

four THE PRE-70 DIASPORA

**D**iaspora communities, particularly those of Alexandria and Egypt, have provided us with a significant amount of material regarding the Hellenistic and early Roman synagogue, or *proseuche*. Epigraphical evidence hails from as early as the third century B.C.E., papyrological and archaeological data from the second century B.C.E., and literary sources from the first century C.E. Together these sources afford an intriguing, if only partial, picture of this institution throughout the Hellenistic-Roman Diaspora. Regarding external appearance and internal organization, there were significant differences between the synagogues in Alexandria, Cyrene, Ostia, Delos, and Asia Minor. Even the various names by which communities referred to the synagogue may well reflect different perceptions of the institution and its place in society. Nevertheless, the Diaspora synagogue fulfilled much the same function as a communal and religious center within each Jewish community, and Roman authorities clearly articulated the rights and privileges of this institution and the community in general in a number of contemporary decrees and edicts.

By the first century C.E., Jewish communities were to be found the length and breadth of the Roman Empire, with the possible exception of the northern and western provinces.<sup>1</sup> Despite the well-known problems with regard to demographic estimates for an-

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1. The widespread Jewish dispersion is attested, for example, by Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca Historica* 40, 3, 8) for the Hellenistic period and, for the Roman era, by Strabo as quoted by Josephus in *Antiqui-*

tiquity, it appears quite certain that the Jewish population of the Diaspora, estimates of which ranged between two and five million, outnumbered that of Judaea well before 70 C.E.<sup>2</sup> It is reasonable to assume that almost any Jewish community would have had its own “place” (*topos* per Josephus),<sup>3</sup> i.e., a synagogue. Thus, the number of such institutions throughout the Empire undoubtedly reached into the many hundreds, if not thousands. However, the information available regarding the pre-70 Diaspora synagogue relates only to a very small percentage of these places and, what is more, varies greatly in what is presented, and how. Evidence for the geographical distribution of this institution is likewise imbalanced. Egyptian Jewry is relatively well documented; information about an important region such as Syria is practically nil; Asia Minor merits considerable attention in several sources, particularly Josephus and Acts, but only limited information is available regarding Greece, Italy, North Africa, and the Bosphorus region. Nevertheless, when taken together, what we have is far from negligible, and it is to an examination of this material that we now turn. Given the extensive geographical dispersion, the variety of sources, and the fact that the sources tend to focus on particular communities, each locale will be discussed individually.

## EGYPT

### Epigraphical and Papyrological Evidence

Although no synagogue building has yet been discovered in Egypt, the epigraphical material that has been recovered, supplemented by a number of papyri,<sup>4</sup> has contributed enormously to the study of this institution in the Ptolemaic-Roman era. Much of this material is considerably earlier than other Diaspora evidence.<sup>5</sup> Altogether, the Egyptian synagogue is mentioned explicitly in fifteen such sources and is implied in five more.<sup>6</sup>

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*ties* 14, 115; Philo, *Moses* 2, 232; idem, *Flaccus* 45–46; idem, *Embassy* 214, 245, 281–82. See also Acts 2:9–11; and *Antiquities* 4, 115–16 (in Josephus’ recasting of Bil’am’s prophecy).

2. A maximalist position is adopted by Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, I, 167–71, 369–72; a minimalist position is taken by McGing, “Population and Proselytism,” 88–106. On the Diaspora generally, see M. Stern, “Jewish Diaspora,” 117–83; Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 356–88; A. Kasher, “Jewish Migration and Settlement,” 65–91. With regard to Diaspora synagogues, see Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 227–341; Runesson, *Origins*, 401–76; Gruen, *Diaspora*, 105–23; Claussen, *Versammlung*, 83–112, 191–208; Fitzpatrick-McKinley, “Synagogue Communities,” 55–87.

3. *Antiquities* 14, 235, 260.

4. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, 8.

5. The evidence for a significant Jewish presence in Egypt at the outset of the Hellenistic period is persuasive. What is less clear is whether this presence was forced, i.e., because of captivity, or the result of free choice—or both. There are conflicting reports not only in the sources (*Letter of Aristaeas* 12–14 and Josephus, *Antiquities* 12, 11–33; contra idem, *Against Apion* 1, 186–89), but also among historians (Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 273; Modrzejewski, “How to Be a Jew,” 75–76). See also L. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 48–49.

6. The epigraphical material has been conveniently collected and extensively analyzed by Horbury

Two inscriptions date from the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221 B.C.E.) and his wife Berenice, three from the reign of Ptolemy VIII (145–116 B.C.E.) and his two wives named Cleopatra, three from the second or first century B.C.E., and one from the first century C.E.<sup>7</sup> Two other inscriptions are more difficult to date and stem from the late Hellenistic or early Roman eras.<sup>8</sup> An inscription from Leontopolis may refer to a *proseuche*, and fragmentary remains of four inscriptions make mention of a *temenos*, and probably also refer to a synagogue.<sup>9</sup> Finally, four papyri dating from the late third century B.C.E. to the beginning of the second century C.E. note local synagogues in a variety of contexts.<sup>10</sup> Altogether, this evidence sheds light on important aspects of the early Egyptian synagogue.

The dedicatory inscription is the most common type, appearing (with minor differences) some eight times throughout the Ptolemaic era. To cite two examples:

On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children, the Jews [dedicated] the *proseuche*.<sup>11</sup>

On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Cleopatra the sister and queen Cleopatra the wife, Benefactors, the Jews in Nitriai [dedicated] the *proseuche* and its appurtenances.<sup>12</sup>

Such inscriptions clearly reflect the common Egyptian Jewish practice of dedicating synagogues to the ruling family. The geographical and chronological distribution of these inscriptions indicates that this practice was accepted by many segments of Egyptian Jewry. The implications of such a practice are fairly obvious: it expresses the loyalty and gratitude of the Jewish community toward the king and queen, as well as reflecting the Jews' dependence upon them. The status of the Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt as part of the class of "Hellenes" (i.e., resident aliens and not native Egyptians) was due to their protection by and service to the king.<sup>13</sup> In a strikingly similar fashion, Onias IV, who fled Judaea and sought asylum in Egypt, petitioned Ptolemy VI to build a temple to the God of Israel at Leontopolis "in the likeness of that at Jerusalem and with the same dimensions on behalf of you and your wife and children."<sup>14</sup>

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and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*. Previously, most of these inscriptions had appeared in Frey's *CIJ* and were later re-edited by Lewis in vol. III of *CPJ*. The last-mentioned work remains basic for papyrological material.

7. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 22, 117 (Ptolemy III); nos. 24, 25, 125 (Ptolemy VIII); nos. 13, 27, 28 (second to first centuries B.C.E.); no. 126 (first century C.E.).

8. *Ibid.*, nos. 9, 20.

9. *Proseuche*: *ibid.*, no. 105. *Temenos*: *ibid.*, nos. 16, 17, 127, 129.

10. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, nos. 129, 134, 138; II, no. 432.

11. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, no. 22.

12. *Ibid.*, no. 25.

13. See Bickerman, *Jews in the Greek Age*, 83–85; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 73–87.

14. Josephus, *Antiquities* 13, 67. On this episode, see Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, 44–46; Grabbe, *Judaism*, I, 266–67; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 121–33; Gruen, "Origins," 47–70.

Egyptian Jewry was dependent upon royal recognition and support for its communal institutions, its right to own and administer property and assets, as well as the legitimacy and authority of its communal activities and decisions. Such royal backing is reflected in a number of inscriptions: the ruling couple is referred to as “benefactors,” they declare a synagogue “inviolable” (*ἄσυλος*), and order an earlier dedicatory inscription to be restored.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of synagogue practice generally, the Egyptian Jewish custom of dedicating such a building to the ruler is most unusual, and only two other parallels are known: a dedicatory inscription from Qatzion in the Upper Galilee from 197 C.E. (although the identity of that building is far from clear) and a fragmentary inscription from late second-century C.E. Osijek, Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Several instances from Italy approximate Egyptian practice in that a number of synagogues in Rome were named after prominent Romans, including Augustus.<sup>17</sup> An Ostia inscription notes “the well-being of Augustus,”<sup>18</sup> and a late midrash speaks of a synagogue in Rome named after Severus.<sup>19</sup> However, even these similar—though not identical—instances are relatively few in number, and thus the concentration of dedicatory inscriptions in Egypt is indeed unique. This was undoubtedly due to the centralized control exercised by the Ptolemies; as a result, religious (and other) buildings often required the sanction and authorization of the ruler.<sup>20</sup> Evidence of this pattern in pagan Egypt is not lacking, and the practice carried over to the Jewish community.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note that despite the clear and unequivocal imitation of this Ptolemaic dedicatory norm, the Jews, nevertheless, adapted it so as not to compromise their

15. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 25 and 125, respectively. See also A. Kasher, “Three Jewish Communities,” 115–16.

16. The inscription from Qatzion is quite explicit as to the dedicatees (Septimius Severus and his sons, Caracalla and Geta), the date (197 C.E.), and the donors (the Jews). However, it continues to be debated whether the building (as yet not fully excavated) in which it was found was a synagogue or some other building. Advocates of a synagogue identification are Schürer (*History*, III, 93), S. Klein (*Galilee*, 127), Avi-Yonah (*In the Days of Rome and Byzantium*, 49), and Roth-Gerson (*Greek Inscriptions*, 125–29), while those who question this identification include Kohl and Watzinger (*Antike Synagogen*, 209) as well as Lifshitz, who excludes this inscription from his collection of Greek dedicatory inscriptions (*Donateurs et fondateurs*). Regarding the inscription from Hungary, see Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 53–55; and below, Chap. 8.

17. From the catacomb inscriptions, we learn of a synagogue of the Augustesians, Agrippesians, and perhaps also Volumnesians; see Leon, *Jews of Ancient Rome*, 140–42, 157–59; and below, note 132.

18. Dating from the first or second century, the fragmentary inscription reads: “*pro salute aug[usti]*” (For the well-being of the emperor); see Noy, *JWE*, I, no. 13, as well as Fortis, *Jews and Synagogues*, 118; White, *Social Origins*, 392–94.

19. Genesis Rabbati 45, 8 (p. 209).

20. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, I, 190; A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 134–38.

21. *Pagans*: Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, I, 190–91, 226ff., 282–84. See also Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 349; Hengel, “Die Synagogeninschrift von Stobi,” 174 n. 97; idem, “Proseuche und Synagoge,” 159. *Jews*: Dion, “Synagogues et temples,” 45–75.

own religious sensibilities. In contrast to the pagans, for example, the avoidance of divine epithets (especially *θεός*) was an elegant way of not acknowledging royal divinity.<sup>22</sup> Philo makes a point of noting Jewish sensitivities in this regard.<sup>23</sup> According to Josephus, Onias IV was also careful in his expression of obeisance to the Egyptian king when negotiating the building of the Leontopolis temple, as were the Jewish and Samaritan protagonists whose case was brought before Ptolemy Philometor.<sup>24</sup>

The overwhelming majority of references in Egypt are to a *proseuche*, appearing ten times in the inscriptions and four times in the papyri.<sup>25</sup> The word *synagoge* is used once, and a reference to officers of this institution twice; the designation *eucheion* (a place of prayer) appears only on one occasion.<sup>26</sup> The Jews of Ptolemaic Egypt also borrowed terminology associated with pagan contexts in other instances as well. The phrase used to describe the God of Israel (*θεὸς ὑψιστος*—*theos hypsistos*, the Most High God) is documented in pagan as well as Jewish contexts, as are various terms for synagogue officers, such as the archisynagogue and *nakoros*.<sup>27</sup>

The religious dimension of these *proseuchai* is reflected in the sanctity accorded to at least some of them. A number of inscriptions specifically refer to the “holy” or “great place”;<sup>28</sup> another source associates the institution with the “Most High God.”<sup>29</sup> The sanctity of one *proseuche* was expressed as follows: “On the orders of the queen and king, in

22. Hengel, “Proseuche und Synagoge,” 161–62; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, I, 283.

23. Philo, *Embassy* 134–49.

24. *Onias IV: Antiquities* 13, 67. *Jews and Samaritans*: *ibid.*, 13, 74–76.

25. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 9, 13, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 117, 125, 126. For references in the papyri, see above, note 10. On the term *proseuche* with reference to the Jewish community, see Levinskaya, *Books of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, 207–25.

26. *Synagogue*: Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, no. 20. Papyrus no. 138 (Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I) seems to refer to a meeting of a Jewish (burial?) association in the *proseuche*. *Synagogue officials*: Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 18, 26. *Eucheion*: Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, II, no. 432.

27. *Theos hypsistos*: C. Roberts et al., “Gild of Zeus,” 55–72; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, I, 282; II, 440 nn. 764–65; *TDNT*, VIII, 614–19; Simon, “Theos Hypsistos,” 372–85; Levinskaya, *Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, 51–103; Mitchell, “Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” 81–148, and esp. 110–21. This phrase was already widely used in the Septuagint (e.g., Gen. 18:20; Ps. 7:8; 17:14), Egyptian Jewish inscriptions (Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 274–75; and above), and contemporary Jewish Hellenistic literature (II Macc. 3, 31; III Macc. 7, 9). It appears also in the Delos synagogue (Frey, *CIJ*, I, nos. 727–29; Schürer, *History*, III, 70–71; and below), and the Bosphorus kingdom (*ibid.*, 72; Frey, *CIJ*, I, 690, 690a; Lifshitz, “Prolegomenon,” 67; Levinskaya, *Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, 229–46; Goodenough, “Bosphorus Inscriptions,” 221–45; and below). See also Kraabel, “*Hypsistos* and the Synagogue at Sardis,” 81–93. *Archisynagogos*: Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, no. 18, and comments on p. 29. See also Rajak and Noy, “*Archisynagogoi*,” 75–93. *Nakoros* (attendant): Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, no. 129; see also the material gathered in Dion, “Synagogues et temples,” 65–73; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents*, IV, 49–52.

28. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 16, 17, 127. Although the term *proseuche* does not appear in these fragmentary inscriptions, there can be little doubt that such a building was intended.

29. *Ibid.*, nos. 19, 27, 105.

