifies his use of the Roman edicts by writing,

Since many persons, however, out of enmity to us refuse to believe what has been written about us by Persians and Macedonians because these writings are not found everywhere and are not deposited even in public places but are found only among us and some other barbaric peoples, while against the decrees of the Romans nothing can be said – for they are kept in the public places of the cities and are still to be found engraved on bronze tablets in the capital ...

He would hardly have wanted to undermine his claims by falsifying his information.

Pucci Ben-Zeev examined the documents for their authenticity and their use of source materials. She found that the complete documents compare favourably with other extant documents from the period. She points out that many of the mistakes could have been scribal errors through transmission of the documents to Asia Minor. Further, Josephus’ lack of control over the material suggests that he did not forge the edicts. Josephus may

112 J.W. 109-111.
113 Josephus’ later books provide no evidence that the documents were challenged for their authenticity. Though an argument from silence, Josephus’ lack of self justification is in direct contrast with his need to defend many of his other claims, notably his wartime conduct.
114 Ant. 14.187-188.
116 Pucci Ben-Zeev, Jewish Rights, 359-361. She goes on to provide an excellent assessment of scribal errors found in extant Roman legal documents. Many of the same type errors appear in the extant copies of
not have even read all of the material in the documents. He offers no explanation of the reference to sacrifice at Sardis, for example. Josephus’ introduction to a document and what the document says are often unconnected. For example, Josephus mentions the letter from Claudius to the Alexandrian Jews in his introduction, but then quotes Claudius’ edict released eight months before.\textsuperscript{117}

An examination of the nature of Josephus’ sources is essential. Various scholars have offered theories about where Josephus found his material. Some posit a literary source: Nicolaus of Damascus, the collection made for Agrippa\textsuperscript{118} or made by Philo and taken to Gaius, or else that Josephus accessed Roman or Jewish archives to find the material.\textsuperscript{119} After examining the possibilities, Pucci Ben-Zeev plausibly suggests that he used a literary collection of juridical material likely collected and kept by Jews in Asia Minor. Most of the documents relate to Asia Minor. Further, if the documents were in a fragmentary form when Josephus received them, his inability to place the documents in a proper chronological order would make more sense.\textsuperscript{120}

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

Josephus’ references to the synagogue suggest that it served two distinct purposes: as the centre of regular religious observance and the focal point of the Jewish community. According to his accounts, Jews went to the synagogue each Sabbath to read and study

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\textsuperscript{117} Pucci Ben-Zeev, \textit{Jewish Rights}, 371.
\textsuperscript{118} These views are summarized and dismissed by Pucci Ben-Zeev, \textit{Jewish Rights}, 392.
\textsuperscript{120} Pucci Ben-Zeev, \textit{Jewish Rights}, 394.
the Torah. Though Josephus does not say so explicitly, synagogues were also likely used as the repository for the temple tax, as a number of edicts record that Jews could collect and store money in the synagogue without interference. Finally, Josephus stressed education (possibly in the synagogue) so that all Jews would be able to read the Torah.

Josephus’ works also suggest that the synagogue was the focal point of the Jewish community. He describes important town meetings taking place in the synagogue, such as the example from Tiberias. The synagogue also appears as the centre for Greek hostility towards the Jews. Josephus records two specific incidences where the Greeks attacked the synagogue because of their anger towards the community as a whole.

b. Philo: 121

1. Historical Background:

Philo of Alexandria is another extremely important source for the study of the Second Temple synagogue. In his works he mentions synagogues in Rome, Asia, Palestine, throughout Egypt and Libya, and in every section of Alexandria. 122 He also made reference to various Diaspora synagogues, including the synagogues of the Therapeutae. 123 The works that provide the most information about the synagogue are his more historical Against Flaccus and On the Embassy to Gaius. The two works recount the clashes between the Jews and the Greeks in Alexandria in 38 CE and Philo’s subsequent leadership of the Jewish delegation to Gaius in Rome. The two books should

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122 Flaccus, 45.
123 Providence, 80-83.
not be viewed as purely historical documents, however, but rather as a "historically based theology."  

2. Definite Synagogue References:

Philo considered that assembly in the synagogue on the Sabbath to read and expound upon the biblical texts was a central characteristic of the Jewish people. A number of examples support this contention:

And will you sit in your synagogues and ... read in security in your holy books expounding any obscure point and in leisurely comfort discussing at length your ancestral philosophy?

[Moses] required them to assemble in the same place on these seventh days and, sitting together in a respectful and orderly manner, hear the laws read so that none should be ignorant of them.

Philo also comments on the practice of Sabbath meetings in the synagogue in reference to synagogues outside Egypt. In his discussion of the synagogues in Rome, for instance, Philo states that Roman Jews met regularly in their synagogues on the Sabbath to study their "ancestral philosophy."

Teaching in the synagogue is another important feature in Philo’s accounts. It is even evident in Philo’s use of the term didaskaleion five times to mean the synagogue. In his On the Special Laws, Philo claimed, "what are our places of prayer throughout the cities but schools of prudence and courage ..." Elsewhere he wrote, “So each seventh day there stand wide open in every city thousands of schools of good sense..."

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124 Peter Borgen, “Philo of Alexandria,” in Stone, Jewish Writings, 251.
125 Borgen, “Philo,” 251.
126 Dreams, 2.127.
127 Hypothetica, 7.12
128 Embassy, 156.
129 Moses, 2.216.
130 Spec. Laws, 2.62.
In his account of the riots in 38 CE from Against Flaccus and On the Embassy to Gaius, Philo describes the Greek mobs’ attacks on the Jewish community through their attack on the synagogues.

Gathering together great hordes of men, they (the Greeks of Alexandria) attacked the prayer-houses, of which there are many in every section of the city. Some they vandalised, others they totally destroyed by torching and burning them to the ground, in their fury and mindless frenzy paying no heed at all to the nearby houses, for nothing is faster than fire once it fastens on timber. I say nothing about the simultaneous destruction and burning of objects set up to honour the Emperors – shields and gilded crowns and stelai and dedicatory inscriptions, consideration for which should have made them spare the rest.\(^{131}\)

Philo is very interested in presenting dedications to benefactors in the *proseuchē*, especially to the Emperors, as an essential part of the synagogue’s function. The synagogue as a site for dedication is also evident in Against Flaccus, where Philo writes,

[The Jews] are the only people under the sun who by losing their meeting-houses were losing also what they would have valued as worth dying many thousand deaths, namely, their means of showing reverence to their benefactors, since they no longer had the sacred buildings where they could set forth their thankfulness.\(^{132}\)

A few lines later, Philo refers to the Jewish practice of dedication in Ptolemaic times, claiming that the Egyptian Jews never set up statues to the rulers because they wanted to “(pay) court to the good fortunes of rulers (rather) than to the rulers themselves.”\(^{133}\) Philo states that the dedications in the synagogue are the only way in which Jews can legally recognise the Emperors: \(^{134}\) “if we have these destroyed no place, no method is left to us for paying this homage.”\(^{135}\)

\(^{131}\) Embassy, 132-3.

\(^{132}\) Flaccus, 48.

\(^{133}\) Embassy, 140. The epigraphic evidence from Ptolemaic Egypt (see below) substantiates his arguments.

\(^{134}\) Jewish law, of course.

\(^{135}\) Flaccus, 49.
3. Possible Synagogue References:

None of Philo’s references to synagogues are particularly contested, except by Kee and Horsley on the grounds that the term *proseuchē* does not refer to the synagogue.\(^{136}\)

4. Problems:

In terms of the major literary sources for this study, Philo is the only author whose work lay entirely within the Second Temple period. Therefore, Philo’s writings cannot be challenged as being anachronistic.

It may be, however, that his discussions of synagogues outside Egypt were coloured by his local situation. His work provides the only evidence for the function of synagogues in Rome, and it may be that the functions are projections of Alexandrian practices instead of Roman ones.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

Philo’s writings suggest that the synagogue was the premier institution of Egyptian Judaism. He describes their rich decorations and the long established practice (even by his time) of dedicating the synagogues to the local rulers. He reports that synagogues were found throughout Egypt and in all areas of Alexandria. Further, it may be that Philo is suggesting that synagogues were equivalent to the Greek *gymnasia*, as they provided a location to teach and discuss “ancestral philosophy.” The centrality of the synagogues to the Jews is also evident in the Greek attacks. Philo reports that the Greeks of Alexandria were fixated on the destruction of synagogues.

\(^{136}\) For example, Kee, “Transformation,” 22.
II. Jewish Apocrypha

a. Susanna:

1. Historical Background:

   The apocryphal book Susanna may represent a pivotal point in the development of the synagogue. In the LXX, the community is said to gather in Susanna’s husband’s house routinely, because he is richest man in the town, and has the most space.\(^{137}\)

2. Definite Synagogue References:

   The earlier Old Greek version of the text, commonly dated between the late second and early first centuries CE,\(^{138}\) differs as to the place of judgement. Instead of meeting in Susanna’s husband’s house, the community is called to judge Susanna in the synagogē, where the judges lived.

   *Old Greek:*

   They came to the synagogue of the city where they sojourned, and all the Israelites who were there assembled.\(^{139}\)

   *LXX:*

   The next day, when the people came to her husband, Joakim, the two elders came...\(^{140}\)

3. Possible Synagogue References:

   Not applicable.

4. Problems:

   Not applicable.

\(^{137}\) The reference to the garden next to the house provides an interesting parallel with the reference to the sacred garden or grove attested in a second-century BCE papyrus from Egypt (\textit{CPJ} 1.129).


\(^{139}\) Sus 28 (Old Greek Version); Collins, \textit{Daniel}.

\(^{140}\) Sus 28 (LXX); Collins, \textit{Daniel}. 
5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

The development of the synagogue from house meetings to purpose-built structures has long been postulated, and Susanna may offer an early example of that practice developing.

b. Third Maccabees:

1. Historical Background:

   The apocryphal story relates the persecution and ultimate redemption of the Jews by Ptolemy IV Philopater.

2. Definite Synagogue References:

   Third Maccabees provides another incidental mention of the Second Temple synagogue. After the Jews were freed by Ptolemy, they dedicated a *proseuchē* to celebrate their freedom.\(^\text{141}\)

3. Possible Synagogue References:

   The first mention of synagogues in the document is taken from the king’s proclamation against the Jews, where he forbids them from entering their temples (*hiera*).\(^\text{142}\)

4. Problems:

   Not applicable.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

   Third Maccabees provides both direct and indirect evidence of synagogue function. In the definite synagogue reference, the synagogue is used to acknowledge the support of benefactors. Philo suggested that in Alexandria one of the main functions of

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\(^{141}\) 3 Macc 7:20.

\(^{142}\) See Binder, for the argument that the “holy places” are synagogues (*Temple Courts*, 46).
the synagogue was to provide a place for dedications to the local rulers. Here, that practice is discussed in terms of the Jews dedicating a building as thanks for their own good fortune.

Indirectly, Third Maccabees suggests that the synagogue functioned as the centre of the community. As in Philo and Josephus, anti-Jewish sentiment in Third Maccabees is expressed by destruction of synagogues. The implication is that, through the closing of hiera, Ptolemy was limiting the power and spread of the Jewish community.

III. New Testament Evidence

a. Paul

1. Historical Background:

Paul makes little reference to the synagogue. However, given the nature of his letters, Paul had little need to discuss concerns with the Jewish community. Paul’s intent was to address the problems within the nascent Christian communities.¹⁴³

2. Definite Synagogue References:

Paul’s letters provide no definite synagogue references.

3. Possible Synagogue References:

Paul only mentions synagogues peripherally. In his account of his sufferings for Christ, Paul relates that:

Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning.¹⁴⁴

The maximum punishment mandated by Deuteronomy was forty stripes: “Forty lashes may be given but not more.”¹⁴⁵ According to C.K. Barrett, by the first century the

¹⁴³ Binder, Temple Courts, 64.
¹⁴⁴ 2 Cor 11.24-25.
¹⁴⁵ Deut 25.3.
interpretation of the passage seems to have shifted to mean forty lashes minus one. In Josephus’ discussion of Jewish law, he writes, “let him be beaten with forty stripes save one.” Similarly, the Mishnah records: “how many stripes do they inflict on a man? Forty less one, as it is said, by number, forty – a number near to forty.” The Rabbis do not say that the punishment took place in the synagogue, but that possibility is likely, given the references to scourging in the synagogues found in the gospel accounts.

4. Problems:

Paul’s account never explicitly suggests that his beating took place in the synagogue.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

If Paul’s punishment took place in the synagogue, this passage provides evidence of the Jewish community carrying out legal judgements during the Roman period. Though the evidence found in the edicts preserved by Josephus and the accounts of Susanna suggest that community judgement occurred, Paul’s account may be the only direct evidence of Jews deciding their own affairs.

b. Synoptic Gospels:

1. Historical Background:

The synoptic gospels seem to provide a great deal of evidence about the synagogue. Though they have been somewhat neglected by scholars of the synagogue, the gospel accounts contain references to synagogue functions within the smaller Jewish communities of Palestine.

147 Ant. 4.238, 248.
2. Definite Synagogue References:

The gospel materials provide some idea of the community function of the synagogue in Palestine before the destruction of the Temple. The gospels present quite an informative picture of the role of the local synagogue in those communities. Every place that Jesus visited had synagogues where the local people met on the Sabbath. Reading and discussion of Torah and the Prophets and Jesus' healing and miracle working were not uncommon events. Further, Jesus taught in the synagogue unopposed; while the local populace challenged him for his views, they remained uncritical of his teaching and healing.

The synagogue in the gospels was also a place for passing and carrying out judgements. In Jesus' commission to his disciples he warns them that their detractors will "hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues." Luke also provides evidence of synagogue donation. Luke records that a centurion at Capernaum built the local synagogue for the people. Further, Matthew provides the earliest mention of the "seat of Moses", which is found in the archaeological record of later periods. He also describes the synagogues as having benches. All of the gospels mention the archisynagogos, the head of the synagogue – someone, incidentally, who is not equated with the scribes or the Pharisees.