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 [ἄσυλον]. The queen and king gave the order.”<sup>30</sup> The original inscription, usually dated to the latter part of the second century B.C.E., thus attests to the holy status enjoyed by an Egyptian *proseuche* in the Ptolemaic period.<sup>31</sup> Such a status may well be paralleled in a papyrus from Alexandrou-Nesos in the Fayyum dated to 218 B.C.E., where it is stated that a Jew named Dorotheus was accused of stealing a cloak and took refuge in a *proseuche* (for purposes of asylum?). Only after the intervention of a third party did Dorotheus agree to leave the cloak with the *nakoros* of the synagogue until final adjudication.<sup>32</sup>

Another indication of the synagogue’s sanctity, albeit indirect, is reflected in the use of terms such as *τέμενος* and *ἱερον περίβολον* for “sacred precinct” in connection with a *proseuche*.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, a second-century papyrus describes a plot of land attached to a *proseuche* in Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis as a “sacred grove or garden” (*ἱερά παράδεσος*).<sup>34</sup> The above clearly imply that in many places, at the very least, the synagogue was considered a sacred institution. Philo, too, alludes to the sacredness and inviolability of *proseuchai* on a number of occasions (see below).<sup>35</sup>

Epigraphical evidence makes it quite clear that the *proseuche* might include other buildings or structures in addition to the “sacred precinct” (i.e., land or courtyards) noted above. Several inscriptions mention *τὰ συγκύροντα*, which seems to refer to ancillary buildings, annexes to the main building, or landholdings.<sup>36</sup> Other structures may have in-

30. Ibid., no. 125; Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, no. 125; Dion, “Synagogues et temples,” 57–59; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 97–98; Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 571–73.

31. Dion prefers to date this inscription to the days of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes (145–116 B.C.E.) and notes the interesting but not particularly compelling parallel act of granting the right of asylum to the Jerusalem Temple by Demetrius in 152 (I Macc. 10:43). See also Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 214.

32. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, no. 129. See also A. Kasher, “Synagogues as ‘Houses of Prayer’ and ‘Holy Places,’” 215. On the office in general, see Llewelyn and Kearsley, *New Documents*, VI, 203–6.

33. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 9, 129; Frey, *CIJ*, II, 1433; Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs*, no. 87; Dion, “Synagogues et temples,” 59–60.

34. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, no. 134. See also A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 138–39. Cf., however, an alternative suggestion of Modrzejewski (*Jews of Egypt*, 89), who views this term as “a well-known technical term for one category of landed property.”

35. Another indication of the holiness of a *proseuche* is reflected in III Macc. 7:19–20: “And when they finished their voyage in peace with appropriate thanksgivings, there, too, in like manner they determined to celebrate these days also as festive for the duration of their community. They inscribed them as holy on a pillar and dedicated a house of prayer [τόπον προσευχῆς] at the site of the banquet.” That a *proseuche* was built as a memorial to the miraculous salvation of a community is noteworthy. Unfortunately, the historicity of much of this book’s narrative is questionable. See, for example, Nickelsburg, “Stories,” 80–84; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 141–53.

36. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 9, 25. On the various meanings of *συγκύροντα*, see ibid., 14; A. Kasher, “Three Jewish Communities,” 121. On the appearance of this term in a fragmentary inscription from Cyrene, see Fraser, “Inscriptions of Cyrene,” 115–16.

cluded a gateway (*πυλώων*), such as the one from second-century Xenephyris, which is noted as having been part of a *proseuche*, or an exedra, such as the one from second- or first-century B.C.E. Athribis.<sup>37</sup> One papyrus mentions what appears to be a rather high water bill owed by two local synagogues; we can only conjecture that this may have been due to the use of water for guests, communal needs (e.g., sacred meals), or ritual purposes. However, it is also conceivable that some water may have been used for domestic purposes by Jews whose homes were located near the *proseuche*.<sup>38</sup>

A number of other interesting details regarding Egyptian *proseuchai* emerge from these data. Dedicatory inscriptions are about evenly divided between the community as a whole and wealthy individuals. *Proseuchai* were built by the Jewish communities of Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis, Schedia, Nitriai, Xenephyris, and Athribis; all of these originated in the Hellenistic period and were dedicated to the royal couple.<sup>39</sup> Among the seven inscriptions mentioning individual donations, two speak of donating the entire building, the others of donating parts thereof: an exedra, a sundial, and a well.<sup>40</sup> The remaining inscriptions are fragmentary and make no mention of the objects involved.<sup>41</sup> Of these seven inscriptions, two were in honor of the royal couple.<sup>42</sup> In only two cases is the donor's name mentioned, while in two others the donor's wife and children are also included.<sup>43</sup> Although the dating of these dedicatory inscriptions is uncertain, they appear to range from the second century B.C.E. to the late Roman period (i.e., the second–third centuries C.E.).

The *proseuche*'s centrality to the Jewish community is reflected not only in the number of dedicatory inscriptions, buildings, and property associated with it but also by the fact that it was the meeting-place for various Jewish associations (*συνόδος*). So, for example, we read of one such group (a burial society?) meeting in a *proseuche*.<sup>44</sup> Less clear

37. *Xenephyris*: Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, no. 24. *Athribis*: *ibid.*, no. 28. This was apparently an annex (partially open?) to the main hall or building, itself used for a variety of purposes. On the exedra, see *ibid.*, 49; A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 117; and S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, 349–50. See also Goodenough's suggestion (virtually ignored subsequently) to read "cathedra" instead of "exedra," thus turning this into a reference to a bench or perhaps a Seat of Moses (*Jewish Symbols*, II, 85). See Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, II, 443 n. 773; Griffiths, "Egypt and the Rise of the Synagogue," 9–10.

38. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, II, no. 432; Fuks, in *ibid.*, 221; and A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 140–44.

39. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 117, 22, 25, 27, and 24 (which mentions only the exedra).

40. *Building*: *ibid.*, nos. 13, 126. *Exedra*: *ibid.*, no. 28; for possible meanings of the term "exedra," see Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, III, 143, no. 1444; Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 49–50; and, more generally, Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 96. *Sundial and well*: Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, no. 115.

41. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 16, 17, 20, 27, 129.

42. *Ibid.*, nos. 13, 28.

43. *Ibid.*, nos. 13, 20; and *ibid.*, nos. 28, 126, respectively. See Noy, "Jewish Place of Prayer," 118–22.

44. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, no. 138. On the *dekany* as a burial association, see Noy, *JWE*, II, no. 440. On the meaning of *dekany* in the Aphrodisias inscription, see Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers*, 28–30; and below, Chap. 8.

is a reference to a meeting of a Sambathic association, perhaps in Naucratis.<sup>45</sup> While the identification of this latter group (and if, indeed, it was even Jewish) and its precise venue remain unclear, from what we know of Ptolemaic Egypt generally, a temple—or, in this case, the Jewish *proseuche*—would have been an obvious choice.<sup>46</sup>

Several papyri from Arsinoe contain some interesting details regarding local synagogues. One second-century C.E. document dealing with water distribution, referred to above, notes two institutions, one called a *proseuche*, the other an *eucheion*.<sup>47</sup> The former is identified as having belonged to Theban Jews; the latter presumably belonged to the indigenous population. If this was the case, then we have here an interesting example of Theban Jews organizing their own house of worship that also served as their *Landsmannschaft*. A second papyrus, from the second century B.C.E., is a land survey noting that the synagogue was located on the outskirts of the town and bordered by private estates and a canal—quite possibly indicating that a (the?) Jewish quarter of the town was there.<sup>48</sup>

One inscription refers to a gold crown, presumably a token of honor bestowed on someone.<sup>49</sup> This well-known pagan practice was adopted by Diaspora Jews in both Cyrene and Asia Minor (see below), and apparently in Egypt as well. A papyrus notes a “Jewish communal archive” (*Ἰουδαίων ἀρχεῖον*) in Abusin el-Meleq that most likely was located in the local synagogue, and it is here that important documents—contracts, records of priestly lineage, wills, official statements, etc.—were deposited.<sup>50</sup> Local synagogues must also have had arrangements for the safekeeping of communal monies earmarked for local use or for the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, there is evidence that several Egyptian synagogues, one in Alexandria and the other in Naucratis, had statues. Statue bases were discovered in each, one with the explicit inscription “to the synagogue” (*τῆ συναγωγῆ*), the second mentioning a Sambathic association.<sup>52</sup> Despite an attempt to explain away this phenomenon (e.g., both inscrip-

45. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, no. 26 and comments on pp. 44–45.

46. C. Roberts et al., “Gild of Zeus,” 72–87. Compare this to the meeting of a *dekany* in the Aphrodisias inscription; see below, Chap. 8; and White, *Building God’s House*, 88.

47. See above, note 38; and Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, II, no. 432.

48. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, no. 134 and comments by Tcherikover on pp. 247–48; A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 138–39.

49. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, no. 129; see also Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, VII, 148–71; and below.

50. Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, II, no. 143; see also Frey, *CIJ*, II, no. 775. On the importance of documents proving priestly lineage that were stored in communal archives, see Josephus, *Against Apion* 1, 31–36; idem, *Life* 6.

51. See, for example, Philo, *Embassy* 156–57, 216, 291, 312–16; idem, *Special Laws* 1, 77. See also Josephus, *Antiquities* 14, 112–13, 214–16, 260, 261; 16, 160–72.

52. Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, nos. 20, 26.



tions deal with Judaizers and not full-fledged Jews: these were people who “did not share the sensibilities of some Jews about images”; this was a pagan institution), we may well have here evidence of communities whose Jewish practice condoned such images, not unlike those who built and attended the third-century Nehardea (Babylonia) synagogue that also had a statue.<sup>53</sup>

### Philo

The writings of Philo are of inestimable importance as a source for Alexandrian Jewry generally and for the synagogue in particular. Living at the height of this Jewry’s power and prosperity and through traumatic—even cataclysmic—events that shook the community to its foundations, Philo was far from being a dispassionate and objective bystander. This commitment, added to his natural penchant for conveying a definite religious and cultural message to readers and listeners, means that one must exercise caution in evaluating many of his claims.<sup>54</sup>

For example, Philo speaks of Jews in Rome conducting regular weekly meetings on “sacred Sabbaths,” when they are “trained” in their ancestral philosophy.<sup>55</sup> He refers to *proseuchai* as schools (*διδασκαλεία*) for the inculcation of virtue, emphasizing the instructional dimension of these synagogue gatherings, which were based on scriptural readings.<sup>56</sup> These sessions were led by a priest or elder and may have lasted for a good part of the day;<sup>57</sup> Philo himself mentions the late afternoon as a *terminus ad quem*.<sup>58</sup> With regard to the Therapeutae, Philo describes the solemnity surrounding their Sabbath observance, which likewise featured an extensive discourse offered by the senior member of the group.<sup>59</sup>

Philo portrays the synagogue’s religious agenda as an intensive intellectual experience, and there may be a modicum of truth to his claim. Similar frameworks for serious philo-

53. B Rosh Hashanah 24b. See Rajak, “Jews as Benefactors,” 27–28.

54. Opinions regarding the reliability of Philo as a historian and commentator on current events are seriously divided; see, for example, Smallwood, “Philo and Josephus,” 114–29; and, for an opposite view, D. R. Schwartz, “Josephus and Philo,” 26–45. See also idem, “On Drama and Authenticity in Philo and Josephus,” 113–29.

55. *Embassy* 156.

56. *Moses* 2, 215–16; *Special Laws* 2, 62, 63; *Embassy* 312. See also *On Dreams* 2, 127, and Leonhardt, *Jewish Worship in Philo of Alexandria*, 74–95.

57. See *Letter of Aristeas* 310.

58. *Hypothetica* 7, 13: “And indeed they do always assemble and sit together, most of them in silence except when it is the practice to add something to signify approval of what is read. But some priest who is present or one of the elders reads the holy laws to them and expounds them point by point till about the late afternoon, when they depart having gained both expert knowledge of the holy laws and considerable advance in piety.” See also below, note 61.

59. *Contemplative Life* 31. On Therapeutae generally, see Schürer, *History*, II, 591–97.

sophical discussions and study sessions were not an uncommon feature in the Roman world, and some Jews—particularly in the various sects—may well have created similar settings.<sup>60</sup> The real question, however, is how widespread such a practice was. Did it engage only a Jewish intellectual elite in Alexandria, or was it typical of many Egyptian *proseuchai*, both in Alexandria and the *chora*? I am inclined to prefer the former alternative, as Philo's emphasis is too unique and extreme: he alone calls the synagogue a *didaskaleion*. To assume that ordinary Jews would be interested in such intensive study sessions or would be willing to stay in the synagogue for much of the Sabbath day flies in the face of all we know of human nature and Jewish practice *de facto*.<sup>61</sup>

Philo also notes that the *proseuche* functioned as a repository, where funds for the Temple were collected and stored until their transfer to Jerusalem. Presumably, funds for local communal use were deposited there as well.<sup>62</sup>

In his dramatic account of the Alexandrian pogroms of 38 C.E. and their aftermath, Philo takes note of Alexandrian synagogues on a number of occasions.<sup>63</sup> These buildings were located in every section of the city, and there was one particularly magnificent *proseuche* that he describes as “the largest and most magnificent [μεγίστη καὶ περισημοτάτη] in the city.”<sup>64</sup> The building was lavishly decorated with, *inter alia*, insignia, shields, golden crowns, stelae, and inscriptions honoring the emperor.<sup>65</sup> By specifically mentioning these accoutrements, Philo may have been indicating the loyalty of the Jewish community to Rome, thereby discounting one of the main charges brought by the Roman governor Flaccus and the Alexandrians against the Jews. Emphasizing the legal and recognized status of these buildings (Philo claims that only the Jews were so privileged by Augustus), he excoriates those perpetrating the violence and destruction as guilty of heretofore unheard of desecration and abominable acts.<sup>66</sup> According to Philo, the desecration reached such proportions that, not only were the synagogues despoiled and in some cases

60. See Mason, “Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Philosophies,” 12–18.

61. In first- and second-century Palestine, Jews abandoned liturgical study sessions or even intense political discussions for their Sabbath midday meal; see, for example, Josephus, *Life* 279; B Betzah 15b. Cf., however, A. Kasher (“Synagogues as ‘Houses of Prayer’ and ‘Holy Places,’” 211), who suggests that the extended scriptural readings in Egyptian synagogues, as described by Philo, originated in the desire to imitate the original reading of the Septuagint as described in the *Letter of Aristeeas*, implying that this was practiced widely.

62. *Embassy* 156–57, 216, 312–16. See also A. Kasher, “Synagogues as ‘Houses of Prayer’ and ‘Holy Places,’” 217 n. 44.