149 Capernaum (Mark 1:21); Nazareth (Mark 6:2), Galilee in general (Mark 1:39).
151 Schrage, "synagogē," 830; Levine, First Thousand Years, 44.
153 Matt 10:17-18, Mark 13:9, Luke 21:12, 12:11. The council/synagogue distinction may reflect a further differentiation between the community (here the council) and the building where the community meets, the synagogue.
155 W.D. Davies and D. Allison suggest that "seat of Moses" may have developed out of Moses' teaching role and either represent an actual chair or a metaphoric "chair" (university type). Commentary on Matthew III (3 Vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 268.
156 Matt 23:2, 6.
3. Possible Synagogue References:

The gospels refer to almsgiving in the synagogue as well as praying.\(^{157}\) It is unclear, however, if either action is required to take place there.

4. Problems:

The tendency in synagogue research has been to treat the gospel materials with a great deal of restraint.\(^{158}\) Fears of anachronism and projection are common. Most centre on the claim that the synoptic gospel writers reflect the late first century Diaspora more than early first century Galilee. The terms used to describe the synagogue are often open to interpretation, and there are those scholars, notably Kee and Horsley, who exploit the ambiguity of the terms to challenge the existence of a Second Temple synagogue building. They argue that the usage of the term, synagôgê, in the gospels denotes the community only.\(^{159}\) Their argument cannot be maintained, however, even if the discussion is only restricted to the internal evidence from the gospels. In Matthew 23:6, Jesus challenges the scribes and the Pharisees saying, “they love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues.” Matthew is, without a doubt, describing a building, and indeed Horsley is forced to argue *ad absurdum* in order to prove that the “seats” are not from a building.\(^{160}\)

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\(^{157}\) Almsgiving: Matt 6:2; praying: Matt 6:5.


\(^{159}\) In Kee’s latest article, for example, he acts as if the term synagôgê and proseûche have been proven to represent different buildings (“Defining the First Century Synagogue: Problems and Progress,” Kee and Cohick, *Evolution of the Synagogue*, 11). See the above footnote (72) for a more thorough discussion of the problems with Horsley and Kee.

\(^{160}\) See for example Horsley’s latest addition to his synagogue rejection, “Synagogues in Galilee and the Gospels,” in Kee and Cohick, *Evolution of the Synagogue*, 53, where he argues that the Pharisees would claim the best seats in the “public scenes and occasions”. He does not explain where the seats in the “public scenes” would have been.
The reliability of the gospels is a central issue. A growing number of scholars such as Martin Hengel have placed greater confidence in the evidence of the synoptic gospels. He has repeatedly pointed to the fact that we have the benefit of maps, histories, and a good deal of other material that would not have been available to the early Christian writers. He highlights the fact that scholars of classical literature are not so critical of their material and criticises New Testament scholars who would rather rely on the statements of Classical historians writing in a time and place far removed from the period in question, than consider the gospel evidence accurate.

Lee Levine also cautions against such hypercriticism of the New Testament sources. The New Testament writers are not so far removed from the time period in question as to be totally mistaken, he suggests. Though I do not want to enter the debate on the subject of the authorship or makeup of the gospels (the two-source hypothesis, Q, et cetera), I do not think anyone doubts that the gospel writers had access to some earlier materials during the gospels’ composition. The gospel accounts provide a unified view of what synagogue practice was like. Given that the Diaspora synagogues are quite diverse in their form and function, one would assume that, if the writers were reflecting later Diaspora practices, many of the synagogue practices in the gospel materials would reflect the diversity of the Diaspora.

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161 Schrage notes that the synagogues are not likely editorial additions to the texts, as they are integral to the meaning of the various synagogue pericopae (“synagogae,” 832).
163 Levine, First Thousand Years, 44.
164 Binder, Temple Courts, 68.
165 Levine, First Thousand Years, 44.
5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

The evidence from the synoptic gospels suggests that the synagogue was the focus for the religious and social needs of the communities of first century Palestine. Weekly Sabbath meetings, the reading of the Torah and prophets, and sermons are casually presented as part of the regular religious observance of the local communities. However, synagogues are also represented as filling the social needs of the community. Jesus is presented as travelling throughout the area teaching in the synagogues. One can imagine that this would have been a bit like a concert coming into town. Local communities also seemed to be able to pass judgements in their synagogues.

c. Acts:

1. Historical Background:

Acts appears to be an excellent source for the spread and function of the synagogue in the first century. Acts provides a total of nineteen references and outlines a number of specific incidents that take place in the synagogue.

2. Definite Synagogue References:

Acts provides a good deal of information about the function of the synagogue. Sabbath worship seems to be the primary time of assembly. In each place that he visits, Paul is said to preach on every successive Sabbath. After Paul’s first successful lecture in Perga, for example, the Jews invite him to come back on the next Sabbath to lecture again. As in the gospel accounts, teaching in the synagogue is presented as being a

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166 As Schrage writes, “according to the depiction in Acts, synagogues were one of the most important factors in the history of primitive Christian missions” (“synagogue,” 835).

167 Acts 13:42.
regular part of the Sabbath meeting.\textsuperscript{168} Further, Acts describes the Sabbath service: reading of the Torah\textsuperscript{169} and the Prophets, followed by a congregational address.

3. **Possible Synagogue References:**

   None of the references in Acts is questionable.

4. **Problems:**

   The many challenges to the historicity of Acts have caused concern for those examining the Second Temple synagogue\textsuperscript{170} Much of the discussion of the concerns expressed about the synoptic gospels also applies to Acts. However, it should be kept in mind that the communities that Luke was writing for were aware of the situation in the Jewish Diaspora and would have recognised serious flaws with Luke’s account.\textsuperscript{171} Luke did not likely engage in a wholesale fabrication of evidence – the early Christian community would have written off his work.

   Acts was evidently not conceived of as a historical document only. Luke’s account of the mission of Paul has a theological basis.\textsuperscript{172} Luke presents Paul’s missionary effort in each of the cities of Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece identically.\textsuperscript{173} When Paul enters a new town, he first goes to the synagogue, preaches there, is first accepted and then rejected by the Jews, but gains converts among the god-fearers and turns his back on the Jewish community.\textsuperscript{174} The failure of Paul’s mission to the Jews in their synagogues, coupled with his successes among the gentiles, is essential to Luke’s description of the spread of early Christianity. Levine best articulates Acts’ theological bias when he writes,

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\textsuperscript{168} Acts 13:15.

\textsuperscript{169} Acts 15:21 presents Torah reading in the synagogue as an activity which dates back to Moses.

\textsuperscript{170} For a discussion of the historical problems of synagogues with Acts (see Binder, *Temple Courts*, 79-81).

\textsuperscript{171} Levine, *First Thousand Years*, 108.

\textsuperscript{172} Schrage, “\textit{synagogē},” 835.

\textsuperscript{173} Levine, *First Thousand Years*, 108.

This recurrent phenomenon goes to the heart of Acts’ theological and political message. Paul is rebuffed time and time again by the Jews, and only then devotes himself fully and unequivocally to the gentile mission.\textsuperscript{175}

The thematic repetition of the Paul’s visits has led some scholars, most notably A.T. Kraabel, to reject the notion of god-fearers in the synagogues as a Lukan construct.\textsuperscript{176}

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

Acts offers an interesting picture of the functions of the synagogue in a Jewish community surrounded by Greco-Roman culture. Jews meet for weekly Sabbath observance, and speakers from outside the community seem to be welcome to speak. In some ways, the role of synagogues in the dissemination of information is worth considering.

d. The Gospel of John:

1. Historical Background:

The Gospel of John is far less useful for the discussion of the Second Temple synagogue. It contains only five references to synagogues.\textsuperscript{177}

2. Definite Synagogue References:

There are two types of references to synagogues in John: Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue (6:59 and 18:20) and the expulsion Christians from the synagogue (9:22, 12:42 and 16:2).

3. Possible Synagogue References:

Not applicable.

\textsuperscript{175} Levine, \textit{First Thousand Years}, 108.
\textsuperscript{176} A.T. Kraabel, “The Disappearance of the God-Fearers,” \textit{Numen} 28 (1981):121. Though other scholars challenged Kraabel’s views, I think that they were discounted too quickly. Paul Trebilco, for example, dismisses Kraabel’s arguments by citing the sparse evidence for god-fearers from Josephus (\textit{Jewish Communities in Asia Minor} (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), 147. He fails to recognise Kraabel’s main point, however, that without the references in Acts, no one would ever have interpreted the rest of the evidence in the way that they have.
4. Problems:

Most scholars consider that the references to the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues in the Gospel of John represent a later reality. It is unclear when these expulsions took place. There have been somewhat unsuccessful attempts to link the expulsion to specific Rabbinic texts; however, none disagrees that the references are anachronistic.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

Teaching in the synagogue seems to have been a common practice. It is found in Josephus and the synoptic gospels.

IV. Epigraphic Evidence

The epigraphic evidence for the existence and spread of the Second Temple synagogue is substantial and diverse. Inscriptions from Jerusalem, the Bosporus, Delos, Asia Minor, Egypt and Cyrenica will provide further evidence for the diversity of functions of the Second Temple synagogue.

a. Theodotus Inscription:

Theodotus, son of Vettenus, priest and archisynagogos, son of an archisynagogos, grandson of an archisynagogos, built the synagogue for the reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments, and the guest house and rooms and the water installations, for the needy travellers from abroad. The foundations of the synagogue were laid by his fathers and the elders and Simonides.

1. Historical Background:

Raimond Weill discovered the Theodotus inscription during his excavations of the City of David in Jerusalem in 1913-14. The inscription was found lying loose at the

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178 Flesher, “Palestinian Synagogues,” 32.
180 C/J 1404.

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bottom of a cistern in a fifth century Roman bathing complex at the foot of the Temple mount.

2. **Definite Synagogue References:**

The Theodotus inscription refers to the reading and study of the Torah in the synagogue. Theodotus also claims to have built a guest house and water installations for pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem, but it is important to note that the hostelling facilities seem to be separate from the synagogue.

3. **Possible Synagogue References:**

Not applicable.

4. **Problems:**

The prominence of the Theodotus inscription in every discussion of the function of the Second Temple synagogue makes a detailed analysis necessary. Each investigator dredges up the arguments associated with the Theodotus inscription in order to support her or his version of the origin and purpose of the synagogue. A preliminary examination of the text is important.

The date of the inscription is problematic. Most follow Deissmann in arguing for a pre-70 date, owing to the fact that there would be no pilgrims after the destruction of the Temple. As Peter Richardson wrote,

I am persuaded of its pre-70 date by the reference to “needy travellers from abroad,” pre-supposing pilgrims from the Diaspora on their way to fulfil Temple obligations, a part of the Jewish life that must have ceased with the disastrous conclusion of the [First] Revolt.

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Harold Clark Kee challenged the first century date in the defence of his claims that the synagogue did not exist prior to the destruction of the Temple. He argued that the original dating was not done based on archaeological or epigraphic grounds, but on the supposed *terminus post quem* of the destruction of the Temple.\(^{183}\) Kee's scholarly bias against all references to Second Temple synagogues would normally call into question his suggestion; however, his argument does seem to have some validity. Some modern scholars have expressed doubt as to how carefully the Roman legislation was enforced,\(^{184}\) and they suggest the possibility of Jewish residency in Jerusalem after 70 CE.\(^{185}\) Among the extant laws from the *Theodosian Code* from the reign of Constantine is one allowing Jews to enter the city of *Aelia Capitolina* on the feast of Purim, so they could remember their ignominious defeat.

None of the debates is worth exploring further, as the inscription is not particularly useful to a discussion of the function of the Second Temple synagogue, even if the Theodotus inscription is often used to illustrate common synagogue practice. The Jerusalem synagogue, even if from the first century, would not have functioned like most other synagogues. The synagogue was set up near the Temple for a special purpose, "for the needy travellers from abroad." Thus, the Theodotus inscription refers to an extraordinary installation dealing with the specific requirements of Jews having to travel to Jerusalem. Hostelling and water installations should not therefore necessarily be taken as indicative of regular synagogue functions. Instead, the significance of the Theodotus


\(^{184}\) This argument is found in both Avi-Yonah's *The Jews of Palestine* (New York: Schocken, 1976) and in E. Mary Smallwood's *The Jews Under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1981).

\(^{185}\) L. Michael White is quick to point out that the dating could stretch to the time of the second revolt, or else the late fourth-fifth centuries. *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture Volume II: Texts and Monuments for the Christian Domus Ecclesiae in its Environment* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1997), 294.
inscription should be limited to its providing evidence for an early synagogue within Jerusalem.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

The Theodotus synagogue was built for a special purpose: to aid pilgrims in Jerusalem. It should not necessarily be used as evidence that hostelry was a common synagogue function in the Second Temple period. The Temple had a exceptional place in Judaism, and the requirements of pilgrimage likely would have led to unique developments in the Jewish institutions in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the text of the inscription is ambiguous and the additional facilities may refer to a separate building.

The inscription does suggest that reading the Torah and studying the scriptures were important functions of synagogues. They were evidently considered so important that they took place literally in the shadow of the temple.

b. Manumission Inscriptions from the Bosporus.

1. Historical Background:

In the 19th and early 20th centuries a series of Jewish manumission inscriptions was discovered in the Bosporus kingdom, which is located in the coastal areas of the eastern Crimea and the Tama peninsula. The inscriptions range from the first to the fourth centuries CE, though five of them are dated to the Second Temple period. Greek settlements in the area began during the eighth century BCE, and continued well into the common era, though the first indication of a Jewish presence was not until the first century BCE. The manumission inscriptions provide valuable evidence for our

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understanding of Diaspora Judaism, though they have been little discussed in the former Soviet Union and are not very well known in the west.\textsuperscript{188}

2. Definite Synagogue References:

The inscriptions are all structurally similar, each giving the name of the slave and his/her benefactor, and then giving the community (the \textit{synagoge}) legal responsibility to keep the slave free from harassment.\textsuperscript{189}

In the reign of king Cotys, on the 1\textsuperscript{st} day of the month Xandikos, Psycharion and his sons Sogos and Anos. Karsandanos and Karagos and Metroteimos are set free for (in?) the prayer-house without let or hindrance on condition that they are conscientious in their attendance to prayer-house and honour it and they became free also under the joint guardianship of the Jewish community.\textsuperscript{190}

The inscriptions appear to be written in a format common to Temple manumissions from the area. A number, including one from Gorgippia in 41 CE, manumit the slave in the name of “Zeus, Ge and Helios.”\textsuperscript{191} Schürer originally assumed that the Jews of the Bosporus practised a syncretised Judaism. Goodenough, however, convincingly argued on the basis of papyrological evidence that performing manumissions by citing the names of three pagan gods was merely a legal formula. The Jews who composed the inscriptions did not feel any sense of connection with the three gods.\textsuperscript{192}

The Bosporan inscriptions provide much important evidence for the practice of Judaism in the area. In a number of cases the freed slave is required to adhere to stipulations of the synagogue. Whether the stipulations represent a contractual

\textsuperscript{189} E. Leigh Gibson, \textit{The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosporus Kingdom} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 98.
\textsuperscript{190} Translated by Levinskaya, \textit{Diaspora}, 237.
\textsuperscript{191} Translated by Levinskaya, \textit{Diaspora}, 240.
relationship to work for the synagogue for a set period of time or force the slave to become a ‘God-Fearer’ is uncertain.