63. On events in Alexandria, see Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, 55–74; Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 220–55; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 161–83.

64. *Embassy* 134.

65. *Embassy* 133.

66. *On the recognized status*: *ibid.*, 138–39, 311ff. See also Josephus, *Antiquities* 14, 213–16. *On the violence*: Philo, *Flaccus* 41ff.; *idem*, *Embassy* 132ff.

destroyed, but statues of the emperor as well as other images (e.g., a bronze statue of a man riding a *quadriga*) were introduced in direct violation of the status quo enshrined by earlier Ptolemaic and Roman rulers.<sup>67</sup>

One final comment on Philo's terminology is in order. In line with Egyptian Jewish practice, as noted above, Philo almost always (nineteen times) uses the term *proseuche* or a derivative.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, he does use the term *synagoge* on two occasions.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Philo, too, alludes to the institution's sanctity, invoking the terms *τεμένος* and *ἱερός* and *ἱεροί περίβολοι*.<sup>70</sup>

### A Rabbinic Tradition

The number of sources in rabbinic literature relating to the pre-70 Roman Diaspora is almost negligible; even rarer are the references to the Diaspora synagogue. Nevertheless, we have one most unusual pericope, and if its historicity (or a significant part thereof) is upheld, it would constitute a source of major importance to the subject at hand. First appearing in the third-century Tosefta, this tradition is subsequently cited, with variations, in both the Yerushalmi and the Bavli.<sup>71</sup> Owing to its importance, I quote the Toseftan version in full:

R. Judah [b. Ilai] said: "Whoever has not seen the double stoa [i.e., colonnade] of Alexandria has never in his life seen the glory of Israel. It is a kind of large basilica, a stoa within a stoa, holding, at times, twice the number of those who left Egypt. And seventy-one *catbedrae* [i.e., honorary chairs or thrones] of gold were there for the seventy-one elders, each of them [worth] 25 talents [of gold], and a wooden platform [במה] was in the middle. And a *ḥazzan* of the synagogue [lit., assembly] stood on it with kerchiefs in his hand. When one took hold [of the Torah scroll] to read, he would wave the kerchiefs and they [i.e., those congregated] would answer 'Amen' for each benediction; and he would again [wave the kerchiefs] and they would [again] respond 'Amen.' And they would not sit randomly, but goldsmiths would sit by themselves, silversmiths by themselves, weavers by themselves, Tarsian weavers by themselves, and blacksmiths by themselves. And why to such an extent [i.e., why the differentiated

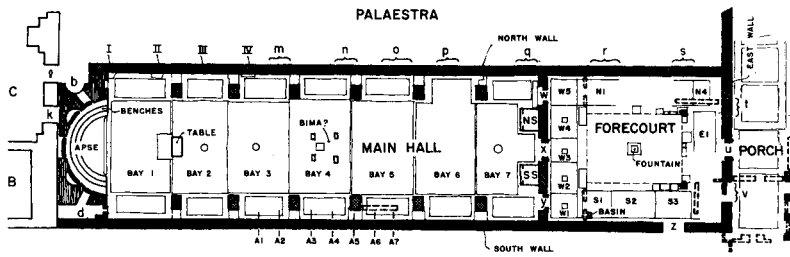
67. *Flaccus* 43; *Embassy* 134–35, 138. It is not clear, however, whether the desecration caused by the introduction of statues meant that the *proseuche* per se was considered sacred by the Jews, as has sometimes been claimed.

68. Mayer, *Index Philoneus*, 247. See also Hengel, "Proseuche und Synagoge," 169; A. Kasher, "Synagogues as 'Houses of Prayer' and 'Holy Places,'" 210.

69. *Embassy* 311; *On Dreams* 2, 127. With respect to the Essenes, see Philo's *Every Good Man Is Free* 81; idem, *Special Laws* 3, 171.

70. *Embassy* 137; *Flaccus* 48. The term *ἱερός* in *Special Laws* 3, 171, probably refers to a pagan temple, contra Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 129–30. On the other hand, when Josephus refers to *ἱερά* in second century B.C.E. Egypt (quoting a letter from Onias to Ptolemy), he seems to mean Jewish religious buildings (temples? shrines? synagogues?); *Antiquities* 13, 65–66.

71. T Sukkah 4, 6 (p. 273); Y Sukkah 5, 1, 55a–b; B Sukkah 51b.



11. Plan of the Sardis synagogue.

seating]”? So that if a visitor comes he can [immediately] make contact with his trade, and thus he will be able to make a living [ומשמם פרנסה יוצאה].”<sup>72</sup>

According to the above tradition, this Alexandrian building was of colossal proportions. The statement that it could “hold twice the number of those who left Egypt” (i.e., 1.2 million people!) was, of course, never intended to be taken literally; it is a stock rabbinic phrase connoting a very large number of people.<sup>73</sup> In this case, the reference is to an assembly hall of such monumental size that kerchiefs were required in order to signal the congregation when to respond. The description of the golden chairs, each worth twenty-five talents, is probably exaggerated as well. Nevertheless, the above description is so detailed and unique that it perhaps ought not be rejected out of hand as totally fanciful, especially in light of the fact that archaeological excavations at Sardis have revealed a fourth-century and later synagogue building of monumental dimensions—its assembly hall and atrium measuring eighty meters in length (fig. 11).<sup>74</sup>

This rabbinic tradition immediately calls to mind the large Alexandrian synagogue that Philo describes in his narrative of the events of 38 c.e., and it is quite plausible that both the rabbinic tradition and Philo refer to the very same building. The Tosefta’s description of the main hall as a kind of basilica, *dyplastoon* (a stoa within a stoa or a double stoa), is compatible with the architectural traditions of the period. The hall may have had rows of columns, perhaps two deep on two or four sides, thus forming a series of aisles, examples of which can be seen in the Basilica Aemilia and the Basilica Julia in Rome.<sup>75</sup> Such

72. On this source, see the comments in Lieberman, *TK*, IV, 889–92; S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, 261–63; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, I, 284–85; A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 349–55. See also Gordon, “Basilica and the Stoa,” 359–62.

73. Lieberman, *TK*, IV, 890 n. 8.

74. Seager, “Building History,” 425; Seager and Kraabel, “Synagogue and the Jewish Community,” 169; While, *Social Origins*, 310–24; and below, Chap. 8.

75. Boethius and Ward-Perkins, *Etruscan and Roman Architecture*, 192–94. On monumental buildings in the East, particularly the Alexandrian *kaisareion*, see *ibid.*, 459–60.

a multi-aisled synagogue was discovered in Byzantine Gaza (seventh century C.E.).<sup>76</sup> As noted in Chap. 3, the first-century *proseuche* in Tiberias must also have been of large proportions if meetings of the city's residents could be conducted there instead of the city's stadium.<sup>77</sup> Another Tiberian synagogue of the third or fourth century (perhaps the same as the first-century one) was described in rabbinic sources in a similar fashion as the one in Alexandria, namely, as a *dyplastoon*.<sup>78</sup>

Regarding the synagogue or community elders mentioned in the above Toseftan tradition, the number is far from unusual. While "seventy" clearly has a symbolic ring, the fact is that this number was adopted by many Jewish leadership bodies during this period.<sup>79</sup> Rabbinic literature reports seventy (or seventy-one) members in the Jerusalem sanhedrin; Josephus appointed seventy leaders when organizing the Galilee in 66–67 C.E.; there were seventy prominent people who represented the Jews residing in Batanaea, and the Zealots appointed seventy members to a high court in Jerusalem during the revolt.<sup>80</sup>

From an archaeological perspective, the only evidence that could possibly relate to this Alexandrian tradition of seventy-one elders comes, as mentioned, from fourth-century Sardis. At the western end of the hall were three semicircular benches, clearly intended for people of rank within the congregation. These Sardis elders, who sat on benches facing eastward, toward the center of the hall and the Torah shrine (or shrines), also may have numbered seventy, as the building's excavators have estimated on the basis of the space available.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the number of leaders in these two communities may have been identical, although the seating arrangement in Sardis was different from that indicated by the individual Alexandrian *cathedrae* described in the Tosefta.

In the above-quoted Toseftan tradition, reference is made to a wooden platform (במב, *bima*) in the center of the hall that was used for the reading of Scriptures. Once again,

76. Ovadiah, "Synagogue at Gaza," 195.

77. Josephus, *Life* 92, 276–80, 331.

78. Midrash on Psalms 93, 8 (p. 208b).

79. Num. 11:16. On the council of elders (γέροντες) heading the Alexandrian community in the first century, see Philo, *Flaccus* 74; Schürer, *History*, III, 93–94; Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 227–33; M. Stern, "Jewish Community and Institutions," 168–69. For other representative bodies numbering seventy in the biblical period, see Judg. 9:2; II Kgs. 10:1.

80. M Sanhedrin 1, 6; *War* 2, 570; *Life* 14, 79; *War* 2, 482; *Life* 11, 56; and *War* 4, 336, respectively. Equally interesting is the fact that later on the Samaritans, too, had a governing council of seventy (lit., "Family of Seventy"), which was well established in Samaritan life at the time of Baba Rabba's reforms in the third century. See J. M. Cohen, *Samaritan Chronicle*, 70, 228–29; and below, Chap. 6. On the number "seventy" in later rabbinic sources, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, VII, 429.

81. Seager and Kraabel, "Synagogue and the Jewish Community," 169; Seager, "Building History," 426. Interestingly, this seating arrangement is very different from that prescribed in T Megillah 3, 21 (p. 360), where the elders faced the congregation with their backs to the holy, i.e., the Torah shrine or the direction of Jerusalem.

the finds at Sardis prove enlightening, as a stone table was found in the middle of the hall, toward its western end, and what may have been traces of a platform or canopy were found toward the middle.<sup>82</sup> This custom of having a table or *bima* in the center of the hall was thus not uncommon in synagogues of the Roman world. In synagogues of Second Temple Judaea, such as those at Gamla, Masada, Herodium, Qiryat Sefer, and Modi'in, the reading of Scriptures would also have been carried out in the center of the hall since the benches and columns on all four sides left no room for a platform at one end.<sup>83</sup> In third-century Dura Europos as well, benches on all four sides of the room would have required setting up a table or platform in the center of the hall. In fact, the final excavation report notes a number of depressions found in the floor in the center of the room, perhaps made by the legs of a platform that once stood there.<sup>84</sup>

One element of the above tradition that has proven as intriguing as it has elusive is the concluding section dealing with the seating arrangements in the synagogue. Each professional group seems to have sat separately. Why should professional affiliation have proven so critical in this synagogue? One can indeed point to the inscriptions in Rome, where at least one synagogue appears to have been organized around a professional group,<sup>85</sup> although most Jews, both in Rome and elsewhere, seem to have based their affiliation on other criteria.

Several scholars have attempted to place this Alexandrian synagogue in a setting that would explain the economic element in its seating arrangements. Krauss, followed by Fraser, has suggested that the building itself was a basilica-marketplace, a merchants hall used mainly for economic purposes but also for worship and judicial proceedings.<sup>86</sup> Alternatively, one might posit that this Alexandrian synagogue included members of all groups but that only the artisans—for whatever reason—sat in this fashion.

Once again, the Sardis synagogue may offer an interesting parallel. Located on the main street of the city, it stood adjacent to a row of shops, many of which appear to have been owned by Jews.<sup>87</sup> One side entrance of this synagogue even joined its atrium to these shops. Might there have been a similar situation in Alexandria, and might this in some way explain the unique seating arrangements specifically affecting the artisan class there?

Perhaps we ought to be looking elsewhere—to the non-Jewish world—for at least a

82. Seager and Kraabel, "Synagogue and the Jewish Community," 169–70.

83. See the articles of Yadin, Foerster, Gutman, and Ma'oz in L. Levine, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 19–41; and L. Levine, "Second Temple Synagogue," 10–19.

84. Kraeling, *Excavations at Dura: Synagogue*, 256.

85. Leon, *Jews of Ancient Rome*, 142–44.

86. S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, 261–63; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, I, 285. Goodenough (*Jewish Symbols*, II, 86) repeats this claim, although he is skeptical about the value of the entire tradition.

87. On representations of *menorot* on shops adjacent to the synagogue, see Seager and Kraabel, "Synagogue and the Jewish Community," 176–87; Hanfmann et al., "Roman and Late Antique Period," 166.

partial explanation of this phenomenon. There is a great deal of evidence, both literary and archaeological, attesting to highly structured and differentiated seating arrangements in Roman public spaces, e.g., theaters and amphitheaters. Even during the late Republic, but especially after Augustus, there were set places for different Roman social and political groupings, not to speak of distinctions among foreigners, *collegia*, soldiers, circus factions, women, and others.<sup>88</sup> It might well be, then, that as regards seating, the Alexandrian synagogue reflected current Roman practice in large places of assembly and that rabbinic tradition noted this fact in its description.

One final issue to be addressed concerns the historicity of the above-quoted Toseftan tradition. It is quite obvious that many phrases in this source recall descriptions of the Jerusalem Temple found in Josephus as well as elsewhere in rabbinic literature. On the Temple Mount, we are told, there was a large area enclosed by a double stoa (“a stoa within a stoa”), at one end of which was a basilica (i.e., a royal stoa) of colossal proportions.<sup>89</sup> The placing of the platform in the center of the Alexandrian synagogue and the custom of waving kerchiefs are likewise reminiscent of Temple practice. At the *Haqbel* celebration held in the Temple every seven years, a special wooden platform was constructed for the reading of the Torah;<sup>90</sup> whenever the high priest would officiate in the daily ritual, a Temple functionary (קֹדֵשׁ) would stand by the altar and signal by waving a kerchief.<sup>91</sup> Even the opening phrase of the above-quoted tradition (“Whoever has not seen the double stoa . . . of Alexandria has never in his life seen the glory of Israel”) is remarkably similar to the hyperboles occasionally used in rabbinic literature when introducing Temple-related matters.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, it is quite in place to ask whether these literary parallels do not, in effect, undermine the historical veracity of our source. Perhaps the transmitter of the Alexandrian synagogue description, R. Judah b. Ilai (or someone before him), had collected a series of phrases that originally related to the Temple and appended them to a description of the well-known Alexandrian synagogue, even though they had no basis in reality.<sup>93</sup>

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88. See Suetonius, *Augustus* 44. For a discussion of the various social groups, see Rawson, “Discrimina Ordinum: The Lex Julia Theatralis,” 83–114; Small, “Social Correlations to the Greek Cavea,” 85–93; Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, 218–26; Edmondson, “Dynamic Arena,” 81–111; Van Nijf, *Civic World*, 209–40. My thanks to Zeev Weiss for bringing several of these references to my attention. See also MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 71–79.

89. Y Sukkah 5, 1, 55a; Y Ta’anit 3, 11, 66d; B Sukkah 45a. See also Josephus, *War* 5, 190; idem, *Antiquities* 15, 396, 411–16.

90. M Sotah 7, 8.

91. M Tamid 7, 3.

92. For instance: “Whoever has not seen the Temple standing has never seen a magnificent building” —B Sukkah 51b; “Whoever has not seen Herod’s Temple has never seen a beautiful building” —B Bava Batra 4a.

93. The tendency to project descriptions of the Temple (not to speak of Temple practices) onto the synagogue is widespread in rabbinic literature. See, for example, R. Isaac’s assertion that the phrase *miq-*

Perhaps, but I think not. In the first place, why would someone (presumably in second-century Roman Palestine) want or need to invent such an exaggerated depiction? If it was, indeed, such a blatant fabrication, why would R. Judah or the editors of the Tosefta even bother to report it? Furthermore, the parallels noted above, from both Philo and Sardis, lend a measure of plausibility to the assumption that some such building might have existed in as powerful and wealthy a community as that of first-century Alexandria. The fact that there are so many allusions to the Jerusalem Temple in the description of this synagogue may not necessarily be due to literary style but rather to a historical reality resulting from either a common architectural tradition that influenced both Alexandrian and Jerusalem Jews or, what seems more likely, a conscious attempt by Alexandrian Jews to emulate the form and patterns of Herod's Temple in their large synagogue. It should be remembered that this seems to be what Onias IV did when building his temple in Leontopolis in the second century B.C.E.<sup>94</sup> There may be other indications of the adoption of Temple-related practices by Egyptian synagogues,<sup>95</sup> and if this was the case, then the Toseftan literary parallels point to a very significant historical reality: the imitation of some Temple-related architectural forms in at least one important Diaspora synagogue (see above, Chap. 3).<sup>96</sup>

### BERENICE (CYRENE)

Three important communal inscriptions relating to the synagogue were found in this North African city, and together they contain not a few surprises.<sup>97</sup> First and foremost is the very nature of these Greek inscriptions, which are decrees of the local Jewish *poli-*

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*dash me'at* in Ezek. 11:16 refers to the synagogue (B Megillah 29a). The difference, of course, is that in our case the reference relates to a particular place and time.

94. Josephus, *Antiquities* 12, 388; 13, 63, 67, 72; 20, 236; idem, *War* 1, 33. Cf., however, *ibid.*, 7, 427.

95. See A. Kasher, "Synagogues as 'Houses of Prayer' and 'Holy Places,'" 205–20; Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 233–54; Runesson, *Origins*, 436–59. Moreover, the claim that R. Judah was using a current Palestinian model anachronistically is difficult. It seems rather far-fetched, to say the least, that in the wake of the various unsuccessful rebellions and the resultant economic and social upheavals something as monumental as the building described here existed or was under construction in second-century Palestine. In all probability, Jews at that time would not have been able to afford such a structure, and the assumption that Galilean-type synagogues were being built around that time, in the mid second century, is no longer valid. Therefore, a claim for anachronism is hardly credible; see Krautheimer, "Constantinian Basilica," 123–24 and n. 22; Gutmann, "Ancient Synagogues: Archaeological Fact," 226–27; Fine, *This Holy Place*, 43–45.

96. T Sukkah 4, 6. This source was not cited by Binder in his *Into the Temple Courts*, which is unfortunate. Since one of his aims was to show Temple influence over synagogues everywhere, such a tradition might have been helpful. In any case, the thesis is very problematic in its own right. See above, Chap. 3.

97. On the history of the Jewish community of Cyrene generally, see Applebaum, *Jews and Greeks*, 130ff.; Hirschberg, *History of the Jews in North Africa*, I, 21–86.



*teuma* honoring various individuals who had benefited it in one way or another. These decrees not only refer to the same community but span a period of approximately sixty-five years, thus offering a repeated glimpse into the workings and concerns of this synagogue. Moreover, the inscriptions refer to the synagogue as an institution (or, as we shall see, they also use an alternative term) and therefore furnish precious information in this regard.<sup>98</sup>

The earliest of these inscriptions, discovered several centuries ago, is the most poorly preserved of the three. It records a resolution of the Jewish community (referred to here as a *politeuma*) and its archons to honor one Decimus Valerius Dionysios in gratitude for his benefactions. The following is the text of the inscription:

In the year [?] 3, on the 5th of Phamenoth, in the archonship of Arimmas son of . . . , Dorion son of Ptolemaios, Zelaios son of Gnaius, Ariston son of Araxa . . . , Sarapion son of Andromachos, Nikias son of . . . , . . . son of Simon. Whereas Dec[i]mus Valerius Dionysios son of Gaius . . . remains a noble and good man in word and deed . . . , doing whatever good he can, both in a public capacity and as a private individual, to each one of the citizens, and in particular plastering the floor of the amphitheater and painting its walls, the archons and the *politeuma* of the Jews at Berenice resolved to register him in the . . . of the . . . and [resolved] that he be exempted from liturgies of every kind; and likewise [they resolved] to crown him with an olive wreath and a woolen fillet, mentioning his name at each assembly and at the New Moon. After engraving this resolution on a stele of Parian marble the archons are to set it in the most visible place in the amphitheater.

All [the stones cast were] white [i.e., the decision was unanimous]. Dec[i]mus Valerius Dionysios son of Gaius plastered the floor of the amphitheater and painted [its walls] at his own expense as a contribution to the *politeuma*.<sup>99</sup>

Dating to the end of the first century B.C.E.,<sup>100</sup> this inscription is remarkable on a number of counts. We learn that the Jewish community was led by archons and organized as a *politeuma*.<sup>101</sup> At one stage it was assumed that this term reflected the usual form of Jewish communal organization in the Greco-Roman Diaspora; however, this view has been called into question of late, particularly with regard to the Alexandrian and the larger Egyptian community.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the evidence is clear-cut, at least from Berenice;

98. Published originally by Roux and Roux ("Décret de politeuma des juifs," 281-96), these inscriptions have been analyzed by Reynolds ("Inscriptions," 242-47) and Lüderitz (*Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika*, 147-58). See also G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents*, IV, 202-9; White, *Social Origins*, 296-300; Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 257-63.

99. Translation based on G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents*, IV, 203, with some changes.

100. Roux and Roux ("Décret de politeuma des juifs," 288-89) date this inscription to 8-6 B.C.E., assuming the missing letter is *iota* (= 10) or, more likely, *kappa* (= 20) and that the era is that of Actium (31 B.C.E.).

101. Cf., however, the problematic suggestion by Lüderitz ("What Is the *Politeuma*?" 183-225), who defines *politeuma* here as the Jewish oligarchy or ruling body, and not the community as a whole.

102. See, for example, Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, I, 6, 9, 32, 61; Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 225-

such a form of communal organization did, in fact, exist there. It is well attested throughout antiquity, in all parts of the Diaspora, that archons often stood at the head of a Jewish community.<sup>103</sup> Four of the six preserved personal names of these archons are Greek; of the patronyms, four are in Greek, two are entirely missing, and one (Simon) is of Jewish derivation.

The name of the honoree, Decimus Valerius Dionysios, son of Gaius, bears a Roman stamp, and he appears to have been a Roman citizen. If this is the case, then a number of other issues connected with his name are unclear: Why is no tribal status noted? Was his father also a Roman citizen? Was he a freedman? What was his connection (official or otherwise) to the Jewish community?<sup>104</sup>

In fact, it appears certain that Decimus was a member of the *politeuma*, since the decree notes that he was to be exempt from communal liturgies. The honor accorded him consisted of an olive crown and a fillet, and the mention of his name at each “assembly” and on the New Moon. This “assembly” may well refer to the Sabbath gathering, well known in first-century sources. However, taking special note of a monthly meeting is unusual, as New Moon celebrations are unknown elsewhere in the Diaspora.<sup>105</sup>

The reference to Decimus’ significant impact on many people (the citizens of Berenice generally? the Jewish community only?) may have been due to his position as a public official. Specifically, he is recognized as having contributed to the Jewish community by plastering the floor of the amphitheater and painting its walls.

One of Decimus’ benefactions, the painting of walls, is most intriguing. The Greek word *ξωγραφέω* conveys two possible meanings: to paint generally or to paint figures (human or animal). If the former was intended, then the paintings may have been similar to more or less contemporary ones at Pompeii, Jerusalem, or Masada.<sup>106</sup> If the latter was intended, then the amphitheater would have boasted more striking decorations (figural images?); were it a synagogue, as will be argued below, then the decorations might have been similar to what has been found in other Diaspora synagogues, such as the third-century walls at Dura Europos or the sixth-century mosaic floor at Hammam Lif in North Africa.<sup>107</sup> At this juncture, however, certitude is elusive.

33, 359–60; A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 29ff. See the recent discussion and bibliography on this issue in Zuckerman, “Hellenistic *Politeumata* and the Jews,” 171–85; Hönigman, “Birth of a Diaspora,” 93–98; Lüderitz, “What Is the *Politeuma*?” 183–225.

103. See below, Chap. 11.

104. See Reynolds, “Inscriptions,” 246–47; Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika*, 151.

105. The juxtaposition of regular (i.e., Sabbath) meetings and those of the New Moon in this and the following inscription (see below) is intriguing, but elusive; see Judith 8:6; McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue*, 11–42.

106. *Pompeii*: Brion, *Pompeii and Herculaneum*, 201–30. *Jerusalem*: Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 81ff. *Masada*: *NEAEHL*, III, 973ff., and generally Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology—Israel*, 65–83.

107. See below, Chap. 8. On the murals in the first-century synagogue at Acmonia (Asia Minor), see

Perhaps the most engaging detail in this inscription is the thrice-mentioned term “amphitheater”: To what does it refer? Was it a civic building that served all citizens as a place of sports, entertainment, or assembly? Or was this the synagogue of the Jewish *politeuma*? Those who have addressed the issue have formulated three distinct approaches. Schürer, Goodenough, Caputo, Gabba, Horsley, and Zuckerman assume that this was a regular Roman amphitheater;<sup>108</sup> Robert, Applebaum, Cohen, M. Stern, Rajak, and Barclay assume it was a Jewish public building;<sup>109</sup> Hirschberg, Roux, Reynolds, Lüderitz, and White are less committal.<sup>110</sup>

The major arguments in favor of regarding the amphitheater as a civic building are as follows: the term itself suggests that interpretation; the decorations involved are attested in public entertainment buildings elsewhere in North Africa; Jews are known to have frequented theaters and amphitheaters and thus may well have contributed funds to them; the inscription also notes Decimus Valerius Dionysios’ benevolence to all citizens of the city; the Jews of Cyrene were quite hellenized, and therefore erecting a stele in a civic building might constitute but one more example of their acculturation; the amphitheater was probably a well-enough-established institution in the late first century B.C.E. as to preclude applying the name to a different type of building.

On the other hand, the following considerations argue for identifying the amphitheater as a specifically Jewish building: Why should a prominent Jew have been responsible for or have seen fit to repair and plaster the floor of a city amphitheater? Moreover, the usual Roman amphitheater is not known to have had plastered floors. Would the Jews have been able to place their own stele in a civic institution, and why would they have wanted to place their communal inscriptions in a public arena? And if Dionysios’ beneficence was not related to them, why would the Jewish community have honored him for it? The amphitheater was still not a functionally well-defined institution at this time, and consequently the name could well have been used for other institutions, in this case a synagogue.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the last lines of the inscription indicate that Decimus Valerius

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below. The same root, *ζωγράφος*, appears on a third- or fourth-century sarcophagus from Rome to designate the profession of Eudoxius (Noy, *JJWE*, II, no. 277).

108. Schürer, *History*, III, 104; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, II, 143–44; XII, 52 n. 11; Caputo, “Nota sugli edifici teatrali della Cirenaica,” 283–85; Gabba, *Iscrizioni Greche e Latine*, 63ff.; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents*, IV, 208–9; Zuckerman, “Hellenistic *Politeumata* and the Jews,” 179.

109. Robert, *Gladiateurs*, 34 n. 1; Applebaum, *Jews and Greeks*, 164–67; idem, “Organization of Jewish Communities,” 486–88; S. J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 109–10; M. Stern, “Jewish Diaspora,” 135; Rajak, “Jews as Benefactors,” 28–30; Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 237; Baldwin Bowsky, “M. Tittius,” 507; Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 140–45.

110. Hirschberg, *History of the Jews in North Africa*, I, 26; Roux and Roux, “Décret de politeuma des juifs,” 290–92; Reynolds, “Inscriptions,” 247; Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika*, 155; White, *Social Origins*, 297 n. 36. Cf., however, Lüderitz’s comments in “What Is the *Politeuma*?” 213, where he seems much more comfortable with a Jewish identification.

111. On the architectural fluidity of the Roman amphitheater prior to the Flavian era and the building

Dionysios' gift was given to the *politeuma*, thus confirming that this was most probably a Jewish building. A second inscription from Berenice (see below) likewise associates the Jewish community with an amphitheater, further reinforcing this connection. If, on the other hand, the amphitheater was a civic institution, then why were the Jews using it regularly for their communal purposes?<sup>112</sup>

Certitude in this matter is impossible. We read of no remotely similar occurrence elsewhere in antiquity. As we are dealing here with obviously Jewish communal matters, the use of the term "amphitheater" for a Jewish building is most unusual, to say the least. However, to assume that this inscription refers to honors bestowed by the Jews on one of their own in return for benefactions to the city's amphitheater, and then to call this a contribution (*ἐπίδομα*) to the *politeumata*, would require an enormous stretch of the imagination.