The role of the community in the manumission is most significant. In the Greco-Roman world, manumission was normally performed in a temple. The slave would be sold to the god for a price paid by the slave or a benefactor, and the temple would then give the money from the sale back to the owner.\footnote{Binder, \textit{Temple Courts}, 440.} In her work on the Bosporus inscriptions, Leigh Gibson outlines how the inscriptions have the same form as the other sacred inscriptions of the surrounding cultures.\footnote{Gibson, \textit{Manumission}, 50-55.} Thus, the synagogues of the Bosporus were performing a temple function, and the community was taking legal responsibility for the slave.

3. Possible Synagogue References:

Not applicable.

4. Problems:

These inscriptions were originally challenged on the basis that they could not be proven conclusively to be Jewish.\footnote{Gibson, \textit{Manumission}, 5.} However, as discussed in the introduction, Levinskaya has proven that references to the \textit{proseuchē} are Jewish.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

How did the Jews of the area view their synagogues? Binder argues that the Bosporan Jews considered their synagogues as analogous to temples. He claims that the Bosporan synagogues took on temple functions because the Jews considered their synagogue to be a religious building.\footnote{Binder, \textit{Temple Courts}, 445.}
Though Binder is correct in his claim that manumission was normally a temple function, his argument is problematic. Unlike temple inscriptions, in the Bosporan synagogue inscriptions the slave is not being freed to a God, but rather to a community. This difference allowed the Jews to participate in a local norm, freeing slaves through religious structures, without being forced to take part in pagan religious actions.

c. Samaritan Inscriptions from Delos:

1. Historical Background:

Further evidence comes from two Samaritan synagogue dedications uncovered on Delos. According to Josephus, the Samaritan Diaspora can be traced back to Alexander the Great’s settlement of Samaritan troops in Egypt. Crown, a noted Samaritan scholar, has even suggested that the temple at Elephantine was Samaritan and not Jewish.\(^{197}\) Josephus outlines the extent of the Samaritan Diaspora in *Jewish Antiquities* 11.345, 17.7, and 18.74-75.\(^{198}\)

The Samaritans also had synagogues, though their origins are as contentious as their Jewish counterparts.\(^{199}\) Two steles that confirm a Samaritan presence and synagogue on Delos were discovered in 1979 by a French archaeological team, and may help illuminate our present discussion. They were written on rectangular marble slabs with wreaths in high relief.\(^{200}\) Bruneau dated the first stele between 250 and 175 BCE.\(^{201}\) It was mutilated and had a six line inscription.\(^{202}\)

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\(^{198}\) Josephus should be trusted to be revealing what he believed true. Jews of the first century did not like or associate with Samaritans, and he would have hardly desired to increase their stature to a Roman audience by increasing their numbers or spread. A.T. Kraabel, "New Evidence of the Samaritan Diaspora has been found on Delos," *BA* 47 (1984): 46.

\(^{199}\) In its section on Samaritan synagogues, the NEAHL claims that they did not begin until the third century CE (Itzhak Magen, "Samaritan Synagogues," *NEAHL*, 1424).

\(^{200}\) Kraabel, "Delos," 45.
Israelites who contribute their offerings to the holy temple (of) Argarizin honoured Menippos son of Artemidoros from Heracleion and his offspring who constructed and dedicated at their expense to the proseuchē of God, the...and the walls and ..., and crowned him with a gold wreath and ...

Bruneau dated the second inscription later, to between 150 and 50 BCE,

The Israelites in Delos who contribute their offerings to the temple (of) Argarizin crown Sarapion son of Jason citizen of Knossos with a gold wreath because of his benefactions towards them.203

The inscriptions were found 92.5 meters to the north of the Jewish synagogue. They are definitely Samaritan, as they refer to Mount Gerazim, the site of the Samaritan Temple and the focal point for Samaritan worship even today. As well, they must belong to a building because they were originally mounted on the wall.204

2. Definite Synagogue References:

The Samaritan inscriptions are valuable to our discussion as they suggest that non-Samaritans donated money to support the community. Bruneau argued from the first that the dedications were not donated by Samaritans. Samaritans would likely not have come from Heracleion or Knossos. As well, the names do not seem to be Samaritan.205 The donors evidently considered that providing money and support to a Samaritan synagogue benefited them.

3. Possible Synagogue References:

Not applicable.

203 Inscriptions de Delos 2328 and 2330 (Translation from B. Hudson McLean, “Voluntary Associations and Churches on Delos,” in Kloppenborg and Wilson, Voluntary Associations, 191).
204 L. Michael White, Building God’s House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews and Christians (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1990), 64.
4. Problems:

Bruneau, who first brought the inscriptions to light, suggested that, because of their proximity to the synagogue building on Delos, the area was an Israelite ghetto.\(^{206}\) The existence of a segregated area for Jews and Samaritans seems to be an anachronistic projection,\(^{207}\) but the nearness of the steles has led others to suggest that the Delos synagogue was, in fact, a Samaritan synagogue.\(^{208}\)

The inscriptions are implicitly confrontational, however, and that may suggest the existence of two competing groups in the area. The community refers to itself as Israelis who worship on Mt. Gerazim, which would really only be a meaningful claim if there were “Israelites” on Delos who worshipped somewhere else. The inscriptions also seem to challenge the antiquity of the Jews. The Samaritan self-definition as “Israelites” suggests greater antiquity than Jew (from Judaea).\(^{209}\) They represent a level of competition one would only expect if the two groups were both present on the island.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

The Samaritan inscriptions suggest that it was not unusual for non-Jews to donate funds to synagogues. That pagan benefactors, who were not particularly interested in converting, considered it worthwhile to donate money implies that the synagogue was seen as the focal point of the Jewish community. Further epigraphic evidence for donatory practice is recorded from late first century CE Acmonia in Asia.

The prayer-house built by Ioulia Severa P(oublios) Tyrronios Klados, archisynagogus for life, and Loukios, son of Loukios, archisynagogos, and Poplios Zotikos, archon, have repaired out of their own resources and the community funds. They have also embellished the walls and the ceiling with

\(^{206}\) Bruneau, “Delos,” 467.
\(^{207}\) Kraabel, “Delos,” 46.
\(^{208}\) See especially McLean, “Delos”.
paintings and made safe the windows and carried out a general refurbishment. The community (synagogē) has honoured them with a gilded shield because of their virtuous conduct and their goodwill and zeal towards the community. (DF no. 33)\(^{210}\)

Though this inscription is a little outside of the temporal framework of the Second Temple synagogue, it shows that some non-Jews evidently contributed to synagogues. In addition to providing funding for the synagogue, Julia Severa was also the high priestess of the Imperial Cult.\(^{211}\) That she could maintain that post while being an archisynagogus for life may also call into question the religious function of the synagogue.

d. Egyptian Inscriptions:\(^{212}\)

1. **Historical Background:**

   The earliest and most numerous synagogue inscriptions come from Ptolemaic Egypt.\(^ {213}\) The earliest dates to the middle of the third century BCE and the inscriptions continue into the Roman era.

2. **Definite Synagogue References:**

   Though there are a few which offer some evidence for the function of the synagogue, most of the inscriptions provide dedications to the ruling king or queen, the names of the donators and their children. For example,

   On behalf of (hyper) king Ptolemy and queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children, the Jews (dedicated) the proseuche.\(^ {214}\)

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\(^{210}\) This practice is also evident in the donation of a synagogue building to the Jews of Capernaum by a Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-5).

\(^{211}\) Levinskaya, *Diaspora*, 123.

\(^{212}\) There are ten inscriptions that refer to Egyptian synagogues (Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 9, 13, 22, 24, 27, 28, 105, 117, 125, and 126).

\(^{213}\) All of the Egyptian inscriptions use the term "proseuche" (see the discussion above). The inscriptions are all from buildings as all of the inscriptions were meant to be wall-mounted and a number of them refer to rooms or adjoining buildings.

\(^{214}\) Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 22.
Some of the inscriptions provide details about Egyptian-Jewish practice and the interconnection between the Jews and their surrounding culture. One inscription records the granting of the right of asylum, a right that was normally only confirmed on temples. The original is likely dated to 145-116 BCE, while the replacement comes from 47-31 BCE.

On the orders of the queen and king, in place of the previous plaque about the dedication of the proseuche let what is written below be written up. King Ptolemy Euergetes (proclaimed) the proseuche inviolate. The king and queen gave the order.215

Others suggest that some synagogues had architectural attachments like *exedra* (see the discussion of archaeological definitions in the introduction).

3. Possible Synagogue References:

   Not applicable.

4. Problems:

   Not applicable.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

   Interestingly, the inscriptions use language identical to that found in Temple dedications. As Paul Fraser wrote, "in most instances the dedication is indistinguishable from a pagan equivalent save for the substitution of the term ‘synagogue. ‘"216 The inscriptions all begin with "*hyper*", the regular loyalty formula used by Greeks in dedications to both Egyptian and Greek gods. The formula thus honours the Ptolemaic rulers, but avoids deifying them.

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215 Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 125. A right also confirmed by a papyrus from 218 BCE (see below).
Does providing synagogues with the power of inviolability mean that the Egyptians considered synagogues analogous to temples? D. Binder certainly advocates that position, suggesting as well that the use of architectural features like exedra\textsuperscript{217} and appurtenances\textsuperscript{218} relate to both pagan cultic practice and the presentation of the Jewish Temple in the LXX.\textsuperscript{219} He backs away from the argument that Egyptian synagogues were considered temples in the conclusion of his section on Egypt, but the affinity between temples and synagogues is at the heart of his study; he argues that the synagogue and the Temple were closely related in function.\textsuperscript{220} Binder’s explanation seems to be too simplistic an explanation of why synagogues took on Egyptian temple functions, however. The Judaism preserved in our literary sources does not seem to fit with such a syncretistic approach. Though Aristeas, Philo, and the writers of 3 Maccabees all present a Judaism comfortable in Egypt and in line with Alexandrian Egyptian thought, none presents a Judaism that has taken over the temple structure. Peter Richardson has noted that Philo excludes all reference to the Onias’ temple in Egypt, which he considers possible evidence of strife between the two forms of Jewish piety.\textsuperscript{221} The synagogues in Ptolemaic Egypt took on temple-based structures and powers because they served the same social function that the temples served for other alien populations – they were the central focus for the community.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[219] Binder, \textit{Temple Courts}, 244-5.
\item[220] Binder, \textit{Temple Courts}, 22.
\item[221] Richardson, “Collegia,” in Kloppenborg and Wilson, \textit{Voluntary Associations}, 106, no. 24.
\end{footnotes}
e. Inscriptions from Cyrenica:

1. Historical Background:

Though not nearly so diverse as the inscriptions from Egypt, two of Cyrenica’s inscriptions from the first century BCE are important for our discussion. They are, however, quite contentious, as they may not refer to synagogues at all.

2. Definite Synagogue References:

Not applicable.

3. Possible Synagogue References:

Both of the inscriptions in question relate to honouring the help and support of prominent local figures publicly. In the first, the Jews of Berenice honour the local legate of the Roman governor for some unknown help and support that he has provided the community.

Year 55, Phaophi 25, at the assembly of the Feast of Tabernacles (skenopegia), in the archonship of Kleandros... [list of archons]: because Markos Tittios, son of Sextos, of the Aemilian tribe, a worthy and excellent man, since coming to the province to administer public affairs has directed their governance with benevolence and skill and in his behaviour consistently shown himself to be of an eirenic disposition, and has behaved unoppressively both in these (public matters) and with regard to those of the citizens who have approached him privately, and because for the Jews of our politeuma both publicly and privately his administration has been useful and he has not ceased to perform deeds in keeping with his own essential nobility of character, therefore the archons and the politeuma both have decided to laud him and crown him ‘by name’ at each gathering and each New Moon with a wreath of olive leaves and (a fillet of) wool. The archons are to inscribe the decree on a stele of Parian stone (i.e. marble) and to place it in the most conspicuous part of the amphitheatre. All (pebbles) white (i.e. decided unanimously).\footnote{CJZC 71.}

\footnote{CJZC 71.}
In the second inscription, the Jewish community publicly thanks a benefactor of the amphitheatre, who paid for the plastering and painting of the building. Though the donator’s ethnicity is unclear, Binder argues that Dekmos must be Jewish, otherwise his being excused from further liturgies would be pointless.

(Year)... Phamenoth 5, in the archonship... Since Dekmos Oualerios Dionysios, son of Gaios... remains a fine and good man and does good, whenever he can, both publicly and privately, to each of the citizens, and has plastered the floor of the amphitheatre and decorated the walls with painting, the archons and politeuma of the Jews in Berenice have decided to enrol him in the ... of the ... and exempt him from all liturgies (i.e. public duties in the Jewish community). Likewise to crown him ‘by name’ at each meeting and New Moon with a wreath of olive-leaves and a (fillet of) wool. After inscribing this decree on a stele of Parian stone (i.e. marble), the archons are to place it in the most conspicuous part of the amphitheatre. All white.

Dekmos Oualerious Dionysios, son of Gaios, has plastered the floor and the amphitheatre and painted it at his own expense as a contribution to the polituema.

4. Problems:

The problem for interpreting these inscriptions is obvious. The identification of the Jewish building in Berenike as an ‘amphitheatre’ is the only attested usage of the term for a synagogue. In the early Roman period the amphitheatre became associated with gladiatorial contests, but the word could have referred to a place for public meeting with seats in an oval or u-shape. The LSJ defines amphitheatre as “a double theatre,

223 The inscription provides an interesting allusion to synagogue decoration in the Second Temple period. Though it is not within the scope of the present study to examine the issue of synagogue art, the inscription provides direct evidence for the early decoration of synagogues.
224 Binder, Temple Courts, 258.
225 CJZC 70 in Williams, Diaspora, V.36.
226 For a different interpretation of what is presented here, see R. Tracey’s commentary in New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 4, 111. Tracey suggests that the inscription is evidence of rapprochement between Jews and their Greek neighbours, to the extent that they feel justified in publicly thanking a benefactor to the local amphitheatre. Tracey fails to take into account the plastering of the floor. He also mistakenly suggests that objections to the building being an amphitheatre were based on the suggestion that the Jews could not have been so close to their neighbours. In his argument against a strict definition of Judaism, Tracey has settled on a strict definition of an architectural form that had not yet been developed.
227 Williams, n.31, 194.
amphitheatre, a space wholly surrounded by seats rising one behind another, so as to command a view of the whole arena."\textsuperscript{228} The literal meaning of \textit{amphitheatron} has been taken to suggest that the term could be merely referring to a Greek \textit{bouleterion}.\textsuperscript{229} The inscription did not likely refer to the type of structure used for gladiatorial games. According to Robertson, the amphitheatre as a site for gladiatorial games only began to develop in the first century BCE and was mostly focussed in the Latin west, only making inroads into the Greek east in the second century CE.\textsuperscript{230} Vitruvius did not mention the amphitheatre at all. Instead, he advised architects to consider gladiatorial matches when designing a forum.\textsuperscript{231} The oldest surviving amphitheatre from Pompeii (80 BCE) predates any mention of the form by ancient writers. According to Roller, most amphitheatres were temporary structures until after the time of Augustus. No stone amphitheatres were built outside of Italy until after the time of Julius Caesar.\textsuperscript{232} Amphitheatre floors were never plastered,\textsuperscript{233} yet the inscription thanks Dionysios for plastering the floor of the Jewish building.\textsuperscript{234} One more suggestive piece of evidence comes from a later (55 CE) inscription from Berenice.\textsuperscript{235} The inscription lists all of the community members (\textit{synagoge}) who had donated money for the upkeep of the synagogue (\textit{synagoge}). Perhaps the change of nomenclature reflects the growing popularity of the amphitheatre as a site for games.\textsuperscript{236}

\textsuperscript{228} LSJ, "\textit{amphitheatron}," 83.
\textsuperscript{229} S. Applebaum, \textit{Jews and Greeks in Ancient Cyrene} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 161.
\textsuperscript{231} Vitruvius, V.I.1.
\textsuperscript{232} Roller, \textit{Building Program}, 83.
\textsuperscript{233} Robertson, \textit{Architecture}, 283.
\textsuperscript{234} Binder, \textit{Temple Courts}, 143. Applebaum points out that the phrase, \textit{epidoma toipoliteumati}, is the same formula used in an honorary inscription by the Idumaeans to thank a high official for painting and plastering the Temple of Apollo which belonged to the \textit{politeuma}, \textit{Ancient Cyrene}, 160.
\textsuperscript{235} CJJC 72
\textsuperscript{236} Binder, \textit{Temple Courts}, 144.
5. **Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:**

The Cyrenica inscriptions provide evidence that the synagogue was used to publicly thank benefactors, resembling the practice attested in Philo and in Egyptian synagogue inscriptions.

More informative, perhaps, is the amount of interaction with local norms implied in the inscription. The method of voting (all white) resembles Hellenistic practice, and the terminology reflects a Greek frame of reference.

**V. Papyri:**

1. **Historical Background:**

Papyrological evidence provides a number of details about the Second Temple synagogue, though most of the evidence comes from Egypt.

2. **Definite Synagogue References:**

One early papyrus records the plight of a woman whose garment was stolen and then brought into the Jewish synagogue. Her story makes it evident that Egyptian proseuchē had the power to provide sanctuary at an early date (218 BCE).

[To King Ptolemy,\(^{237}\) greetings from] ... who lives in Alexandrou-Nesos. I am being wronged by [Dorotheos, a Jew who lives in the same] village. In the 5\(^{th}\) year, according to the financial calendar, on Phamenoth... [as I was talking?] to my fellow worker, my cloak [which is worth... drachmas caught Dorotheos' eye and?] he made off with it. When I noticed he [took refuge?] in the prayer-house of the Jews ... Lezelmis, 100 arourai-holder, arrived on the scene [and gave] the cloak to Nikomachos the neokoros,\(^{238}\) (for safekeeping) until the trial. Wherefore, I beg of you, O King, to instruct Diophanes [the strategos to write to] the epistates [telling him] to order Dorotheos and Nikomachos [to hand over] the cloak to him, and, if I write the truth [to make him give to me] either the cloak or its value ...\(^{239}\)

\(^{237}\) Ptolemy IV (221-204 BCE).

\(^{238}\) The title of the synagogue keeper, neokoros, is the common Greek term for temple warden (Margaret Williams, ed. *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998), 185, no. 22).

\(^{239}\) *CPJ* 1.129.
The existence of a synagogue in a small Egyptian village in the second century BCE is surprising.²⁴⁰

Also of interest is a first century BCE (?) papyrus fragment that records the meeting of an association of grave diggers in the synagogue:

... At the session held in the proseuchē ... To Demetrios of the first friends and the door-keepers ... And the ushers and the chief officials ... of Kamax ... secretary ... to the association ... with ... and has been incorporated ... on the condition that ... association ... the times ... every year ... the corporation of ... taphiasti [grave diggers] ... future new ... the syntaphiastes ... whom it concerns ... to the secretary according ... the association.²⁴¹

The burial society appears to have been well organised. It had groups of officers and subordinates.

3. Possible Synagogue References:

Not applicable.

4. Problems:

Not applicable.

5. Implications for the Function of the Synagogue:

The two fragments help to supply evidence for the function of the synagogue in regular Egyptian life. The first suggests that the synagogue was a place of sanctuary, and the second gives evidence for secular meetings taking place within the synagogue.

VI. Conclusions:

The literary evidence provides suggests that Second Temple synagogues had a number of powers and functions. It is necessary to recognise, however, that the evidence represents a wide scope of political and ethnic areas in the Greco-Roman world, and it

²⁴⁰ Binder, Temple Courts, 239.
²⁴¹ CPJ 1.138. Provenance unknown.
should not necessarily be assumed that synagogue functions were uniform. The references can be categorised in three groups: community, societal and religious functions.

a. Community Functions:

There are four different functions that can be included in this category: (references to) communal assemblies, legal judgements, the synagogue as the collection point for alms or monies to be sent to Jerusalem, and the focus for community action.

Community assembly seems to be an extremely important part of synagogue life throughout the Jewish world. Josephus offers three examples in support: in *Jewish War* he makes reference to the meeting of the community in the *proseuchē* at Tiberias; in his *Life* he mentions meetings held in Tiberias and he lists five decrees from the Roman government and the Greek cities of Asia Minor that grant the power of assembly to the Jews. Philo also argues for the importance of assembling at the synagogue. According to Peter Borgen, Philo saw synagogue attendance as a key to being a good Jew.\(^{242}\) Susanna also provides evidence of community assembly. Further, a papyrus fragment discussed above makes mention of a meeting of a grave diggers’ association at a synagogue. Though it is unclear what this entailed, it provides definite evidence that meetings took place in the synagogue.

There are also a number of references to the power to pass and carry out judgements in the synagogues. Josephus reports two decrees which give the Jews of Sardis and Ephesus the right to decide their own affairs. As discussed above, the decree from Ephesus is especially interesting as it allows the Jews to carry out judgements

\(^{242}\) Borgen, “Philo,” 251.
against non-Jews\textsuperscript{243}. The power to pass judgements is most evident in the New Testament. Jesus warns the disciples that they will be “flogged in the synagogues”. Paul records that he received 39 lashes, the common Jewish penalty. The trial of Susanna in the synagogue is further evidence of this practice.

Finally, the synagogue may have been the repository for money being gathered to go to Jerusalem and the centre of almsgiving. Two of the decrees in Josephus record the rights of the Jewish community to collect money. Although they do not mention the synagogue specifically, an edict of Augustus suggests that this was at least sometimes the case.\textsuperscript{244} As well, a number of the letters written on behalf of the Jews to various Greek cities focus on the Greeks stealing their donations. Philo also writes that the collection of money was a common feature of Judaism at Rome. Though the gospel evidence does not mention the collection of the Temple tax in the synagogue, it does make reference to the practice of almsgiving there.

It should be noted that in the Bosporus inscriptions the synagogue was the focal point for community action. Though they freed their slaves in the synagogue, it was the community that was made legally responsible for the former slave. The synagogue’s role in providing a focal point not only for the Jews, but also for non-Jews to support the community is further evidence of this. The surrounding cultures could interact with the Jews through their synagogues. They could provide money and building materials, without religiously affiliating themselves with the Jewish community. The synagogue

\textsuperscript{243} Ant. 16.168.
\textsuperscript{244} Ant. 16.164: “But if any one be caught stealing their holy books, or their sacred money, whether it be out of the synagogue or public schools…”
provided a place where Judaism and the Greco-Roman world could interact. Thus the authorities bestowed upon synagogues legal responsibility and power for the community.

b. Societal Functions:

The literary record also provides three types of functions related to the interplay between the Jews and the society around them: dedications, the inviolability of the synagogue and the sacred books, and the rise of anti-Jewish sentiment targeted at the synagogue.

The synagogue as the centre of dedication to Greek and Roman rulers seems to be primarily an Egyptian feature. It is of central importance to Philo’s arguments to Gaius and to his condemnation of the crowds and Flaccus. Philo describes gilded crowns, shields, and plaques in the synagogues of Alexandria and suggests that one of the main purposes of the synagogue is to allow the Jews to thank their benefactors properly. This is further supported in the conclusion of Third Maccabees, where the grateful Jews set up a synagogue to thank Ptolemy for his support and to commemorate their victory. The Egyptian epigraphic evidence also supports this contention. All of the synagogue inscriptions use the formula, “On behalf of king/queen...” There is also evidence from outside of Egypt that the surrounding culture used synagogue dedications as a way to support the Jews publicly. According to Luke, a centurion at Caesarea dedicated a synagogue for the Jews of that community.

The inviolability of the synagogue is also attested. Among the edicts that Josephus records in his Jewish Antiquities, there are numerous protections for the building and the text of the Jews. A synagogue inscription from Egypt records that the synagogue was granted the right to offer asylum. Additional support comes from perhaps
one of the most interesting pieces of evidence, a papyrus from second century BCE Egypt, the struggle of a woman to recover her stolen cloak from the protected area of the synagogue.

The more sinister side of the synagogue as the focus for societal interaction is found in the reports of anti-Jewish violence against the synagogue. It would appear that the Greeks and the Romans considered the synagogue the centre of the Jewish community and, by attacking it, thought that they were attacking the Jews. Nowhere is this more evident than in Philo’s reports of the Alexandrian riots in 38 CE. There the Greeks took out their frustrations with the Jews through the wholesale destruction of their synagogue buildings. However, anti-Jewish attacks against the synagogue are found in Josephus’ account of the problems in Caesarea and Dora. Despite the fact the dispute was not religious, the Greeks focussed their attack on the Jewish community of Caesarea by sacrificing a bird in front of their synagogue.

c. Religious Functions:

There are also a number of religious functions evident in the literary material, both expressing Jewish religious practices and taking on local religious norms. These include references to Torah reading, Sabbath assembly, and teaching. Torah reading and study is recorded in almost all of our extant literary sources. The practice seems to have been common and widespread. Likewise, Sabbath meetings are widely attested. They are even well represented in the nomenclature used by the Roman authorities, who designate them, sabbetheion. Luke and Acts both give some sense of the content of these meetings, readings from the Torah and the Prophets, followed by some sort of lecture.
Finally, the New Testament documents present the synagogue as a site for teaching. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus travels throughout Galilee teaching in the synagogues. Paul also seems to do the same; in each of the cities of Asia Minor that he visits he lectures about Jesus to those assembled for the Sabbath. Both Josephus and Philo highlight the importance of teaching also.
Chapter 3 - Archaeology

The archaeological remains of the Second Temple synagogue can be used to make some suggestions about synagogue function. However, the evidence must be used carefully, and it is necessary to decide first whether a building is a synagogue. I will divide the evidence into four categories of likelihood based on the criteria established in the introduction: buildings that are probably synagogues, buildings that may be synagogues, buildings about which there is not enough information to decide if they are synagogues, and buildings that are probably not synagogues. Each building will be analysed in terms of its history, the excavation, the physical description, the development of the site and its date, synagogue features, and architectural analogies. I will finish the discussion with some conclusions about the function of the synagogue that may be drawn from the archaeological evidence.

Problems:

The interpretation of the archaeological remains of Second Temple synagogues is problematic. There are not enough synagogue buildings known to be able to make grand theories about their form and structure. Yet no theory of function is valid unless it matches the archaeological evidence. I will, therefore, use my definition from the introduction to analyse whether the building remains were once synagogues.

Further, archaeologists working in Israel face different challenges in their study of synagogue remains from those in the rest of the Mediterranean basin. Because archaeologists in Israel are primarily concerned with excavating Jewish materials, they tend to want to interpret building remains as synagogues. Any first century building in Israel that offers the possibility of a communal function is immediately accepted as a synagogue. The higher proportion of possible Second Temple synagogues in Palestine
highlights this tendency. Conversely, archaeologists working in the rest of the Greco-Roman world require much more direct evidence before they begin to consider the possibility that a building may be a synagogue. Jewish synagogue inscriptions, later synagogue decorations, and literary records of a Jewish presence in the area are all necessary in making a firm identification. One can only imagine how many synagogues may have been uncovered in the Greco-Roman world that were mistaken for houses, meeting halls, or dining areas.