It seems, therefore, that we are indeed dealing here with a Jewish institution.<sup>113</sup> We cannot be sure why exactly it was called an amphitheater. The most likely explanation is that the name was related to the shape of the building. The word *ἀμφιθέατρον* seems to indicate a circular or elliptical structure where the audience sits in the round, or, per Dionysios of Halicarnassus, it could refer to a U-shaped building with seating on three sides.<sup>114</sup> Serving as a meeting place for the community, this amphitheater qua synagogue had to have adequate seating arrangements. We possess no information regarding its location in the city. Applebaum once suggested a site outside the city wall to the south, but later retracted this in light of subsequent excavations.<sup>115</sup>

The second Berenice inscription, from 24–25 C.E.,<sup>116</sup> contains a further resolution of

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of the colosseum, see Golvin, *L'amphithéâtre romain*, I, 268–72. Humphrey ("Amphitheatrical Hippo-Stadia," 122) writes: "In the Late Republic and early Empire, the terminology for Roman entertainment buildings, and especially for the building that we would later know as the 'amphitheater,' was still in flux." Welch, in "Roman Amphitheatres Revived," 273, notes: "The Colosseum canonized the Roman amphitheatre as an architectural form. Amphitheatres securely dated after it (e.g., Capua) self-consciously refer to it in the same way that circuses throughout the empire looked back to the Circus Maximus." On the early evolution of the amphitheater, however, Welch adopts a different approach than that of Golvin; see idem, "Arena in Late-Republican Italy," 69.

112. On the other hand, theaters, amphitheaters, and stadiums were often used for meetings of the citizenry as a whole, as in Alexandria—Josephus, *War* 2, 490–91; Antioch—*ibid.*, 7, 47; Ephesus—Acts 19:29; Tiberias—Josephus, *Life* 331.

113. See M. Stern, "Jewish Diaspora," 135.

114. See, for example, his description of the old Circus Maximus as a U-shaped building in *Roman Antiquities* 3, 68, 3; and comments by Cary, LCL, II, 242–43 n. 2. See also Humphrey, "Amphitheatrical Hippo-Stadia," 122–23. It is interesting to note that in the fourth century C.E. Epiphanius speaks of Samaritans imitating the Jews by building a synagogue "which is shaped like a theater and thus is open to the sky" (*Panarion* 80, 1, 6).

115. Applebaum, "Jewish Community," 159–62; idem, *Jews and Greeks*, 194.

116. For an earlier dating, see Baldwin Bowsky, "M. Tittius," 504–6.

the community—this time in the name of nine archons and the *politeuma* at large—taken on the festival of Sukkot. The inscription notes the honors bestowed upon a Roman official, Marcus Tittius, for his support of the Jewish community, as well as for his kindness to the Greek citizens of the city.

Year 55. Phaoph 25. At the gathering of the Festival of Tabernacles during the terms of office of the archons:

Cleandros son of Stratonicos

Euphranor son of Ariston

Sosigenes son of Sosippos

Andromachos son of Andromachos

Marcus Laelius Onasion son of Apollonios

Philonides son of Hagemon

Autochles son of Zenon

Sonicos son of Theodotos

Josephos son of Straton

Since Marcus Tittius<sup>117</sup> son of Sextus [from the tribe of] Aemilia, a goodly and worthy man, who has assumed the responsibility of government in public affairs and who has exercised management of these matters benevolently and rightly, and has always displayed in his conduct a gentle character on all occasions; and not only does he give of himself unstintingly in these matters to those citizens [of the city generally] who entreat him in private, but also to the Jews of our *politeuma*, publicly and privately, he has been supportive in his governance and has not ceased, in his own noble goodness, behaving in a worthy manner. Now, therefore, the archons and *politeuma* of the Jews in Berenice have decided to praise him by name and dedicate to him at each assembly and new moon [celebration] a wreath of olive branches and a woolen fillet; and [it has been decided] that the archons are to record this resolution on a stele of Parian marble and set it up in the most prominent place in the amphitheater.

All [the stones cast] were white.<sup>118</sup>

The dating of this document seems certain: the year 55 apparently relates to the Actium era, i.e., 24–25 C.E.<sup>119</sup> The document is clearly a Jewish one. It begins with a list of archons and a decree taken on the Sukkot holiday.<sup>120</sup> The benefactions of Marcus Tittius to the Jews may have been appreciably more significant than those he bestowed on the Greeks; at least the Jews seem to have thought so. That such a declaration was made by the Jew-

117. On the spelling of this name, see Reynolds, “Inscriptions,” 245. On the honoree, see Baldwin Bowsky, “M. Tittius,” 495ff.

118. For the Greek text, see the references in note 98.

119. However, Lüderitz (“What Is the *Politeuma*?” 212) has suggested an earlier date—43 B.C.E., as has Baldwin Bowsky—13 B.C.E. (“M. Tittius,” 504–6).

120. Might this Sukkot meeting time be related to a reference in a later Christian source, stating that Jewish archons were elected annually in September (Tishri)? See Schürer, *History*, III, 99; and below, Chap. 8. See also the reference to Sukkot by Plutarch (*Quaestiones Convivales*, IV, 6, 2 (*GLA* 77, I, 557); as well as Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church*, 235 n. 61.

ish community at its regular weekly (?) and monthly meetings in the amphitheater once again suggests that this was a Jewish building.

The inscription provides clear evidence of the salutary rapport enjoyed by the Jewish community with this Roman official. Moreover, the community's willingness to publicly proclaim these excellent relations, orally and in writing, is striking evidence of its self-confidence and rapport vis-à-vis the authorities. The fact that the favors bestowed by Marcus Tittius do not appear to have been at the expense of, or opposed by, the local citizenry but were part of his overall policy reinforces the impression that—at this juncture, at least—the Jews were on good terms with their Greek neighbors and Rome's representatives. This had not always been the case, as a letter from Marcus Agrippa to the *polis* of Cyrene some four decades earlier attests.<sup>121</sup>

The use of wreaths and fillets indicates the imitation of the Greek custom in bestowing honors, as does dedicating a stele in a public building. There is no more striking evidence of this acculturation than the names of the nine archons and their fathers. Of the twenty names, nineteen are Greek or Roman and only one (Josephos) is Jewish. It is noteworthy that these Greek names (as in the other two inscriptions) were popular in pagan Cyrene.<sup>122</sup> Together with the Greek language, the other elements in this inscription—the year and month, the voting process (casting white stones), its formulary announcement, the designation *politeuma*, and the ways in which honor was bestowed—all point to a community comfortably ensconced in its larger Greco-Roman milieu.<sup>123</sup>

Once again, we are informed of the community's appointed times for honoring Tittius. It would seem that the regular assembly was on the Sabbath, and additional meetings were held at the beginning of each month. At least part of these assemblies undoubtedly included a liturgical element; to what extent, if at all, these gatherings dealt with "secular" communal matters is unknown. If they did, then such a combination would be reminiscent of Josephus' account of events in Tiberias at the outbreak of the revolt in 66 C.E.<sup>124</sup> It is of interest that major gatherings of the community took place on the Sukkot festival, when important decisions such as the one recorded in the above inscription were made.

A third inscription, from 55 C.E., commemorates a series of donations made by at least eighteen individuals (part of the slab is broken and part is missing) for restoring their synagogue (here referred to as a *συναγωγή*):

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121. Josephus, *Antiquities* 16, 160–61, 169–70; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World*, 273–80. Hirschberg's suggestion, that Tittius was honored because he implemented the Imperial edicts recorded by Josephus, is problematic owing to the time gap between the decree and the writing of the inscription; see his *History of the Jews in North Africa*, I, 25–26.

122. Reynolds, "Inscriptions," 244–45; Applebaum, "Jewish Community," 163.

123. See Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, II, 484 and n. 781.

124. *Life* 276–303; and above, Chap. 3.

The year 2 of Nero Claudius Caesar Drusius Germanicus Imperator on 6 Choiak:

It has been decided by the community [*συναγωγῆ*] of Jews in Berenice that those donating towards the restoration of the synagogue building [*συναγωγῆ*] be inscribed on a stele of Parian marble:

Zenion son of Zoilos	archon	10 dr[achmae]
Isidoros son of Dositheos	archon	10 dr.
Dositheos son of Ammonios	archon	10 dr.
Pratis son of Jonathan	archon	10 dr.
Karnedas son of Cornelius	archon	10 dr.
Heracleides son of Heracleides	archon	10 dr.
Thaliarchos son of Dositheos	archon	10 dr.
Sosibios son of Jason	archon	10 dr.
Pratomedes son of Socrates	archon	10 dr.
Antigonos son of Straton	archon	10 dr.
Kartisthenes son of Archias	priest	10 dr.
Lysanias son of Lysanias		25 dr.
Zenodoros son of Theuphilos		28 dr.
Mar . . . [son of]		25 dr.
Alexander son of Euphranor		5 dr.
Isidora daughter of Serapion		5 dr.
Zosima daughter of Terpolios		5 dr.
Polon son of Dositheos		5 dr. <sup>125</sup>

Compared with the two previous inscriptions, this one is unique in a number of ways. The list of donors reveals a wealth of names unmatched in the other Cyrenian inscriptions. Once again, Greek names predominate, with many characteristic Greek Cyrenian (Karnedas, Kartisthenes, Pratis, Pratomedes), Egyptian (Ammonios, Serapion), Roman (Cornelius), and Hebrew (Jonathan) names.

Of the eighteen donors, the first ten are archons—as compared to seven and nine in the two earlier inscriptions—a factor that may indicate growth in the local Jewish community or perhaps only an administrative reorganization that had taken place in the three decades between the second and third inscriptions. Either of these alternatives is possible, although the latter option is supported by the fact that the word *synagoge* appears twice here, once denoting the community (instead of the previously used term, *politeuma*) and once with reference to the building (instead of amphitheater). The above terms (*politeuma*-synagogue; amphitheater-synagogue) may have been synonymous,<sup>126</sup> and thus no great significance is to be attributed to the change in nomenclature.

125. For the Greek text, see above, note 98; and Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs*, no. 100. See Reynolds, "Inscriptions," 244; Applebaum, "Jewish Community," 163 and esp. n. 152.

126. See A. Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 181.

It is less likely that these terms refer to two distinct Jewish frameworks existing side by side in the city.<sup>127</sup> We can only speculate as to the reasons for the community's decision to change its nomenclature. Was it assuming a more "Jewish" posture; i.e., were these new terms now considered more Jewishly identifiable and significant? This line of reasoning, however, is not borne out by the names of the community leaders or the language of the inscription, where the Greek component remains strong. Perhaps the Jews' right to be called a *politeuma* was revoked? Was the term "amphitheater" for the building now associated more with a sports arena and thus became inappropriate for a Jewish public edifice? It may also be the case that the Jewish community underwent some far-reaching changes—internally and externally—in the first century C.E.; however, any such changes remain unknown.<sup>128</sup> In any case, we can assume rather confidently that in all three inscriptions the main body of Berenice Jewry, and not some marginal group, is the subject at hand; each appears to speak on behalf of the city's entire Jewish community.

The third inscription also raises several points of interest with regard to the people and sums of money mentioned. First among the non-archons on the list is a priest, perhaps owing to his lineage and prominent status in the community; this is reminiscent of Philo's reference to a priest presiding over Sabbath instruction as well as of Jerusalem's Theodotos inscription.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, several Jewish women are mentioned as donors, a phenomenon attested for first-century Asia Minor and one that recurs with greater frequency in later antiquity, especially in the Diaspora.<sup>130</sup> Finally, the sums of money recorded are generally quite modest, although it is impossible to know whether this is significant regarding the economic and political status of the Jewish community in the mid-fifties.

## ITALY

### Ostia

Although the Ostia synagogue as it stands today dates from the fourth century C.E., there are several earlier stages in the building's history.<sup>131</sup> Most of the extant building existed for at least several centuries: the main hall, adjacent areas to the east, the *tricladium*, and parts of other walls. All underwent extensive renovations over time, including those sections that were added to the original structure. Nevertheless, there is gen-

127. Perhaps, as in second-century B.C.E. Memphis, where the terms *politeuma* and *synagoge* appear simultaneously; see Rappaport, "Iduméens en Egypte," 73–82. See also Applebaum, *Jews and Greeks*, 162 n. 149.

128. See Applebaum, "New Jewish Inscription," 172.

129. See above; and Chap. 3.

130. See below, Chap. 14.

131. On the earlier stages of this building, see Squarciapino, *Synagogue of Ostia*, 25; Fortis, *Jews and Synagogues*, 124–25; Kraabel, "Diaspora Synagogue," 498–99; White, *Building God's House*, 69; idem, *Social Origins*, 379–82; idem, "Synagogue and Society," 27–38.



relations between the Jews and their neighbors, with the latter, in turn, attempting to reduce (if not eliminate) the Jews' preferred status. In light of these documents, the location of the Delian Jewish community in a relatively isolated part of the island takes on additional significance. Not only could it have served Jewish interests to be somewhat isolated, but it may already reflect (or have subsequently contributed to) a degree of social alienation, and perhaps even hostility, between the Jewish and pagan residents on the island.

## ASIA MINOR AND GREECE

We are probably as well informed about the Jewish communities and their synagogues in Asia Minor and Greece as in any other part of the Diaspora.<sup>170</sup> Not only does the pre-70 material begin to rival that of Egypt, but archaeological data (buildings and inscriptions) from this area supply extensive information about these communities in Late Antiquity as well.

These two regions will be treated together since the sources of information are the same for both. Josephus and Acts supply the bulk of data for the pre-70 era, while practically all of the archaeological remains come from Late Antiquity alone. The material below is organized by source and not by individual locale.

### Josephus

Josephus has preserved a series of Imperial edicts relating to the first century B.C.E., each reaffirming the rights and privileges of various Jewish communities in Asia Minor in the face of local opposition and hostility.<sup>171</sup> Each edict presumes that the Jews were

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twentieth day of the month of Thargelion, response of the magistrates. The legate Marcus Piso, when resident in our city, having been placed in charge of the recruiting of soldiers, summoned us and a considerable number of citizens and ordered that if there were any Jews who were Roman citizens, no one should bother them about military service, inasmuch as the consul Lucius Cornelius Lentulus had exempted the Jews from military service in consideration of their religious scruples. You must therefore obey the magistrate." Similar to this was the decree that the people of Sardis passed. See Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights*, 168-72.

170. On the numerous Jewish communities in this area, see, inter alia, Philo, *Embassy*, 245, 281; M. Stern, "Jewish Diaspora," 143-55; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 5-36; Levinskaya, *Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, 137-66; Lichtenberger, "Organisationsformen," 23-27.

171. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14, 213-64; 16, 160-73. On these edicts, see Schürer, *History*, III, 114ff.; Juster, *Les Juifs*, I, 391ff.; II, 1-27; La Piana, "Foreign Groups," 348-51; Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 120-43; Applebaum, "Legal Status," 420-63; Moehring, "*Acta pro Judaeis*," 124-58; Rajak, "Was There a Roman Charter?" 107-23; eadem, "Jewish Rights," 19-35; Pucci Ben Zeev, "Caesar and Jewish Law," 28-37; eadem, "Jewish Rights," 39-53; eadem, *Jewish Rights*, passim.

These decrees stem from the basic recognition extended by Julius Caesar to the Jews in the Roman Empire, in no small part in gratitude for the support he received from Antipater, Hyrcanus II, and the Jews of Judaea in his struggle against Pompey (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14, 211-12). At the same time, these

well organized, having formed their own communal framework, and possessed their own social and religious mores (see below). Undoubtedly, this also meant the presence of a place of worship, i.e., a *proseuche* or synagogue, although, admittedly, in only a few of these edicts is such a place specifically mentioned. It is to this evidence that we now turn.

Josephus records a decree regarding the Jews of Halicarnassus,<sup>172</sup> in which it is carefully noted that the community was assured the inviolability of their holy days and gatherings: “We have also decreed that those men and women who so wish may observe their Sabbaths and perform their sacred rights in accordance with the Jewish laws, and many built places of prayer [*proseuchai*]<sup>173</sup> near the sea, in accordance with their native custom.”

Of particular interest here is the explicit statement that many Jews built synagogues near bodies of water, a phenomenon we have already encountered in Egypt, Delos, and Ostia.<sup>174</sup> A similar reference appears in Acts.<sup>175</sup> The reason for this practice is not entirely clear, although one obvious possibility is the need to be close to water for purification purposes, a practice already attested in the *Letter of Aristeeas*.<sup>176</sup> There may also have been other reasons for this preference, e.g., the Jews’ desire to distance themselves from the pagan city generally in order to avoid, or at least reduce, tensions with their neighbors stemming from their different practices and behavior, or to allow for a less “polluted” worship environment, far from pagan places of idolatry.<sup>177</sup>

Josephus has preserved several decrees regarding Sardis that are likewise pertinent to our discussion. One document explicitly notes that the Jews had a place (*τοπός*) where they decided their affairs, being organized, as they were, in an association (*σύννοδον*) governed by ancestral laws.<sup>178</sup> In another decree, the Jews were granted both the right to orga-

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privileges also continued the earlier Hellenistic tradition of religious and ethnic tolerance with regard to the Jews. Josephus makes this claim in an exaggerated fashion on several occasions; see his *Antiquities* 12, 119–20; 16, 160–61; and below.

172. *Antiquities* 14, 258.

173. E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 259, 341 n. 26; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights*, 206–16.

174. See above; see also Lauterbach, “Tashlik,” 207ff.; Goldin, *Studies in Midrash*, 346.

175. Acts 16:13. See also Philo, *Flaccus* 122–23.

176. *Letter of Aristeeas* 304–6. The idea that the sea was valid for purification purposes is reflected in the following: “All seas are valid as a *miqveh* . . . so [says] R. Meir. R. Judah says: The Great Sea is valid as a *miqveh*. . . . R. Yosi says: All seas render clean by virtue of being flowing waters” (M Miqva’ot 5, 4); and “And it happened that Rabban Gamaliel and Onqelos the Proselyte would come to Ashkelon, and Rabban Gamaliel immersed himself in a bath and Onqelos the Proselyte in the sea. R. Joshua b. Qabusai said: I was with them and Rabban Gamaliel immersed himself in the sea” (T Miqva’ot 6, 3 [p. 658]).

Regarding the waters of a river, see T Makhshirin 2, 12 (p. 674); T Miqva’ot 4, 5 (p. 656). See also E. P. Sanders, *Judaism*, 223–24; Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights*, 215–16.

177. See Mekhilta of R. Ishmael, Bo, 1 (p. 2); and Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues*, 49ff., where being near water is associated with the rabbinic concept of “impurity of gentile lands.” See also Alon, *Jews, Judaism in the Classical World*, 146–89.

178. *Antiquities* 14, 235.

nize their communal life, including self-adjudication, and a place (*τοπός*) for the practice of their ancestral customs, which included prayer and sacrifice.<sup>179</sup>

A general edict of Augustus to the Jews of Asia Minor from 12 B.C.E. is of especial importance: “And if anyone is caught stealing sacred books or sacred monies from a Sabbath-house [*σαββατεῖον*] or a banquet hall [*ἀνδρών*], he shall be regarded as sacrilegious, and his property shall be confiscated to the public treasury of the Romans.”<sup>180</sup> Many, if not most, of the synagogues had a banquet hall in addition to a place for Sabbath assembly. Sacred communal meals are documented in a number of first-century Jewish contexts (Pharisaic *havurot*, Essenes [Qumran], Therapeutae, and the early church), mostly in connection with religious associations. However, it would appear that such communal meals were not foreign to the wider Jewish community, as reflected in the decree regarding Delian Jews.<sup>181</sup> Such banquet halls could have served other functions as well, and smaller facilities may have consisted of a single room utilized for several purposes. Finally, the reference to a synagogue as a repository for sacred books and sacred monies is invaluable. These monies were probably donated for local use as well as for the Jerusalem Temple, a practice that, as we have seen, was widespread among first-century Diaspora communities.<sup>182</sup>

### New Testament

As was the case with the Second Temple Judaean synagogue, the New Testament has preserved invaluable material relating to the Diaspora synagogue in Asia Minor and Greece. The account in Acts of Paul’s journeys attests to the density of Jewish settlement and the development of Christianity throughout the eastern Mediterranean in general and in Asia Minor and Greece in particular. In all, Acts mentions the synagogue nineteen times, almost always referring to the institution as “synagogue,” with but one exception, Philippi, where the term *proseuche* is used. Acts informs us of synagogues in Damascus

179. Ibid., 260: “they may, in accordance with their accepted custom, come together and have a communal life and adjudicate suits among themselves, and that a place be given them in which they may gather together with their wives and children and offer their ancestral prayers and sacrifices to God.” The reference to Jewish sacrifices is enigmatic; see below, Chap. 5, note 33.

180. Josephus, *Antiquities* 16, 164. See M. Stern, “Jewish Diaspora,” 146. On a similar term in Syriac, בית שבתא דיהודי, see Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, I, col. 497. There is also a reference to a *sabbateion* in an early second-century inscription from Thyatira in Asia Minor, where a synagogue is probably intended (Frey, *CIJ*, II, no. 752; van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 150–51). For a reference to a “house of the Sabbath” in Rabbat Moab that was destroyed by Barsauma between 419 and 422 C.E., see Nau, “Deux épisodes,” 188. On the *andron* generally, see C. Roberts et al., “Gild of Zeus,” 47–48.

181. See above, note 167.

182. *Antiquities* 14, 213–16. Regarding the sending of money to Jerusalem by the Jews of Ephesus, see Philo, *Embassy* 315. On the Jerusalem church and contributions from various “diaspora” churches, see, inter alia, Rom. 15:25–26; I Cor. 16:1–4; Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 110.

(9:2, 20), Salamis (13:5), Antioch of Pisidia (13:14), Iconium (14:1), Thessalonica (17:1), Berea (17:10), Athens (17:17), Corinth (18:7, 8), Ephesus (18:19ff.), and Philippi (16:13).

The frequent reference to synagogues in Acts is not fortuitous. According to Luke (author of Acts), this institution was a critical factor in the spread of Christianity in its early stages. Almost every reference to a synagogue is related to Paul's missionary activity;<sup>183</sup> at first he addresses the Jews and only later the gentiles. The pattern appearing in Acts is almost inexorable: visit to a synagogue, effective preaching, Jewish hostility, and expulsion.<sup>184</sup> This recurrent phenomenon goes to the heart of Acts' theological and political message. Paul is rebuffed time and again by the Jews, and only then devotes himself fully and unequivocally to the gentile mission. The theological basis of this schema is clearly spelled out in Acts 13:46: "And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from yourselves, thereby judging yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the gentiles.'" <sup>185</sup>

Much has been written about the historical reliability of Acts—from the more skeptical to the largely accepting. Theological agendas aside, one may assume that the specific events reported, especially those relating to the synagogue, are largely credible. The author was certainly familiar with the Jewish Diaspora and wrote for Christian Diaspora communities. It is hard to imagine that he would invent accounts for a population that knew a great deal about the synagogue, its workings, and Paul's activities. At the very least, even were one to doubt the specific details included in Acts, one would have to admit that such events could well have taken place, even if not precisely in the manner recorded.

Many interesting and important details regarding the synagogue emerge from the accounts in Acts. For instance, the antiquity of the custom of reading Scriptures in the synagogue on the Sabbath is considered here, as in other sources, to derive from Moses himself (Acts 15:21). In fact, it is Sabbath worship that regularly provides the setting for Paul's encounters with the local community (e.g., Acts 13:42; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). Clearly, the Sabbath was the primary occasion for the community to congregate, particularly in a worship context.<sup>186</sup> As noted, this phenomenon may be alluded to in two Berenice inscrip-

183. The one exception is the reference to an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos, who spoke in the synagogue of Ephesus (Acts 18:26).

184. So, for example, Acts 9:20–22; 13:44–48; 14:1–6; 14:19; 17:1–9, 16ff.; 18:18–21.

185. See also Kee, "Jews in Acts," 183–95. Despite a rather skeptical approach to the historical validity of many New Testament traditions concerning the synagogue, McKay (*Sabbath and Synagogue*, 165–71) seems to accept most of Acts' accounts as reliably reflecting the synagogues that Luke knew. See also A. F. Segal, *Paul*, 267–73.

186. Regarding the Christians of Berea, Acts notes that some Jews would gather daily to study Scriptures, particularly in response to Paul's message. Clearly, the intent here is to describe an emerging Christian community whose fervor and commitment led to daily study, reminiscent of the practice among

tions, where the regular (as opposed to monthly) gathering seems to refer to the Sabbath, as well as in Josephus' reference to the *σαββατεῖον* of Asia Minor Jewry.<sup>187</sup>

While most cities appear to have had one synagogue, the plural "synagogues" is used on several occasions, probably reflecting a large local Jewish population that required more than one building.<sup>188</sup> The only synagogue official specifically named in these accounts is the *archisynagogos*. In one instance, this official invited Paul to speak to the congregation in Antioch of Pisidia following the reading of the Torah and Prophets; clearly the position entailed a degree of responsibility and authority.<sup>189</sup> In a second instance, Acts notes that Crispus, the archisynagogue of the Corinthian synagogue, became a believer (18:8), and it is not surprising that his whole household followed suit. However, the fact that immediately afterwards many other Corinthians, having heard Paul, began to believe in Jesus and were then baptized may attest to the impact of Crispus' conversion on his fellow-citizens and thus to his prominence in the community generally.

Two synagogue scenes described in Acts are especially noteworthy. One (16:12–13) has to do with Paul's first encounter with the Jews of Philippi in Macedonia. He came to the city in midweek and waited several days for the Sabbath and his first encounter with the local Jewish community. He then went to the riverside, "where we supposed there was a place of prayer [*proseuche*],"<sup>190</sup> and there met a group of women. The presence of women, some of high standing, in Paul's audience at Berea is also noted.<sup>191</sup>

Acts singles out gentiles, both men and women, as also having frequented Diaspora synagogues.<sup>192</sup> The attraction of many pagans to Judaism in antiquity is well documented.<sup>193</sup> Although the nature of this missionary phenomenon has been vigorously debated of late, the issues in dispute concern its extent in the first century and the degree of active missionizing on the part of the Jews.<sup>194</sup> What is to be noted in the present con-

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various sects such as the Essenes, Therapeutae, and, undoubtedly, the Pharisees. The author of Acts describes these Jews as "more noble" than those of nearby Thessalonica (Acts 17:11).

187. *Antiquities* 16, 164.

188. Acts 9:2, 20; 13:5.

189. *Ibid.*, 13:15. See Chap. 5.

190. Alternatively: where prayer was carried out.

191. Acts 17:12. The special attraction of women to Judaism is attested elsewhere as well (e.g., *War* 2, 560); see below, Chap. 14.

192. So, for example, Acts 13:43; 14:1–2; 17:4, 12; 18:4; as well as Josephus, *War* 7, 45. See also *ibid.*, 2, 463; *idem*, *Against Apion* 2, 123; and Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 145–66, esp. 164–66.

193. So, for example, Josephus, *Antiquities* 14, 110; see Schürer, *History*, III, 150–76; Juster, *Les Juifs*, I, 253–337; M. Stern, "Sympathy for the Jews," 155–67 (*Studies*, 505–17); Feldman, "Proselytes and 'Sympathizers,'" 265–305; *idem*, *Jew and Gentile*, 177–445; McKnight, *Light among the Gentiles*; Figueras, "Epigraphic Evidence," 194–206.

194. See, for example, S. J. D. Cohen, "Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?" 14–23 (cf. Feldman's very different emphasis in the same volume, "Was Judaism a Missionary Religion in Ancient

text is the central role played by the synagogue in this regard. It was not only the place where Judaism was most visible, thus drawing the sympathetic and curious, but, once they were won over, it became a focus of identification and affiliation. These gentiles, of many stripes and referred to by different names, may have played a prominent role in some Diaspora synagogues (see below, Bosphorus), and this appears to have been the case in Late Antiquity as well.<sup>195</sup> In fact, the status enjoyed by many Diaspora communities may have been due, at least in part, to the presence and support of a large number of pagan sympathizers.

The second account of importance described in Acts (13:15) offers us a fleeting glimpse at the Sabbath-morning liturgy in the Antioch of Pisidia synagogue. Four elements are featured in this schema: a selection from the Torah is recited; then a selection from the Prophets is read; the archisynagogue invites Paul to speak; and Paul addresses the congregation. This order of events generally parallels Luke's earlier description of the synagogue service at Nazareth.<sup>196</sup> Perhaps the remarkable fact in this account is the receptivity of the local community to the participation of outsiders. Paul's appearance in Antioch was unannounced; he was, for all intents and purposes, a stranger. Nevertheless, he was asked to address the congregation. How widespread this custom was is impossible to assess, although we may note that something similar happened at Ephesus. According to Acts 18:24–26, an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos came to the local synagogue there and spoke effectively and fervently about Jesus from a distinctively non-Pauline perspective. Once again, the synagogue served as an open forum for Jews of different backgrounds and persuasions.