I. Buildings that are probably synagogues.

a. Delos:

a.1. History of the Site:

The Jewish community on the Greek island of Delos was well attested from the second century BCE. Jewish presence is mentioned both in 1 Maccabees 15:23 and in edicts preserved by Josephus. The Ecole Francaise uncovered two Jewish inscriptions on Rhenea, Delos' burial island, as well as two second or first century BCE inscriptions from a Samaritan synagogue 92.5 meters to the north of the synagogue.

The Jewish community probably settled in Delos after 146 BCE. With the Roman destruction of Corinth, the major shipping interests moved to Delos and large scale trading followed. Delos' fortunes turned in the first century BCE, however. It was

245 It is easy to see how this disproportionality could lead scholars to argue for a Palestinian origin to the synagogue.
247 See the discussion of Josephus above.
248 Discussed above (Chapter 2).
attacked by Mithridatic forces in 88 BCE and by pirates in 69 BCE. According to Pausanias, the island was nearly abandoned by the second century CE.249

a.2. Discovery and Excavation:

In 1912 and 1913 a synagogue was uncovered by A. Plassart for the École Française d'Archéologie. It was situated on the east shore of the island in a residential neighbourhood far from the city centre, close by the alternate harbour and near the gymnasion and stadiun. Unfortunately, it was built so close to the shoreline that the rising tide levels in the Aegean have destroyed part of the porch area of the synagogue, something that has become one of the main areas of contention. The building was originally residential, but at some point in the late second century BCE it was apparently converted to communal use.

The excavator was the first to suggest that the building was a synagogue, based on Jewish inscriptions inside the building. It has since been re-excavated by Philippe Bruneau in the 1960s and L. Michael White in the 1980s, who both concur with the original excavator’s analysis.

a.3. Physical Description:

The building consists of three main parts: a large interior room, which was later divided into two (A/B), a series of smaller rooms to the south (D), and a large porch area (C).250

a.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

The excavator outlined two stages of construction, though White has recently suggested that there was also a third stage of construction which is not as apparent. The

249 Descr. 8.33.2.
250 See figure 2.
first stage consisted of room AB, 16.9 x 15.09 m, with benches lining the west and south walls. The porch area had three entrances, a large central entrance (2.2 m) and two smaller flanking doors (1.8 m). Several small rooms (area D) lay to the south with access to a cistern under the floor of AB. Area C, the columned porch, was likely a roofed portico *tristoa*, a three-sided roofed portico with a stairway serving as an entrance from the seaside.

In the second stage, wall PT was rebuilt with marble spoils from the *gymnasion*, and wall SR was added to divide rooms A (7.85 m x 15.09 m) and B (8.22 x 15.038 m). Wall SR filled the main entrance to room AB with a T-shape, suggesting that it was constructed before or at the same time as wall PT was rebuilt, because there would have been no need to fill in the entrance if the wall was already being redone. Three entrances were created between rooms A and B, and new entrances were created from A to C and B to C. More benches were added to rooms A and B, and a marble throne was added to room A, facing the new entranceway onto the porch (C).

The marble throne has led to much scholarly interest. The “Throne of Moses” is a regular feature in much later synagogues in Israel, but the Delos usage predates any other known examples by hundreds of years. Goodenough noted that the word in Hebrew found on the later thrones is simply a transliteration of the Greek, *kathedra*, so it may be that the throne of Moses was a more common feature than the archaeological

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251 Mazur suggested that it was a *peristyle* court, typical of Delian house architecture (Belle Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece* [Athens: Hestia, 1935], 18-19). White’s careful examination of the site revealed a stairway at L to the ocean in the front of the building, however, leading him to argue that it was a truncated *tristoa* (White, “Delos,” 150-1). Further, Bruneau’s excavations revealed additional foundation walls that suggested a *tristoa* and not a peristyle (Recherches, 483). While Binder challenges White’s conclusions and accepts Mazur’s view, he fails to take into account both the evidence from Bruneau and the function of the stairway (Temple Courts, 310).

252 Among the more interesting observations about the origins of the throne is Kraabel’s. He suggested that it resembles the marble throne for the priest of Dionysus in Greek theatre (“Diaspora Synagogues,” 110).
evidence would suggest. In 1962, while excavating in the cistern, Bruneau uncovered a number of architectural fragments with palmettes that seem to have been part of the decoration of the thronos.

The date of the synagogue is much easier to assess. The excavator dated the first phase of the building to the second century BCE. The marble fragments used in the second phase of the building were spoils taken from the gymnasion, which was destroyed in the Mithridatic raid of 88 BCE. According to Plassart, at that time the building was first established as a synagogue. White, however, suggests that the first renovations were done before 88 BCE. He argues that the partition of AB and the construction of the stair must have been earlier than 88 BCE. There would be no need to add the ‘T’ onto the end of wall SR if wall PT were already being redone, and there are no marble spoils in SR, while they were used to embellish wall PT.

Though White’s argument is architecturally sound, it is based on the fact that First Maccabees 15 suggests a Jewish presence on Delos in the late second century. He reasons that the group must have had a synagogue, and because the Delos building was a synagogue in a later period, it must have been one earlier also. His theory is possible, and it may be that this building functioned as a synagogue in the earlier period, but the existence of a Jewish community on the island is not enough to prove that the building originally served as a synagogue.

253 It should be noted, however, that there is a reference to Moses’ seat in Matt 23:2.
254 Goodenough, Jewish Symbols, 2:74. Again, it is important to keep in mind that, with so few first century synagogues, it is easy to try to force a typology which may not reflect the actual model of the Second Temple synagogue.
255 Bruneau, Recherches, 485.
256 White, “Delos,” 152.
a.5. Synagogue Features:

The building on Delos has most of the features which would identify it as a synagogue. It was evidently big enough to hold a large number of people. It was surrounded by benches, and was very near a water source, a fact highlighted by the stairway leading down to the shore. The Delos building also has a number of surrounding rooms, though it does not have a niche.

The central issue for the identification of a Diaspora building as a synagogue, however, is adequate proof of Jewish occupation and usage. The building was originally identified as a synagogue, based on the inscriptions from six small columns. Plassart believed that these were Jewish because they were dedicated to the ‘most high god’ (theos hypsistos), a phrase common in the LXX and one found elsewhere on Delos in a Jewish grave\(^{257}\) and on two Samaritan inscriptions just north of the structure.\(^{258}\) The fifth base reads that the dedication was *epi proseuchē*, for which two translations have been suggested: “for the prayer house,”\(^{259}\) or “in fulfilment or pursuance of a prayer.”\(^{260}\) The use of *epi proseuchē* as “for the prayer-house” in one of the two Samaritan inscriptions substantiates the first suggestion and significantly strengthens the identification of the building as a synagogue.

a.6. Architectural Parallels:

Rather than resembling other buildings thought to be Second Temple synagogues, the Delos building’s architectural plan parallels the buildings used by voluntary

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\(^{258}\) Bruneau, “Delos,” 467.


associations on Delos. Originally, this was held as proof that the Delos building was not a synagogue. One of Mazur’s primary reservations about identifying the building as a synagogue was that it resembled large-scale Hellenistic houses used by the various cults on Delos. In his work on the site, White concurred, noting a number of similarities between the Delos building and the buildings of other ethnic/religious associations. Specifically, he examined the House of the Poseidoniasts, a business exchange and communal religious structure for worshippers of Poseidon from Berytus, and the House of the Comedians. These structures differ from the synagogue as they have peristyle courts, but the overall structure of a large room, separate rooms off to the side, and large court seem to correspond to the synagogue’s plan. McLean suggested that the differences between the synagogue and the two cult buildings that White refers to might relate to use of space. He argued that the synagogue would not have needed to set an area aside for cultic use.

a.7. Assessment:

The Delos building is commonly referred to as the earliest extant synagogue, and most current writers on the subject consider it without a doubt to be a synagogue. Those who accept the building as a synagogue may not appreciate fully the implications of that designation, however. The interpretation of the inscriptions found inside the hall is still problematic for the issue of the Second Temple synagogue. The possibility that these were ex voto offerings led Belle Mazur to reject the identification of the building as a synagogue. Sukenik, who had earlier supported the identification of the building as a

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262 Mazur, Studies, 18.
263 White, “Delos,” 152.
synagogue, changed his mind and followed Mazur. Mazur argued that the resemblance of the votive bases to similar votaries from pagan contexts suggested that they could not be Jewish. In his analysis, Goodenough also noted the approximately sixty ‘Happy New Year’ lamps (strenae) found within rooms A and B. These consist of a victory holding a shield with the words “annum novum faustum felicem” and date from the first century CE.

b. Masada:

b.1. History of the Site:

Masada sits on an isolated rock cliff bordering the Judean desert and the Dead Sea. Though most famous as the place of the rebels’ last stand in the Jewish war, it was originally constructed by Jonathan, and expanded and rebuilt by Herod the Great. Herod built two luxurious palaces, a Roman bathhouse, and twelve huge cisterns on the site. During the Jewish war, Masada was taken by the Zealots, who held it until 74 CE, when it was finally captured by the 10th legion under Flavius Silva, the Governor of Syria.

b.2. Discovery and Excavation:

Yigael Yadin excavated Masada from 1963 to 1965. In the first season of excavations, he uncovered a room lined with benches on the northwest section of the

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265 Binder, Temple Courts, 305; R. Hachlili, Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 39; Levine, First Thousand Years, 100; White, Social Origin, 332.

266 It is interesting to note that an inscription from Egypt with the word ‘synagogue’ (Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions, 20) is considered not to be Jewish as it appears to be a statue base, despite other Jewish indicators in the inscription. It is suggested that it might relate to a Judaizer or to a Sambathic organization (Horbury and Noy, Jewish Inscriptions, 34).

267 Mazur noted that they are no different from those found in the Zeus Hypsistos sanctuary on the Pnyx. She considers that the request in one of the inscriptions for healing was “not a Jewish custom” (Studies, 21).

268 Goodenough, Jewish Symbols, 2:73.

casemate wall. From the beginning, Yadin considered that the Zealots had constructed the building. The excavators found many coins from the revolt period in the room, and the benches were constructed largely from reused architectural fragments from the Herodian period. After fully clearing the building, Yadin identified it as a synagogue.  

b.3. Physical Description:  
The building measures 12.5 x 10.5 m and faces northwest, with an entrance on the middle of the southeast side and with a smaller room (3.6 x 5.5 m) in the northwest corner. The larger room is lined with four tiers of benches on three sides and just one bench on the outside of the smaller room. The benches are made of dolomite fieldstones, sandstone, and reused architectural fragments, all covered with mud plaster. The structure had two rows of columns – three to the south, but only two to the north because of the smaller room. The smaller room contained remains of an oven, some glass and metal, including a bronze bowl and a wash basin. The small room seems to have been set on fire; there was a burn layer covering the level where the goods were found. To the east of the entrance to the small room there is a small niche about two-thirds of the way up the wall. Fifteen meters to the north of the building the rebels constructed a miqveh that would have filled with rain water collected on the synagogue’s roof.

A number of written documents were uncovered in the structure, including two ostraka, one with the words ‘priest’s tithe’ and another with the name Hezekiah. For further discussion of the ostraka, see Yigael Yadin and Joseph Naveh, “The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions,” in Masada: The Yigael Yadin Excavation, 1963-1965: Final Reports I (ed. E. Netzer; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989), 32.
were also two pits 80 and 70 cm deep with portions of the scrolls of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel buried in them. In addition, twelve meters to the north of the synagogue, a number of other scrolls were found, including parts of Genesis, Leviticus, Psalms, and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice.\textsuperscript{274}

b.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

The building was constructed in two stages. The synagogue was the second stage, but it is uncertain what function the building served in its first stage. In its first phase the smaller room did not exist. Instead, the room was divided into two by a wall that cut width-wise across the centre. The wall thus created an antechamber (10.5 x 3.6 m) and a small hall (10.5 x 8 m) with five columns arranged in a u-shape. The floor was white lime plaster on gravel fill laid on the bedrock. Yadin found a large amount of animal dung under the second, synagogue stage of the building.

b.5. Synagogue Features

The Masada building was composed of many of the features listed in the definition used here. The excavators suggested that, at 12 x 5 meters, it could hold as many as 250 people,\textsuperscript{275} it had benches built around the walls, and there was a miqveh constructed nearby. The building also contained an additional room, a niche, and some degree of orientation towards Jerusalem.

What makes the identification of the Masada building certain, however, is the presence of clearly defined Jewish ritual materials. The fragments of scripture and the ostrakon with “priest’s tithe” make the identification certain.

\textsuperscript{274} There were parts of scrolls found elsewhere on the site, but none was close enough to the synagogue to suggest any connection.
\textsuperscript{275} Netzer, Masada III, 412.
b.6. Architectural Parallels:

There has been a great deal of debate about the architectural origins of the Masada, Herodium, and Gamla synagogues. Originally Yadin suggested that they developed out of *ecclesiateria*, legal assembly halls in the Greek world. He cited the structure from Priene, arguing that its roofed, square shape surrounded by benches fit the Masada model.\(^\text{276}\) Other scholars rightly questioned how the Jews at Masada could have been influenced by such a distant structure. Avigad, for example, suggested that the Masada building should be seen as the archetype of the Galilean synagogue, and that it developed from the basilica plan.\(^\text{277}\) Yet, the Masada building pre-dated the western basilica and had none of the characteristic basilical features such as an apse or a raised area at the end.\(^\text{278}\) Foerster originally suggested that the synagogue plan developed from the *pronaos*, the hall or first room of a temple, citing the similarity of the Palestinian synagogues with *pronai* from Dura Europas. More recently, Foerster suggested that it developed from the reception halls of Nabatean Temple courts. In his recent work, Binder develops the Temple court theory, suggesting that the synagogue developed in response to courts in the Second Temple.

In his study on the structure of the synagogues, Zvi Ma'oz highlighted one obvious point, which has led most scholars to support the development of the synagogue from the *bouleterion* or *ecclesiaterion*. Since the benches surround the walls of the structure, the focus is obviously on the middle of the room.\(^\text{279}\) Temple structures have a different focus; they point towards the cult image. Masada, Herodium, and Gamla all

\(^{278}\) Foerster, “Masada,” 27.
point to the centre of the room. The only other buildings from the Greco-Roman world that have benches focussing on the centre of the room are those for community assembly, namely *bouleteria* and the *ecclesiateria*.

b.7. Assessment:

It seems evident that the second stage of the building, constructed by the Zealots during the revolt, was a synagogue. The layout of the room with benches and columns fits with other synagogue buildings of the period, as does its proximity to the *miqveh*. The burial of scrolls within the structure and the *ostakra* marked as priest’s tithe, the basin and bowls make it almost certain that the Masada building was a synagogue.

A question remains about the first phase, however. Yadin believed that the building was built as a synagogue for Herod’s Jewish associates. He argued that it resembled the Galilean type, which he believed to be quite early. He hypothesised that the Zealots chose the Masada building because it had been a synagogue already. He argued that the animal dung merely reflected the Roman use of the building between the Herodian and Zealot occupations.

Netzer countered the assumption by suggesting that there is no reason to consider the original Masada building a synagogue, as it had no obvious parallels with any of the

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280 There are some, of course, who suggest that the building was not a synagogue. P. Flesher, for example, argued that the Zealots would not have built their synagogue on animal dung (“Palestinian Synagogues Before 70: A Review of the Evidence,” in Urman and Flesher, *Analysis and Discovery*, 36). D. Binder, however, pointed to the fact that they had no compunction against burying their scrolls in the dung layer, and that Flesher’s comments reflected today’s culture more than the world of the first century.
282 The ‘Galilean-type’ synagogue is no longer considered to be of an early date. The dating was originally done through architectural analogy, but more recent excavations at Capernaum (see below) and Bar’am (unpublished) have overturned the architectural dating theory, dating at least two of the early ‘Galilean type’ buildings to the Fourth or Fifth Centuries CE.
283 Yadin, *Zealots’ Last Stand*, 185.
other Second Temple synagogues. The earlier building was not well planned, and there were a number of small errors made in its construction, which Herod’s builders did not fix. Further, it was not plastered with the good quality lime plaster used in all of Masada’s buildings which were intended for private use. Netzer suggested instead that the earlier building was likely a stable. The layout would meet the needs of a stable, with columns for tethering and a separate room for storing gear, and there would be animal dung. Netzer does, however, acknowledge the unlikelihood of plastering a stable floor.

On balance, therefore, the Masada building was likely a synagogue in its second stage. It was converted from an earlier building in the casemate wall, which probably was a stable, despite the plastered floor.

II. Buildings that may be synagogues:

a. Herodium:

a.1. History of the Site:

The ancient fortress-palace of King Herod, Herodium lies twelve kilometres south of Jerusalem on a hill 758 meters above sea level. It was constructed between 24 and 15 BCE to commemorate his victory over the Parthian and Hasmonean invaders. According to Josephus, Herod was buried at Herodium, but thus far archaeologists have failed to unearth his tomb. During both Jewish revolts Herodium was taken over by Zealots and held against the Roman army.

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284 Netzer, “Masada,” 982.
285 Netzer, Masada III, 411.
286 Netzer, Masada III, 412.
a.2. Discovery and Excavation:

While excavating for four seasons on behalf of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in the 1960s, V. Corbo uncovered what he believed to be a synagogue at Herodium. He dated it to one of the two revolt occupations, but was unsure which. After the Six-Day war, when the area fell into Israeli hands, G. Foerster (for the National Parks Authority) further studied the synagogue in 1969 and 1970. Since 1970, E. Nezter has been excavating the base of the mound.

a.3. Physical Description:

The synagogue adjoins a peristyle court inside the Herodian palace structure. It is a 15.5 x 10.6 m rectangular building with an entrance in the east wall (3.46 m).288

a.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

In its first stage the building was evidently a triclinium. It had two small windows (1.48 m) flanking the main entrance on the east wall, as well as doors on the north and south walls. The building was paved with opus sectile, and likely had 6 columns which supported a roof.289

In the second stage, the north and south doors were blocked, the windows were filled in with debris, and the main entrance was narrowed to 1.6 m. Three rows of benches were built around the four walls of the room, mostly from reused architectural fragments and there was a miqveh added to the site just to the east of the building.

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288 See figure 4.
289 There is a discrepancy between the excavator’s original plan and the one more recently released. In the original, Corbo drew four columns into the plan. In the later version, he added two more. While he does not comment on the reason behind the change, it is clear that two columns would not have been enough to support the weight of a roof, and so the more common six columns should be preferred. For a discussion of the problem see Joseph Patrick, “Corbo’s Excavations at Herodium: A Review Article,”JE/42 (1992): 241-245.
The most significant problem with the building is its date. Although he wrote that the building could be associated with either the first or second revolt, Corbo preferred to date the synagogue to the occupation of the site during the Bar Kokhba war. He did not provide evidence for his decision, however. Both E. Netzer and G. Foerster have challenged his assumption. The highest number of coins found by far date to the first revolt, 47 out of the 102 found, while there were only 16 from the second.\(^{290}\) Also, as the Sicarii went to the trouble of constructing a synagogue at Masada, it would make sense, they argued, that they would do so at Herodium as well.

a.5. Synagogue Features:

The Herodium structure has a number of the features that would identify it as a synagogue. In its second stage there were benches added, it provides enough space for gathering, and a \textit{miqveh} was added nearby. However, there is no evidence of Jewish religious usage.

a.6. Architectural Parallels:

Architectural parallels were detailed in the discussion of the parallels to the Masada building above (I.b.6).

a.7. Assessment:

Can the Herodium building legitimately be designated as a synagogue? It is similar to the structure at Masada. There were benches added in the ‘synagogue’ phase of the building, it was controlled by the rebels who constructed a synagogue at Masada, and it is near a \textit{miqveh}. There is no evidence of Jewish religious usage, however, and without that it is impossible to say for certain. As mentioned in the archaeological definition section of the introduction, there is an ongoing debate about how to identify synagogues.

\(^{290}\) Patrick, “Corbo’s Excavations,” 243.
in Israel. Do buildings have to have evidence of religious function before they can be considered synagogues, or can it be assumed that all community buildings in Jewish towns are synagogues?

b. Gamla:

b.1. History of the Site:

Gamla lies in the southern Golan, set on a rocky ridge that rises 230-330 meters above the surrounding countryside. Josephus reported that Gamla was totally destroyed following a seven-month siege in the first revolt. The ruin was long believed to be Gamla, but its identity was not confirmed until Shmaryah Gutman began excavating the site for the Israel Antiquities Authority in 1976.

b.2. Discovery and Excavation:

In the first season of excavation Gutman discovered what he believed to be a synagogue along the town wall near the city gate. While the site is not yet fully published, Gutman and others have provided some material on the makeup of the site.

b.3. Physical Description:

The building consists of an elongated hall (13.4 x 9.3 m) with a series of rooms surrounding it on a north-east/south-west axis. It is lined with benches: four to the east with a fifth on the platform above, three to the northeast, and two to the southwest. The foot of the benches is paved, and there is a narrow strip of pavement in the centre of the hall, but otherwise the floor is hard packed earth. There were sixteen columns surrounding the room, with four ‘heart-shaped’ columns at the corners to support the crossbeams. It is assumed that the structure was roofed, not only because of the columns,

291 The background information for the synagogue at Gamla is taken from S. Gutman, “Gamla,” in NEAHL. 2:459-463 and “The Synagogue at Gamla,” Ancient Synagogues Revealed, 30-34.
but also because of the large numbers of nails found in the debris. In addition, there are four raised platforms surrounding the hall. There are two entrances to the southwest, a wide one that leads into the centre of the hall, and a narrower one off to the side. There are additional doors leading onto the platform, and there is a niche near the corner of the northwest wall.

Outside the building there are two small rooms of unknown purpose connected to the *exedra* at the entrance of the hall and three small rooms to the northeast. The middle of the three is the most interesting, as it is lined with benches and has a window which opens up in the southwest wall into the main hall.\(^{293}\) There is also a *miqveh* ten meters to the southwest.

The architectural fragments from Gamla synagogue were decorated with artistic motifs common to Second Temple Judaism. The surviving fragments of the lintel, for example, were decorated with a six-petalled rosette that may have been flanked by a date palm.\(^{294}\)

**b.4. Development of the Site and Dating:**

Dating the construction of the synagogue has led to some debate, but the date of its destruction is well established. The excavator believes that the building was built under John Hyrcanus II (63-40 BCE). There were a number of coins in the virgin soil under the floor and pottery fragments that seemed to point to a mid-first century BCE date. Ma’oz, however, sees the synagogue in terms of Herodian building programs and

\(^{292}\) See figure 5.

\(^{293}\) There is still much debate about the function of the small room. It is generally assumed to be something like a Beth Midrash, a house of study. Ma’oz made the interesting suggestion that it might be a women’s area, but that seems unlikely given its small size in relation to the size to the hall (“Typology”, 39).

\(^{294}\) Ma’oz, “Typology”, 39.
would like to push the date forward to between 23 BCE and 41 CE.\textsuperscript{295} Regardless, the large number of arrowheads and ballista stones testify to the destruction of the building under the Romans, possibly as Josephus describes it, in 67 BCE.

b.5. Synagogue Features:

Like the synagogue at Herodium, there are a number of features of the building at Gamla that fit our proposed synagogue definition. It was a large building with benches around it and a water source nearby. There were also additional rooms surrounding the main hall. Like Gamla, however, there is no evidence of Jewish usage other than artistic motifs that seem to be part of Jewish style at the time.

b.6. Architectural Parallels:

Though most of what has been said about Masada applies to the site, there are a number of independent features that should be highlighted. The builders created a substantial platform by leaving a great deal of space between the benches and the inside walls of the synagogue. The designers also built many more entrances to the building at Gamla than there are at Masada and Herodium. In the case of Herodium, all but one entrance to the previous structure were blocked during its conversion to a synagogue. Each entrance at Gamla leads to a different level, one to the floor of the hall, one to the benches, and some to the raised area behind the benches. The combination of alternate entrances with architecturally segregated space suggests a much less egalitarian ideal than the building at Masada. Further, it is important to note that the Gamla structure was purpose-built. It was not a converted building, and some of the differences may reflect the actual desires of the builders.

\textsuperscript{295} Ma'oz, “Typology,” 35.
b.7. Assessment:

There is little direct evidence that the building was a synagogue, but the Gamla building does have a number of features that suggest it might have been a synagogue. The benches and openness of the building suggest that it was a public assembly hall. According to Gutman, the lack of pagan motifs suggests that it was not just the local council house. As well, the niche, the proximity of the miqveh, and the benches all fit with the other synagogue buildings discussed above. The existence of non-representational art, including a broken lintel with a six petaled rosette flanked by date palm, double meanders and swirls, may also be an indicator that the building was a synagogue. The paved area in the centre of the hall also suggests the presence of a table for reading the Torah.

c. Capernaum:

c.1. History of the Site:

Capernaum lies on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, four kilometres from the Jordan River. It was an ancient site known from both gospel references and Josephus. In 1894 the area was purchased by the Franciscans and they have excavated the area ever since.

c.2. Discovery and Excavation:

In 1921, the well known fourth or fifth century CE synagogue was first cleared and restored, but it was not until 1968 that V. Corbo and S. Loffreda began what has turned into a highly contentious excavation of the building. While excavating under the synagogue in the early 1970s, they discovered a basalt stone floor from an earlier

occupation level. Though there were tentative in their initial assessment, it became evident that they had found some kind of public structure that lay under the later building.

c.3. Physical Description:

The earlier structure was found in trenches dug into the nave of the later synagogue building. Directly under the four walls of the main hall the excavators uncovered black basalt walls 1.2-1.3 meters thick, which correlated with a basalt cobblestone floor found under four feet of fill. Originally the excavators suggested that it could be a private house, but Avi-Yonah argued that, from the size alone (24.5 x 18.7 m), it must represent some form of public architecture. The rest of Capernaum is made of small basalt houses with mud flooring. The excavators later realised that, while the basalt walls travelled along the same line as the later wall, they could not have been foundations for the later walls. Excavations under the courtyard to the east of the later synagogue revealed no such foundation. As Loffreda argued, the foundations abutted the walls of the courtyard, but were not underneath them and were made of dressed stone, while these walls are rough basalt. Further, Strange pointed to the fact that while the later walls sit on these earlier foundations for most of their course, they are out of alignment in the southwest corner. The basalt wall extended a foot west of the corner of the later synagogue.

c.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

Though there are serious concerns about the dating of the later synagogue building, the dating of the earlier building was not so problematic. Pottery found under

\[\text{References}\]

297 See figure 6.
the floor of the earlier building ranged from the third century BCE to the last half of the second century BCE.

c.5. Synagogue Features:

The only sure feature that can be taken from the definition of synagogues used here is size. At 24.5 x 18.7 m, the building is bigger than Masada, Herodium, or Gamla. Though it is not part of the definition used here, it may also be important that a later synagogue was built on the site.

c.6. Parallels:

There is not enough known about the building to make any statements about possible architectural analogies.

c.7. Assessment:

Serious concerns have been raised about identifying the Capernaum structure as a synagogue. It has been argued by a number of Israeli scholars that the Franciscan team found what they were looking for – the synagogue where Jesus taught. It should be noted, however, that the excavators were not looking for a first century synagogue, and even rejected that identification when it was first offered by Avi-Yonah. Further, it is hard to imagine that so large a building would be found here for any private use.299 There is a literary tradition of a synagogue at Capernaum,300 there were two rows of stylobates and some column drums found, suggesting some type of large building. Additionally, in later periods it was common for synagogues to be built on earlier remains. Unfortunately, as it sits on the later synagogue, and as the disputes from that excavation still rage, it is unlikely that the earlier building will be explored further for some time to come.