### The Acmonia Inscription

The region of Asia Minor and Greece has left us with an unusually rich trove of epigraphical evidence. While the total number of Jewish inscriptions stands at about one

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Times?" 24–37); Goodman, "Jewish Proselytizing," 53–78; idem, *Mission and Conversion*, 60–90. For a more strident denial of the *sebomenoi* phenomenon, now seriously undermined by the publication of the Aphrodisias inscription, see MacLennan and Kraabel, "God-Fearers," 46–53; Kraabel, "Disappearance of the 'God-Fearers,'" 113–26. See also Gager, "Jews, Gentiles, and Synagogues," 91–99; Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 342–82.

195. On the gentiles and Diaspora synagogues, see S. J. D. Cohen, "Respect for Judaism," 409–30; idem, "Crossing the Boundary," 13–33; see also Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 145–66, esp. 164–66; Georgi, *Opponents of Paul*, 83–117. Regarding Late Antiquity, see Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 66–94; Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians*, 83–127; Smelik, "John Chrysostom's Homilies." On the Aphrodisias inscription in this regard, see Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers*, 43–92. See below, Chap. 8.

196. Luke 4:16–21. It has been claimed that this similarity indicates Luke's projection of the synagogue liturgy he knew from the late first-century Diaspora onto Jesus' Galilee; however, such skepticism seems unwarranted. See my comments in this regard, above, Chap. 3.

hundred, the inscriptions relating to the synagogue or its officials comprise almost half this number. Most are dedicatory inscriptions from synagogue buildings; a few are epitaphs that mention a synagogue affiliation. Although practically all these inscriptions date from Late Antiquity, one of the most important among them comes from first-century C.E. Acmonia. Located inland in Phrygia, this city has an importance in large measure due to its strategic position on the Persian Royal Road. The inscription reads as follows:

The edifice was constructed by Julia Severa. Publius Tyrronios Clados, archisynagogos for life, Lucius son of Lucius, *archisynagogos*, and Popilios Zoticos, archon, have renovated [the building] from their own funds and from the community treasury. They decorated the walls and the ceiling, and they made the windows secure and [made] all the rest of the decoration. The synagogue honors these individuals with a gold shield on account of their excellent leadership and their kindly feelings toward and zeal for the congregation.<sup>197</sup>

The items of interest here are manifold. Most striking, of course, is the fact that the synagogue building itself was built by one Julia Severa a number of years prior to the date of this inscription, which itself deals with the restoration of the structure. Even more unusual than the nature of this woman's benefaction is the fact that she was a well-known pagan who came from "a nexus of leading families." The local coinage celebrates Julia Severa as politically active in the mid-first century, holding the positions of *agonothete* and *ἀρχιέρεια* (high priestess) of the local Imperial cult.<sup>198</sup> Pagan donations to synagogues are known elsewhere in Asia Minor as well, but donating an entire building was indeed

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197. The translation of this inscription has been adapted from White, *Social Origins*, 308–10, and Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 58–59. See also Frey, *CIJ*, II, no. 766 (= *MAMA*, VI, no. 264); Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs*, no. 33. A major issue here is whether Julia Severa donated a building to the Jews for use as a synagogue or simply built an edifice that later was transferred to, or bought by, the Jewish community. The term *oikos* (lit., house or building) has been used in both ways (see the Phocaea and Stobi inscriptions in White, *Social Origins*, nos. 68, 73). From the inscription here, it seems most likely that a synagogue building was intended. Why else should the fact that Julia erected a building be mentioned at all in this context? If one assumes that the building was originally earmarked for some other purpose, and only later was given or sold to the Jews, why is this fact not noted at all? It seems very plausible that the edifice had been intended from the outset as a gift of a synagogue to the Jewish community and only later was renovated by the three named leaders. See the comments of T. Rajak, "The Synagogue within the Greco-Roman City," in S. Fine, ed., *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists*, 161–73, as well as Matthews, "Ladies' Aid," 199–218; Walton, "Oriental Senators in the Service of Rome," 44–45.

198. Levick, *Roman Colonies*, 107. Julia's husband, Lucius Servenius Capito, was a decurion in Acmonia in the time of Nero, and her son, L. Servenius Cornutus, held many offices—he was, for example, a senator under Nero and a *legatus* to the proconsul of Asia. For the numismatic evidence, see Ramsay, *Cities and Bishoprics*, 638–39; see also Schürer, *History*, III, 31. On the positions Julia held in the Imperial cult, see Ramsay, *Cities and Bishoprics*, 639; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 59.

rare.<sup>199</sup> It was once suggested that Julia was, in fact, a Jewess; however, this claim has been controverted by her now well-documented pagan affiliations.<sup>200</sup>

Some time—perhaps several decades after the initial contribution by Julia—repairs of the synagogue were undertaken by three leading officials, two *archisynagogoi* and one archon.<sup>201</sup> How the archon Popilios Zoticos was related to the synagogue is unknown. The two *archisynagogoi*, bearing Greek and Latin names, may not have held identical positions. One was head for life (*διὰ βίου*); whether this was a purely honorary title following years of service or, indeed, a reflection of a continuous term of office is difficult to determine. The second one, Lucius, is simply noted as an *archisynagogos*. Whether his father, of the same name, also held this position is unknown; it will be remembered that retaining such an office for generations within a single family is attested in the Theodotos inscription from first-century Jerusalem.<sup>202</sup>

The funds used for restoration of the building appear to have been matching grants (whatever the relative percentages) from these three leaders and the community at large. The wall and ceiling paintings are noteworthy, though the nature of these paintings—geometrical, floral, or figural motifs—is unknown. Depending on the lavishness of the ornamentation, this synagogue may have been similar to those in contemporary Berenice, or Sardis and Dura Europos later on.

The three major donors were honored in ways typical among Greek and Roman donors generally. Not only did they merit the above inscription, but they were awarded a gold shield.<sup>203</sup>

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199. See below, Chap. 8. A parallel phenomenon from the fourth century may be the building of a *proseuche* by the Imperial governor in Panticapaeum (Levinskaya, *Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, 229–31). It is interesting to note that relations between the Jews and their neighbors in this region appear to have been particularly close; see Sheppard, “Jews, Christians and Heretics,” 169–80; Crawford, “Multiculturalism at Sardis,” 38–47. On this phenomenon generally, see M. Stern, “Sympathy for the Jews,” 155–67 (= *Studies*, 505–17).

200. See, for example, White, *Social Origins*, 308–9; Ramsay, *Cities and Bishoprics*, 648–51, 673–75; and the somewhat ambiguous note in Juster, *Juifs*, I, 430–31. On the opposite phenomenon, namely, Jews contributing to pagan shrines, see the examples cited in Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 321–22.

201. A similar synagogue inscription, of undetermined date, was found in Olbia, along the shores of the Black Sea. It, too, speaks of synagogue officials restoring the building: “The society under the presidency of [? . . .] Pourthaios Achilleus son of Demetrius, Dionysodoros son of Eros [?], Zobeis son of Zobeis, the archons, have restored by their own care the synagogue from the foundations till . . . and have roofed it.” See the translation and comments of Lifshitz, “Prolegomenon,” 64; idem, *Donateurs et fondateurs*, no. 11; Frey, *CIJ*, I, no. 682.

202. See above, Chap. 3. White (*Social Origins*, 309–10 n. 48) has speculated that the synagogue officials named Tyrronios and Lucius were Jewish freedmen (or their descendants) in the service of Julia Severa, and this would therefore explain her involvement with the Jewish community.

203. See Robert, “Inscriptions grecques de Sidé,” 41 n. 1. On the phenomenon of such dedications in Asia Minor and some of their social and political implications, see Rogers, “Gift and Society,” 188–99.



## THE DIASPORA SYNAGOGUE IN PERSPECTIVE

As we have seen, the range of sources relating to pre-70 Diaspora synagogues is varied. Three major categories are represented—literary, archaeological, and epigraphical—and within each there are substantial differences in the nature of the evidence and its historical value. The literary material, for example, ranges from references in Philonic religious monographs and historical accounts, to edicts cited by Josephus, and, finally, to Acts' accounts of Paul's synagogue visitations.

Similarly with regard to the epigraphical material: some inscriptions are major communal documents (Berenice) or shorter contracts of manumission (Bosphorus), others are brief statements of individual (Delos, Acmonia, Egypt) or communal (Egypt) contributions, while still others are epitaphs noting synagogue affiliation (Rome). Of the two building remains, one dates to the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. (Delos), while the other is a fourth-century C.E. structure that originated in the first or second century C.E. (Ostia).

Each Diaspora community discussed above has left us a combination of these sources. Epigraphical evidence is our sole source for Cyrene and the Bosphorus kingdom; literary and epigraphical testimony is available for Egypt, Asia Minor, Rome, and Greece; literary evidence for Syria; and archaeological, epigraphical, and limited literary material for Delos and Italy.

Owing to this broad range of primary material at our disposal, a number of features common to the pre-70 Diaspora synagogue or *proseuche* become quite evident. All sources are in agreement regarding the centrality of this institution among Jewish communities throughout the Roman world. As in Judaea, this point is driven home by the fact that no other Jewish communal institution or building is ever noted in these sources. And while a number of these communities boasted larger communal frameworks, such as a *politeuma* or *gerousia* (Berenice, Alexandria), no specific place is ever mentioned as housing these bodies; it therefore seems safe to assume that they met in the synagogue. Each locale may express the centrality of the synagogue in a different way, given the particular medium, the subject at hand, and the local context, but the implication is always the same. The synagogue was the Jewish communal institution par excellence everywhere.<sup>235</sup>

As the focus of the local community, the synagogue was geared to fulfill its needs and serve as a setting for all facets of communal life. For those seeking to preserve their Jewish identity—and most Jews in antiquity wished to do so, however they might define that task—such an institution was a *sine qua non*. Moreover, it served to distinguish them from the surrounding society. Familial and ethnic ties were deepened by common historical roots and memories, enhanced by the special ties to Jerusalem and its Temple, strengthened by

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too, found expression in Damascus at the outbreak of the revolt in 66 C.E. See *ibid.*, 2, 259–61; 7, 368; Josephus, *Life* 27.

235. See, however, the reservations of Rajak (“Synagogue and Community,” 22–38), who prefers to emphasize “structural variety” in this regard. I do not find her arguments or reservations persuasive.

a network of customs and ceremonies, and bolstered by a set of beliefs that at times contrasted sharply with those of their neighbors.<sup>236</sup> The Diaspora synagogue paralleled the contemporary Judaeon one in its myriad functions while, at the same time, sharing many characteristics of non-Jewish institutions as well. It served the multiple purposes that a religious and ethnic minority such as the Jews would have needed—religious, educational, social, political, and economic.

Nevertheless, although linked by a distinct (though not always easily defined) religious and ethnic heritage, these Diaspora communities reflected a striking degree of diversity. The synagogues' various names may indeed reflect diverse perceptions of just what this institution was and how it was to function within the community. The most widespread terms, *proseuche* and *synagoge*, have been noted and may well point to varying emphases in each, at least in their formative stages.<sup>237</sup> However, as we have already had occasion to note, other terms were being used in the first century: *ἱερόν* (holy place), *εὐχέιον* (place of prayer), *σαββατεῖον* (Sabbath meeting-place), and *διδασκαλεῖον* (place of instruction).<sup>238</sup> More unusual terms, such as “amphitheater” and *templum*, were also invoked, as was the word *οἶκος*.<sup>239</sup> The synagogues of Rome—some early, others late—are of a unique order, having been named after famous people, professions, or places of origin.<sup>240</sup>

A striking example of the unity and diversity among these synagogues may be found in even the small amount of archaeological evidence hailing from this period, i.e., the buildings of Delos and Ostia. On the one hand, both structures were close to the sea, far from the city center; both were oriented (in some fashion) toward Jerusalem and exhibited certain similarities to other structures in the vicinity. On the other hand, each had its own unique stamp, both vis-à-vis one another and with regard to their surroundings. The Ostia synagogue plan, for example, is far different from that of Delos. Moreover, the types of inscriptions and artistic representations found at Delos are not found at Ostia. Delian inscriptions feature the term *theos hypsistos* and have blatantly pagan symbols on the lamps, whereas an Ostia inscription notes the welfare of the emperor, and the artistic

236. Gafni, “Punishment, Blessing or Mission,” 229–50.

237. L. Levine, “Second Temple Synagogue,” 13–14. The situation may be somewhat analogous to the twentieth-century American Jewish scene, where a synagogue might be called a “temple,” “synagogue,” “shul,” or “community center.” While to most Jews there may be little or no difference between these various names, they can reflect very different ideological and functional notions about the institution in the eyes of the founders and those it served in subsequent stages.

238. *ἱερόν*: Josephus, *War* 7, 44–45; III Macc. 2:28. *εὐχέιον*: Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, II, 223. *σαββατεῖον*: Josephus, *Antiquities* 16, 164; Tcherikover et al., *CPJ*, III, 46. See also S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, 26–27; and above, note 180. *διδασκαλεῖον*: Philo, *Special Laws* 2, 62.

239. *Amphitheater*: see above, notes 98 and 99. *Templum*: Tacitus, *Hist.* 5, 5, 4; see M. Stern, *GLAJJ*, II, 43. *οἶκος*: see above, note 225, as well as later examples; cf. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs*, nos. 13, 21, 22, 61.

240. Leon, *Jews of Ancient Rome*, 135–66.

expression there is almost nonexistent. Finally, of course, the names used in connection with these two buildings—*proseuche* and synagogue—are quite different.<sup>241</sup>

One of the major reasons for this pronounced diversity stems from the fact that the Jews who established these early Diaspora communities had no set models of what a community center facility should look like. Furthermore, in the Diaspora, powerful forces impacted upon each community, resulting in numerous instances of adopting patterns of the wider culture. Years ago, Kraabel called attention to this phenomenon, and with the passage of time and new discoveries and studies, this perception has only been strengthened.<sup>242</sup> The names used by members of the community often imitate those generally popular on the local scene. Julia Severa's contribution of a synagogue building seems to reflect a patronage unique to this part of Asia Minor; the organization and functioning of the Jewish *politeuma* in Berenice may well have derived, in part at least, from Cyrenian models;<sup>243</sup> the type of building used by Delian Jews bore similarities with other buildings on that island; and the manumission decrees from Bosphorus, with their formulary components, are well known in that particular region.