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299 It should be remembered that Capernaum was a small Galilean village and that all of the houses uncovered from the first century had a mud floor.
III. Buildings about which there is not enough information to decide if they are synagogues.

a. Chersonesus:301

a.1. History of the Site:

The Greek city of Chersonesus was situated in the Crimea on the north coast of the Black Sea. It was founded in the sixth century BCE and was part of an international trade network connecting Rhodes, Delos, and mainland Greece. In the first century BCE it established close ties with the Bosporus kingdom.302 Chersonesus had an established Jewish community by the first century CE. There is epigraphic evidence from a number of Jewish graves, many of which include Jewish symbols like menoroth.

a.2. Discovery and Excavation:

Excavating under the auspices of the Black Sea Project, a team of investigators from the United States, Canada, and the Ukraine began searching for a first century synagogue in 1994. They had found evidence of a Jewish presence in the Soviet archives of the first excavations of the area in the 1950s, but wanted to see if there was a synagogue. Through six seasons of excavations the team has become convinced that there was a synagogue building under a famous Byzantine basilica from the sixth century, adjacent to the bath complex and close to the shore (c. 10 m away). It is obvious that the basilica was built on an earlier structure, one with a different orientation, and there are traces of Jewish imagery on the stones used in a secondary context in the basilica's

300 Luke 7: 4-5.
302 For information on the Jewish community of the Bosporus see the inscriptions in Chapter 2.
construction. Unfortunately, the excavators have been forced to excavate around the structure, as the authorities do not want to risk damaging a famous historical site.

The team has been much more successful in the Russian archives. In the field report from M.V.V. Borisova in the 1950s they found reference to a ‘Basilica I’ with Greek and Hebrew inscriptions. Because of the politics of the day, Borisova made no reference to the fact that the building may have been Jewish, but she did leave the evidence in the archive for later scholars to unearth.

a.3-6: No information

a.7. Assessment:

As it now stands, the excavators have not yet found definite evidence of a synagogue building, though they are confident that one is present. In his latest article on the building, J. Andrew Overman revised the likely date of the synagogue building from the original first century CE date to the second to the fourth century. It may be, then, that the Black Sea project will not greatly influence the discussion of the Second Temple Synagogue.

b. Chorazin:

b.1. History of the Site

Khirbat Kerazeh, a site 2½ miles north of Capernaum, is identified with the biblical site of Chorazin.

304 Annual Report (Minneapolis: Macalester College Black Sea Project, 1994) 5.
306 The background information for the synagogue at Chorazin was taken from: Foerster, “Masada and Herodium,” in Ancient Synagogues Revealed, 26.
b.2. Discovery and Excavation:

During his 1926 excavation of a third or fourth century Galilean synagogue at Chorazin, J. Ory identified the remains of what is thought to have been a first century CE synagogue 200 meters west of the later synagogue.

b.3. Physical Description:

In his report to the Israel Department of Antiquities, copied from the archive by G. Foerster, Ory described the building as: a square colonnaded building of small dimension with 7 columns, 3 on each side [sic]. It had an entrance through the east wall and five courses of benches on three sides. In the 1920s it had columns and three courses of benches still standing; however, by the 1970s, when G. Foerster examined the area, he found no remains.

b.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

There is little that can be said about the site development, but it should be noted that neither Foerster nor the report he quotes from Ory provides any reason for assuming that the Chorazin building was from the second temple period.

b.5. Synagogue Features:

Again, there is little evidence. The benches and columns make the identification possible, but more would need to be known.

b.6. Architectural Parallels:

Other than the obvious parallels with Masada, Herodium and Gamla (benches and columns), there is little that can be said about architectural parallels.

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b.7. Assessment:

Further excavations may prove the Chorazin building to be a Second Temple synagogue.

c. Kiryat Sefer:

The background information for the synagogue at Kiryat Sefer is taken from: Binder, 197; Reuters Wire Service, November 20, 1995; Levine, First Thousand Years, 65-66.

308 The background information for the synagogue at Kiryat Sefer is taken from: Binder, 197; Reuters Wire Service, November 20, 1995; Levine, First Thousand Years, 65-66.

309 It has not yet been published, but Levine describes it briefly based on personal observations and conversations with the excavator. Levine, First Thousand Years, 65-66.

310 Levine, First Thousand Years, 65.
c.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

The structure likely dates from the mid-first century to the second century CE. All of the coins and pottery date to the first century CE or later. The excavator found a hoard of gold coins from the Bar Kokhba revolt, and it appears that the site was abandoned soon after.

c.5. Synagogue Features:

While the findings are still in the preliminary stages, the building has some of the features of a synagogue. It has benches along three walls and is large enough to accommodate a small community. It lacks any identifying Jewish features, however, and there is no mention of a water source.

c.6. Architectural Parallels:

According to the excavator the Kiryat Sefer building resembled the structures at Masada and Gamla.\(^{311}\)

c.7. Assessment:

The building would seem a good candidate for a synagogue. The benches, decorated façade, and stone floor suggest that the building was more than a private house, but until more data is released, little can be said about it.

IV. Buildings that are probably not synagogues:

a. Magdala:\(^{312}\)

a.1. History of the Site

Magdala was a Galilean village on the Sea of Galilee. Josephus referred to it as a Zealot stronghold during the Jewish war.

a.2. Discovery and Excavation:

From 1971 to 1976 V. Corbo and S. Loffreda excavated Magdala. In 1975 their excavations turned up what they believed to be a small first century synagogue.

a.3. Physical Description:

The building is quite small, only 8.16 x 7.26 meters and oriented north/south. The roof was supported by two longitudinal rows of columns, each of three columns with an extra column forming a u-shape on the south end. The location of the entrance to the building is unknown. There is a five-tiered bench on the north wall, and the building is paved with basalt flagstones.

a.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

It was evident that in its later stages of use the building had been a springhouse, but Corbo and Loffreda argued that in its first, pre-revolt phase, the building was a synagogue. There are two evident stages of construction with a marked change in the pottery and numismatic records. The first dates to the late Hellenistic/Early Roman period (63 BCE – 70 CE) and the second to the end of the second revolt.

The excavators claimed that the transformation required to make the building a spring house makes its earlier usage evident – in the second stage the pavement was raised to the second step of benches and collection channels for water were added along the western, eastern, and southern walls.

a.5. Synagogue Features:

There are some features that would seem to support the excavators’ conclusions. The building had benches and does not appear to have been a private home. The first

312 The background information for the synagogue at Magdala is taken from: Binder, Temple Courts, 193-195; Chiat, Handbook, 116-118.
point should be examined carefully, however. Though it was not explicit, the literary information for benches implied that they encircled the room. Also, on all of the buildings that have been examined thus far, the benches were on all sides of the room. In his analysis of the building, D. Binder pointed to the fact that these ‘benches’ were only 19-25 cm. high; much smaller than the average 35-40 cm. He suggested that they were steps leading down from the roadway into the water.

a.6. Architectural Parallels:

See a.7.

a.7. Assessment:

There are a number of problems with identifying the building as a synagogue. The most obvious is that the architectural arrangement does not seem in keeping with any of the other synagogues from the Second Temple period. The ‘benches’ described by the excavator may have been stairs leading down into the water house from the major road to the north, the most obvious place for the location of the entrance. Netzer argues that the building was always a springhouse. The floor was only raised in the second stage because the water table rose in the first and second centuries. In fact, in the excavators’ reports they relate that the water flooded to a depth of 1.7 m.

b. Jericho:

b.1. History of the Site

The Hasmonean winter palace north of Wadi Qelt, to the southwest of Jericho, was occupied from c.130 BCE until it was destroyed in an earthquake in 31 BCE. There were numerous stages of construction, as each ruler attempted to put his own mark on the

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313 The background information for the synagogue at Jericho is taken from: Ehud Netzer, “A Synagogue from the Hasmonean Period recently exposed in the Western Plain of Jericho,” IEJ 49 (1999): 203-221.
area. It was originally a large plantation, covering four hectares of land, with date palms and perfumes, necessitating a developed water supply system. It is believed that the synagogue was built during the third stage, possibly under Jannaeus (103-76 BCE) or his widow (76-67). During Jannaeaus' reign, a row of ten buildings was erected along one of the water canals, just on the western fringe of the palace proper, and the synagogue building was one of these.

b.2. Discovery and Excavation:

On March 29, 1998, Ehud Netzer uncovered what he believed to be a synagogue in the palace. His discovery went out immediately across the airwaves and various academic lists. Netzer's preliminary findings were recently published in *Israel Exploration Journal*, allowing a discussion of his find.\(^{314}\)

b.3. Physical Description: \(^{315}\)

The building is constructed from local building materials, mostly mud brick on fieldstone with cobblestone foundations. There are twelve pillars in the hall, five each on the north and south walls with an additional pillar to the east and the west. The floor of the hall is beaten earth, though the excavator believes that it may have been plastered. There seems to have been some sort of bench, though it was unusual. \(^{316}\) There was a 50 cm high wall between the pillars and the outside wall of the hall that the excavators believe was the outside edge of a bench that surrounded all four walls. One of the main oddities with the 'bench', however, is that it was unbroken around the whole of the room. There was no break for the doorway to the east; instead steps ascended from the eastern

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314 Despite my disagreement with Netzer over the function of the building, he should be commended for publishing his preliminary findings so quickly.
315 See figure 7.
316 See figure 8.
courtyard over and down into the building. From the way it is described (there is no proper plan that shows the bench configuration), the effect is of a walkway between the pillars and the walls 50 cm higher than the area in the middle of the hall, not a series of benches around the wall.

The synagogue is bisected by a minor water channel which leads to the miqveh in the room to the south.\(^{317}\) The water channel also fed a small basin inside the hall. Based on the level of the channel on the north wall, Netzer has hypothesised that there was another bench on the north wall, though there is no direct evidence.

There is also a niche in the north-east corner of the hall. It measures 1.55 m wide and 1.5 m deep, and is on the nave level (therefore 50 cm. lower than the bench). It seems to have been originally coated with lime plaster and contained a wooden cupboard.\(^{318}\) The cupboard was later replaced with a fieldstone and mud cupboard divided into two sections, the lower 1.55 x .8 m, 60 cm. high and the upper, larger, 1.55 x 1.2 with a 65 cm wide entrance. The excavator conjectured that the lower area of the cupboard functioned as a genizah – it was difficult to get into and was covered with a mud arch. The larger upper cupboard, Netzer argues, would likely have held the scrolls, possibly on a small platform. There were only a few ceramic objects found within the niche, however.

In the third stage of the hall's construction, a triclinium was added to the west of the hall. The hall was modified for the new format – the pillar in the middle of the western wall was shifted one meter to the north and parts of the southern wall were dismantled. Thus there was a visual connection created between the people seated in the

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\(^{317}\) Though the excavator describes the bath as a miqveh, it should be noted that it is filled from a regular water channel, not with rain water as elsewhere.

\(^{318}\) As the earlier cupboard was replaced with a fieldstone and mud structure, it is unclear how the excavator is aware of an earlier wooden cupboard.
triclinium and the main hall. The floor of the *triclinium* was at the height of the ‘bench’ around the hall (50 cm above the floor of the hall, the outside courtyard and the niche). The floor was plastered and gently sloped to facilitate washing. The bench around the *triclinium* was 1.4 m wide and constructed of fieldstones with lime plaster. There was a walkway 70 cm wide around the bench for food servers. In addition, a triangular room with two equal sides of 2.2 m each was built to the north of the *triclinium*. It had a small podium, which was likely used for cooking. Interestingly, there was no direct way of passing between the *triclinium* and the triangular kitchen. Instead, food servers would have had to walk through the hall of the synagogue building, along the bench on the west wall, in order to serve those in the *triclinium*.

b.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

The building was constructed in three stages, all dated by the excavator between 75 and 50 BCE. In the first stage, the eastern sector of the building was built – the courtyard and room area. In the second, the ‘synagogue hall’ was constructed, along with the rooms to the south of the hall. In the final stage, the *triclinium* and kitchen were added, the western pillar was shifted, and part of the south wall was dismantled. As mentioned above, the building was destroyed in the earthquake of 31 BCE.

b.5. Synagogue Features:

On a cursory examination, it would seem that there are quite a few synagogue features that can be identified. There is a bench, space enough to hold a group of people, and a water source. The building also had a niche and surrounding rooms. A more careful examination makes the identification of these features as synagogue indicators less certain. The bench was unlike any others that we have examined, and appears to have
been a walkway rather than a bench. The niche is also different than those at Gamla and Masada, on a different level than the 'floor' next to it, and quite large.

b.6. Architectural Parallels:

Netzer's identification of the building as a synagogue is based on two claims: that it is similar to the synagogue at Gamla and that the building could not be the reception hall for a *triclinium*. Like Gamla, there are various side rooms, it is a large rectangular hall with pillars and benches, there is a niche, and a water channel bisected the hall feeding a small basin. The fact that there are various side rooms does not seem a particularly compelling argument for identification of the building as a synagogue. If the Jericho building was a reception and dining area of a housing complex, there would also be many side rooms. Likewise, while the columned hall does resemble Gamla, it also resembles any colonnaded structure in Palestine. The benches might be a compelling comparison, as there are benches along the walls in almost every example of Second Temple synagogues; however, the benches in the Jericho building seem to be quite different. They seem to form a walkway around the centre of the hall, rather than a sitting area. They are not even broken by the entrance to the area, and provide the floor level for the triclinium and the kitchen. The niche is also different from those found elsewhere. By calling the area a niche, Netzer is actively linking it with the niches at Gamla and Masada. The identification is misleading, though, as the niche here more resembles some kind of storage area than a Torah repository – perhaps it was used to hold the ceramics for the triclinium (ceramic shards were found in the area during the excavation). Certainly there was no evidence that it was used to hold scrolls, and the awkwardness of
the lower compartment would argue against any regular usage. The water channel is equally ambiguous. One might imagine various reasons to have water brought into the area – that there is a water basin at Gamla does not seem a sufficient enough reason to identify the Jericho building as a synagogue.