Studies focusing on the Egyptian synagogue further confirm this perception, highlighting the many links between the Jewish *proseuche* on the one hand and the surrounding Greco-Egyptian culture on the other. Such parallels include dedications on behalf of the ruling family, the *proseuche*'s status as a place of asylum, the names and functions of synagogue officials, and various architectural components.

Significant local influence points to another characteristic of these Diaspora synagogues—namely, a high degree of hellenization. Diaspora synagogues employed Greek terms for their institutions and officers, and they often referred to the God of Israel as the Greeks did to Zeus (i.e., *theos hysistos*). They almost always wrote in Greek, bore Greek and, at times, Latin names, honored fellow-Jews and benevolent pagans with crowns, shields, woolen fillets, and inscriptions, and built and decorated their buildings in ways customary in Hellenistic-Roman society. This assimilation of outside patterns came quite naturally, nurtured as it was within a heterogeneous society.<sup>244</sup> Throughout the course of Jewish history, the more diverse and pluralistic a society, the greater its acceptance of the Jewish community within it. The Roman Empire provided such a multicultural setting,

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241. That different Diaspora communities may have had different calendars, see S. Stern, "Jewish Calendar Reckoning," 107–16.

242. Kraabel, *Diaspora Jews and Judaism*, 257–67 (= "Social Systems," 79–91). See also Price, "Jewish Diaspora," 176–77. More recently, White has carried this argument even further, suggesting that almost every Diaspora synagogue was a private home converted into a communal institution; see his *Building God's House*, 60–61, 64, 78; and esp. his "Delos Synagogue Revisited," 135–36.

243. See Lüderitz, "What Is the *Politeuma*?" 219–22.

244. On the multicultural, social, and religious heterogeneity of Ptolemaic Egypt, see, for example, Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*; Walbank, "Hellenistic World," 99–102; Samuel, *From Athens to Alexandria*, 105–17.

as did Ptolemaic Egypt throughout much of the Hellenistic period. In the latter, as we have seen, the Jews dedicated building after building in honor of the reigning king and queen, as did their neighbors.

Besides borrowing specific practices and architectural elements, some scholars have suggested far more profound connections between the synagogue and the Greco-Roman world. According to them, the Jews patterned the synagogue and its activities on outside models, the one most frequently mentioned in this regard being the Hellenistic-Roman private association. These associations ranged from the more officially recognized *politeuma* and *collegium* to less-defined groupings (*synodos*, *koinon*, *thiasos*, *communitas*) that might have been based on common geographical origins, commercial interests, religious affiliation, mutual aid, or dining and burial needs.<sup>245</sup>

The subject of Greco-Roman models influencing the synagogue has been addressed of late in a collection of studies, *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, and particularly in an article by Richardson.<sup>246</sup> His claim, that the synagogue was defined as a *collegium*, is based on two considerations: (1) the use of the term in Roman documents referring to the Jewish community; (2) the fact that the synagogue functioned as a social and religious association, as did the *collegium*.

Regarding his first point, we might ask whether the use of this terminology by the Romans with reference to the synagogue was merely a question of convenience, whereby the Roman authorities merely used a term familiar to them without attempting to be exact and precise.<sup>247</sup> In other words, did the term *collegium* actually reflect the legal status of the synagogue? And, if so, did it apply to all synagogues throughout the Mediterranean or did the use of several different terms, as noted above, reflect alternative models?

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the synagogue differed from the above Greco-Roman frameworks in many and significant ways.<sup>248</sup> The Jewish community operated with a far greater range of activities and rights than the ordinary *collegium*, and the Romans were far more tolerant of the Jewish communal framework than of others; to wit, *collegia* were often banned by the authorities while the Jewish community remained unaffected.<sup>249</sup> The Jews had the right to maintain their own courts, attend to their own food requirements, avoid worshipping the civic deities or appearing in court on Sabbaths

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245. See Schürer, *History*, III, 87-137; Waltzing, *Étude historique*, passim; Juster, *Les Juifs*, I, 413-24; La Piana, "Foreign Groups," 348-51; Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 133-38; Kraabel, *Diaspora Jews and Judaism*, 23-26 (= "Unity and Diversity," 51-54); Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 34-36; Rabello, "Legal Condition," 719-20; Rajak, "Was There a Roman Charter?" 107-23.

246. Richardson, "Early Synagogues as Collegia," 90-109; idem, "Architectural Case," 90-117. See also Guterman, *Religious Toleration and Persecution*, 130-56.

247. As, for example, in noting the right of the Jews to offer sacrifices in an edict to the Jewish community of Sardis—Josephus, *Antiquities* 14, 261.

248. See Gruen, *Diaspora*, 121-23.

249. Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 224-30.

and festivals; they were exempt from serving in the army, sent monies to Jerusalem, and conducted a wide range of communal affairs. In certain places, the Jewish community was recognized as a *politeuma*, a civic framework attested in Alexandria and Berenice. Most of the above rights and privileges were not applicable to contemporary *collegia* or *thiasoi*. Thus, the term *collegia* with regard to the synagogue seems to have been one of Roman convenience and not in any way reflective of a specific legal framework. Certainly, the Jews never viewed their synagogue or community in this light, and this term never appears in any document or inscription ascribed to Jews.<sup>250</sup>

Flesher takes a very different approach in his search for Greco-Roman models of the synagogue, classifying the institution as a type of Greco-Roman temple:

The research discussed in this paper reveals that the Graeco-Romans saw the synagogue as belonging to the *genus* of “temple,” even though it was not a perfect fit. This should not be surprising since scholars have long noted similarities between synagogues and Graeco-Roman temples in terms of architecture, artwork, and activities practiced in the buildings. These similarities appear in matters we think of as specifically Graeco-Roman as well as in matters we usually associate with Judaism but which were also practiced in Graeco-Roman temples. When analyzed in taxonomic terms, it becomes clear that the similarities between synagogues and Graeco-Roman temples are not random and *ad hoc*, but indicate that the synagogue belonged to the *genus* of “Graeco-Roman temple.”<sup>251</sup>

According to Flesher, this is the way non-Jews and, consequently, Jews viewed the synagogue. Both institutions had many activities in common, including those that the synagogue clearly borrowed from the pagan temple.

However, despite its apparent attractiveness, this theory presents certain problems. First and foremost is the fact that the pivotal activity in each institution was strikingly different, while each relegated to a secondary role (if at all) what was central to the other. For the pagan temple, it was the sacrificial act under priestly auspices, for synagogues it was the reading of Scriptures that involved congregational participation. Sacrifice was unknown in a synagogue setting (the problematic Sardis evidence aside), as was the public reading of a sacred text in a Greco-Roman temple. In any case, most of the activities that the synagogue had in common with the temple may have evolved independently; there is little reason to assume that the former was specifically influenced by the latter. Did the Diaspora synagogue need the pagan temple to learn about prayer ritual or about its use as a meeting place for communal councils and courts, the collection of donations, etc.? The few persuasive instances of influence (e.g., manumissions and asylum) are so minimally attested for synagogues as to make any generalization in this direction risky.<sup>252</sup>

The interest of pagans in the synagogue is indicative of the institution’s accessibility

250. See also my more detailed comments in “First-Century C.E. Synagogue.”

251. P. V. M. Flesher, “Prolegomenon,” 121–53 (cited from pp. 123–24).

252. See also my more detailed comments in “First-Century C.E. Synagogue.”

as well as importance and centrality in the Jewish community. Evidence for pagan sympathizers and converts has been noted throughout the Diaspora, and in many instances these people chose to be actively supportive of the local Jewish community. The God-fearers of Bosphorus are an interesting example of this, as are Julia Severa's involvement and benefaction. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the presence of women among those attracted to Judaism, a phenomenon attested to throughout the Roman world and in a variety of sources.<sup>253</sup>

Acceptance by many elements in the wider society notwithstanding, the Jews of the Diaspora were continually seeking to gain and maintain their rights, which included confirmation of the status of their central institution. We have also noted numerous occasions on which the Jews were forced to seek official Roman validation of these rights in face of attacks and hostility from their neighbors. In these cases, their minority status and distinctive customs proved as irritating and intolerable to some as they were attractive to others. Such a reality may well lie behind much of Philo's apologetics, as well as Josephus' decision to include numerous edicts issued by the Romans on behalf of Diaspora communities. Such tensions may have played a role in fostering a sense of Jewish marginality, which found expression in the not-uncommon location of the synagogue (and presumably also the community itself) on the outskirts of a city. Such was the case over a wide geographical area, as we have noted with regard to Delos, Ostia, Macedonia, and Egypt.<sup>254</sup> This would seem to have been at least part of the reason why the Acmonian community gave prominence to Julia Severa's gift years—if not decades—after the original donation, and why the Jews of Berenice honored Marcus Tittius.

Let us pursue this last example a bit further. The synagogue inscriptions from Cyrene indeed reflect the community's integration of synchronic and diachronic dimensions. The award ceremony for a Roman official was conducted on the Sukkot holiday and included praise of the honoree and a gift of a wreath to be awarded at each meeting (Sabbath?) and New Moon. This award, memorialized on a stele erected in the synagogue, was the unanimous decision of the entire congregation.

Jewish communal and religious dimensions come into play in these inscriptions. The ceremony was initiated by the congregation, which decided whom to honor and how. All the events mentioned were conducted on dates from the Jewish calendar: Sukkot, the New Moon, and perhaps the Sabbath.

Nevertheless, together with these Jewish components, there were also very definite and discernible Greco-Roman influences. The leadership bore official Greek titles, and the

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253. See, for example, Josephus, *War* 2, 560–61 (Damascus); Acts 13:50 (Antioch, Pisidia); *ibid.*, 16:13 (Philippi, Macedonia); Martial, *Epigrammata*, IV, 4 (M. Stern, *GLAJJ*, I, 524). See also van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 109–13; and below, Chap. 14.

254. Even in Alexandria, the major Jewish residential area, Delta, was on the coast, in the northeastern section of the city.

personal names listed were almost all Greek as well. The same holds true of the communal institutions noted (i.e., *politeuma*, amphitheater). Moreover, the forms of bestowing honor (a wreath and woolen fillet, a public inscription) and the voting procedure (casting white or black stones) are likewise well-attested Greek practices.<sup>255</sup>

When all is said and done, the Diaspora synagogue was indeed a creative synthesis of Jewish tradition, the requirements of each community, and the influence of the surrounding culture. Far from constituting an isolated and insulated minority, or the opposite—on the threshold of full assimilation—the Jews succeeded in creating an institution that expressed and reflected their needs both as individuals and as a community, and did so within the confines of the cultural and social contexts in which they found themselves. They borrowed, yet within limits; Ptolemaic *proseuchai* were not dedicated “to” Ptolemy but “on behalf of” the king. They honored the ruler as was customary in other dedicatory inscriptions to Greek and Egyptian deities at the time.<sup>256</sup> The Jewish place of worship did not resemble the pagan sanctuary or any other place of sacrifice; rather, it was a *proseuche* or *synagoge*, a place for Torah reading, prayer, and communal activity.

Thus, for all its borrowing and diversity, the Jewish communal institution remained quintessentially Jewish. It served the Jewish community and housed its rites and observances, which were influenced first and foremost—though far from exclusively—by a common Jewish past and present. The Jews had brought their own *patria* to the Diaspora, a cultural and religious tradition that pagans could either respect, resent, or ignore but of which the Jews themselves were proud. They were committed to honoring and perpetuating this heritage, and, for the most part, the surrounding world was supportive. To safeguard and transmit one’s traditional customs was an undisputed value in Roman society,<sup>257</sup> and on the communal level the synagogue was the main vehicle for achieving this goal.

Many Jewish communities even regarded their synagogues as holy places. The very term *proseuche* may be indicative of this fact, but even more so are specific references to the synagogue as a place of asylum, a “sacred precinct” (Egypt), or a “holy place” (Antioch; Philo’s reference to Essenes).<sup>258</sup> The manumission of slaves in the synagogues of the Bosphorus kingdom may also indicate the degree of sanctity associated with these buildings. The intention seems to have been that this ceremony be carried out not only in the

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255. The awarding of a wreath and fillet bears further comment. This type of honor is well known in Greco-Roman society and is documented already in classical Greece. Cyrenian Jewry did not hesitate to appropriate this practice, but did so in their own way. Whereas the general practice was to perpetuate or acknowledge such awards on an annual basis, the Jews, for whatever reason, decided to recall this ceremony every month, and perhaps even once a week.

256. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 226–27, 282. See also Nock, *Conversion*, 61–62.

257. See, for example, *Antiquities* 16, 44; 19, 290; *Against Apion* 2, 232–35, and comments in A. Kasher, *Josephus, Against Apion*, II, 519–21; and, generally, MacMullen, *Paganism*, 2–4.

258. See Goodman, “Sacred Space,” 4–6.

presence of the community, but also in the presence of the Jewish God, as was the case with regard to Apollo in Delphi.<sup>259</sup>

The reasons for this attribution of sanctity to some Diaspora synagogues are worthy of comment. It seems most likely that such status was an attempt on the part of Jewish communities to accord their synagogues and *proseuchai* the prestige enjoyed by temples throughout the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. In fact, it was precisely at this time that granting temples the title of “sacred and inviolable” (*ἱερός καὶ ἄσυλος*) increased dramatically and was viewed as a mark of high honor.<sup>260</sup> Consequently, some Diaspora communities also adopted this status (whether formally or not), thus enhancing, in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of others, the prestige of their main communal institution.

The tenacity with which the Jews defended the integrity of this institution, its functions, and their rights generally is a reflection of these commitments and loyalties. From within and without, attempts to undermine what they perceived as their fundamental interests and rights were met head-on. So, for example, when Paul was looked upon as threatening the status quo, he encountered fierce resistance in Diaspora synagogues,<sup>261</sup> and Jews frequently appealed to Rome in order to counter attempts by municipal authorities to undermine their status. The fact that Diaspora Jewry continued to thrive for centuries in many of these cities and regions attests to the overall success of its efforts.<sup>262</sup>

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259. Frey, *CIJ*, I, nos. 709–11; Gibson, *Jewish Manumission Inscriptions*, 36–49, 137–40, although, truth to tell, some pagan deities, but not the God of Israel, are mentioned in these documents.

260. Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 1–29.

261. Acts 18:6 and esp. 19:9.

262. See, however, the reservations of Bohak (“Ethnic Continuity,” 185–91), at least as regards the Egyptian *chora*.