Netzer’s argument that the hall could not have been a reception hall and a courtyard is even less convincing. He argues that a 50 cm difference between nave and aisles is uncommon in courtyards and that the architectural relationship between the rooms is never found in reception halls. His arguments are based on the abnormality of the arrangement in Israel, despite the fact that there are only two triclinia known from the Second Temple period. To further his argument he quotes Katherine Dunbabin’s examination of the development of dining rooms from Greek through Roman times. Her article gives no support to his claims, however, and in fact provides some evidence that the Jericho “synagogue” may indeed be a dining area of a larger housing complex. She says that during Hellenistic times the entertainment and reception area for guests would dominate the layout of the house. The building was situated next to the palace complex. One could imagine a number of tenants who might require a large entertainment and dining area opening out onto a courtyard.

b.7. Assessment:

Can the Jericho building be identified as a synagogue? If so, it would be the earliest in Israel, and a very significant addition to the corpus. While it is unsafe to do more than guess at what the structure might have been, it is reasonably likely that it was

\[319\] Gamla seems an odd basis for comparison, as it is still far from settled that the building there is a synagogue. However, as I have argued that the Gamla building was a synagogue, it is worthwhile to address Netzer’s points.
not a synagogue. It does not fit the definition of a synagogue used in this study on anything more than a cursory level. The odd benches, as well as the use of the “benches” to carry food through the hall, suggest that the Jericho building served some other purpose.

c. Shuafat: \[322\]

c.1. History of the Site

Shuafat (Khirbet a-Ras) is a small (50 x 50 m) second century BCE agricultural settlement just north of Jerusalem.

c.2. Discovery and Excavation:

Alexander On uncovered what he thought to be a synagogue during excavations in 1991. It was originally trumpeted as a great discovery, and the early publication details (in Hebrew) led to a great deal of interest. That has been followed more recently with a great deal of scepticism, as details that have been released in more recent reports to the Antiquities Authorities (in Hebrew) have been “enigmatically altered or eliminated.”\[323\]

c.3. Physical Description:

The proposed synagogue was a subterranean room with an open courtyard ringed with benches in front and ritual baths near by. It was quite small, only 4 x 5 m, and was divided by a low wall of hewn stones. In its synagogue stage there was a rough square niche carved into the Jerusalem wall.

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\[323\] Levine, *First Thousand Years*, 68.
c.4. Development of the Site and Dating:

The room was renovated to form what the excavators call a synagogue in the first century BCE. It was divided in half and the niche was added. The whole settlement was abandoned in 31 BCE, after the earthquake which also destroyed the site at Jericho.

c.5. Synagogue Features:

There were benches, a water source, and a niche found inside the building. The size of the room makes its identification as a synagogue suspect, as does the lack of Jewish connection.

c.6. Architectural Parallels:

Considering how little evidence has been released, it is impossible to draw any parallels.

c.7. Assessment:

Though it is difficult to say without any significant publication of the archaeological reports, the Shuafat building does not seem to be a synagogue. Part of the identification of a synagogue is based on the space for community assembly. A small 4 x 5 m. room in a 50 x 50 m. complex does not seem to provide that type of function. Additionally, there is a low wall that runs through the building.

V. Conclusions:

It is now possible to use the archaeological evidence to outline a number of conclusions about the synagogue’s function. In doing so, however, I will be sure not to try to draw too much from the evidence. Very little extant archaeological materials for the Second Temple synagogue remain, and that will invariably skew the findings. More

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324 In his discussion of the site, Levine notes that the niche and the benches were crudely made, “First Thousand Years, 68.”
importantly, I began this study by using literary evidence from the period to define criteria that archaeological remains need to meet to be considered synagogues. I now run the risk of creating a series of circular arguments if I try to support the literary evidence with the archaeological record. Taking these considerations into account, there are three aspects of the archaeological evidence that have an impact on the way that synagogue functions should be considered: the diversity of the synagogue architecture, a minimal degree of religiosity, and the existence of social hierarchy.

1. Evidence for Diversity of Architecture:

Diversity of synagogue architecture seems to be a central feature of all of the synagogues examined here. There are some similarities between all the buildings, namely the ones used in the definition: benches, water source, space, and additional rooms. However, the differences are more striking. A quick examination of the plans for each building will underscore these differences. Even those that have been most strenuously compared (Masada, Herodium and Gamla) all contain structural differences. One obvious example is the number of entrances. When the Herodium building was converted to a synagogue, the builders blocked up the two windows at the front of the room and the two extra doors leading out to either side. The Gamla building, on the other hand, had a number of doors on each side and in the front, all leading to different parts of the building.

Structural diversity may suggest some degree of functional diversity. It is evident that none of the functions of the building dictated a strict architectural design. The differences in the building plans suggest that the various synagogues were used in different ways.
2. Evidence for Minimal Religious Features:

The building remains also exhibit very few explicitly religious features. Each building was oriented inwards towards the centre of the main hall, rather than towards a storage area for the scrolls or Jerusalem, as was the case in later periods. Yadin suggested that the small room at the back of the Masada synagogue, which he believed functioned as a *genizah*, was the focal point of the Masada synagogue. He argued that its placement directly across from the entranceway would have focussed the attention of the person entering towards it. The benches along that wall, which would have faced back towards the entrance, seem to call Yadin’s view into question, however. The two identified storage niches at Gamla and Masada, which were presumably used to store the scrolls, do not relate to the internal structure of the synagogues either.

The lack of religious features in the building also has implications for the function of the buildings. A solely religious building would likely have more of a religious focus. That the synagogue buildings from the Second Temple period do not seem to have any obvious religious purpose in their structure suggests that religious observance was not their primary function.

3. Evidence for Hierarchical Arrangements:

All of the buildings seem to exhibit some degree of social hierarchy. The Delos building has two rooms with benches, one of which is interrupted by the marble *thonos*. Though its function is not evident, the chair does seem to demonstrate some difference in rank. Likewise, in the Masada synagogue, there are four benches around three of the walls, but only one bench along the outside wall of the internal room. Gamla seems to provide the best evidence for some type of hierarchical arrangement. The builders
designed four separate areas inside one open room, namely, the floor of the hall, the benches, the platform behind the benches, and the small room to the back of the hall. The separation of the four areas was stressed by the creation of separate entrances to each.

325 Yadin, "Masada," 22.
Chapter 4 - Conclusions

After our examination of Second Temple synagogue functions, as expressed in the literary and archaeological evidence, it is now possible to suggest some conclusions about the origins of the synagogue. First, however, I will review the functions that seem to be well attested in the evidence. These will be used to evaluate the theories of origin established in the first chapter to see if it is possible to break the impasse illustrated there.

I. Functions:

The evidence suggests a multiplicity of synagogue functions. Rather than one set of purposes, synagogues filled a great number of different social needs within their communities. Regional diversity was especially important, with synagogues incorporating local ideals into their practices.

The functions of the Second Temple synagogue can be broken down into three categories: religious functions within Judaism, religious functions taken on from the surrounding cultures, and social functions as the centre of the community. A further category, significant regional variation, though not itself a function, stresses that some of the functions of the Second Temple synagogue appear to have been localised.

a. Religious Functions within Judaism:

Each synagogue served its community's religious needs. The literary evidence stressed a number of synagogue functions that relate to Jewish religious practice, including Torah reading and exposition, teaching, and Sabbath observance.

Religious functions were not likely the only feature of Second Temple synagogues, however. It is important to recognise that most of the archaeological record reveals little obvious religious function for the buildings. In each building, the focus is on the centre of the room where speakers would stand and not on the possible storage areas.
for the scriptures. Also, instead of temples, the buildings resemble Greco-Roman council halls or meeting places for voluntary associations.

b. Religious Functions from outside Judaism:

Synagogues also incorporated functions normally performed by temples in the surrounding Greco-Roman world. In Egypt, for example, synagogues were granted the right of asylum, a power normally given to Egyptian temples; even the architectural terminology and the format of the inscriptions correlated with those of pagan temples in Egypt. The evidence from the Roman edicts in Josephus records similar powers – synagogues were made inviolate and allowed to hold and collect money. The Bosporan manumission inscriptions likewise provide evidence of synagogues taking on temple functions.

The archaeological record is not very helpful in providing evidence of pagan temple functions in the synagogue. The statue bases discovered in the Delos synagogue resemble statue bases given as sacrifices for healing elsewhere. The implications of the existence of these bases is obscure. Were Jews on Delos engaged in prayers for healing?

c. Community Functions:

The evidence for community function in the Second Temple synagogue is abundant in both the literary and archaeological evidence. Josephus provides a number of references to community meetings. For instance, he describes a meeting of the community at the proseuchē in Tiberias and records five decrees from the Roman administration and the Greek cities of Asia Minor, which granted the right of assembly to the Jews. Susanna also contains evidence of the community assembly, as does a papyrus

326 Though biblical texts were found in the synagogue at Masada, the back room where they were uncovered was not the focus for the synagogue.
fragment from first century Egypt, which provides evidence for a meeting of a grave
diggers association at a synagogue.

There are also a number of references to the power to pass and carry out
judgements in the synagogues. Josephus reports two decrees which give the Jews of
Sardis and Ephesus the right to decide their own affairs. As discussed above, the decree
from Ephesus is especially interesting as it allows the Jews to carry out judgements
against non-Jews. The power to pass judgements is also evident in the New Testament.
Jesus warns the disciples that they will be "flogged in the synagogues." Paul records that
he was punished by receiving 39 lashes, a common Jewish penalty. In the Old Greek
version, Susanna's trial takes place in the synagogue, further evidence of the practice.

d. Regional Diversity:

The evidence also stresses regional variation. Though the religious functions from
Judaism seem to be attested in a number of different locations, many of the other
functions seem to be localised. Dedicating synagogues to local rulers appears to have
been an Egyptian practice, as it is only attested in Egyptian inscriptions and in Philo.
Manumission in the synagogue seems to have been limited to the north coast of the Black
Sea. Though it may have occurred elsewhere, the high number of inscriptions from this
small area suggests that it was a common regional practice. Regional variation is
especially evident in the archaeological evidence. Even synagogues constructed by
similar groups of Jews, for instance the synagogues at Herodium and Masada, built by the
Zealots in the Jewish war, do not seem structurally identical.
II. Theories of Origin:

I will now re-examine the theories of origin in relation to these four categories of function and suggest that, based on the evidence of synagogue function, the synagogue likely originated in the Greco-Roman Diaspora. I will briefly summarise each theory, and then examine how the evidence from synagogue function relates to each. I will not, however, consider the theory that the synagogue originated after the destruction of the Temple. The bulk of the evidence presented throughout my discussion has challenged that view sufficiently.

1. First Temple Judaism:

The first theory argued that the synagogue began out of religious reforms in the First Temple period.

Analysis:

It certainly fits the first category of religious function within Judaism, but does not seem to relate to any of the other three functions.

2. Exilic Period:

The need for a focal point for worship and communal activities after the destruction of the first Temple and the exile to Babylon was the impetus behind the synagogue.

Analysis:

A Babylonian origin is supported by two of the categories. It would have created a situation of focus for religious and social activities. It could not explain either the diversity in synagogue functions or the regional variations suggested by the evidence, however.
3. Ezra and Nehemiah:

A third theory places the origin of the synagogue in the Torah-reading ceremonies from the Temple court at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Analysis:

This theory would allow for the development of the synagogue as the religious focal point within Judaism, but not for its community functions, influences from outside, or diversity.

4. Pharisaic/Proto-Rabbinic Judaism:

The fifth theory argues that the synagogue grew out of the Pharisaic discussions of legal questions and the ritual Sabbath practices, which created a need for a building to allow for the scholarly assembly.

Analysis:

The origin of the synagogue in Pharisaic Judaism would correspond with the religious functions of the Second Temple synagogue, but not with any of the other categories.

5. Greco-Roman Diaspora:

The earliest evidence comes from the Greco-Roman Diaspora and so this theory suggests that the synagogue likely developed there out of the need of communities to maintain their traditions while interacting with the surrounding community.

Analysis:

A Greco-Roman origin corresponds with the evidence of functions outlined in this discussion. There would be a need for Jewish religious functions, as the Jews in the Greek world would have to continue their traditions while immersed in the larger context
of the Greek culture. They would also, however, have been influenced by the need for social functions practised at local pagan temples. Whether the Jews of the Diaspora wanted to free a slave or claim asylum, they needed their religious building to take on the functions of the religious buildings of those around them. As the Jews in the Diaspora had their own legal status in Egypt and in the Roman world, they would have also needed the synagogue to meet the community needs, such as dispensing justice. Finally, a gradual growth related more to local pressures than a religious crisis would account for the diversity of form and function seen in this investigation.

In conclusion, therefore, the accumulated evidence for the functions of the synagogue corresponds most closely with the suggestion that the synagogue originated in the Greco-Roman world.

III. Areas for Further Study:

1. Archaeological:

The most pressing issue in the archaeology of the Second Temple synagogue is the lack of evidence. With so few archaeological remains it is difficult to draw many conclusions about synagogue origins or functions. Chorazin should be examined for any traces of the possible Second Temple synagogue and excavated. More importantly, work should be done to determine if there is any geographical correlation among Second Temple synagogues. From the evidence, it is apparent that they need to be built near water. Further, Lee Levine has taken the remains of the synagogues near the city gates at Gamla, Masada and Herodium as a possible signifier that they may be related to meetings held at the city gates, at least in Palestine. Perhaps a similar geographical examination could be done for synagogues outside Israel. For example, the synagogues at Delos and
Ostia are both outside the gates by the sea shore. According to Acts, Paul went looking for the synagogue at Phillipi outside the city gates. It may be that this evidence could be gathered to create a possible guide to the geographic location of synagogues by town planners.

2. Literary:

One of the issues that featured prominently in this discussion was regional diversity. Since the early part of the century, scholarship has been focussed on trying to understand the development of the synagogue in terms of a global framework. Scholars have done excellent work on regionalism in other areas of Jewish studies, for example, Aryeh Kasher's examination of Jews in Egypt. Perhaps a similar examination focused solely on synagogues would be a worthwhile endeavour. A discussion of regional differences in synagogues may help to explain how Jews in different areas of the Greco-Roman world interacted with each other.

An area of further interest would be an examination of the effects of the destruction of the Temple on the synagogue in the Greco-Roman world. Though this study followed convention by strictly differentiating between the Second Temple period and the post-destruction world, it may be that there was a lesser effect than imagined. Perhaps an examination of the synagogues before and soon after would help to reveal whether there were any radical changes.
### Figures

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Figure 1: Greek and Latin Terms Used of the Second Temple Synagogue. (D. Binder, *Temple Courts*, 152).
Figure 2: Delos Plan.

Figure 3: Masada Plan.
Figure 4: Herodium Plan.

Figure 5: Gamla Plan.
Figure 6: Capernaum Plan.

Figure 7: Jericho Plan with three stages.
Figure 8: Jericho Building arrangement.
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