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THE ORIGIN AND EARLY ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYNAGOGUE

by

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of the requirements for the Degree of
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DIGEST

The synagogue provided a new form of worship for the Jew, prayer instead of sacrifice. Research seems to indicate that the synagogue had its origins during the Hellenistic period, after the Hasmonean revolt, first as a house of assembly - later, after 70 C.E., as a house of prayer.

The earliest ruins of synagogues are from the area of the Galilee, dated in the second century, C.E. These synagogues are patterned after the basic Roman basilica, though they are distinguished by two major innovations; the complete lack of an apse, and the use of a transverse row of interior columns in addition to two parallel rows of columns. There may have been a gallery supported by these three rows of columns.

The facade, the central focus of these buildings, is pierced by three doors, and is decorated with stone sculpture. The portable ark used in these early structures was placed in front of the central of the three doors. At a later time, the central door was walled in.

The later phase of early synagogue construction, known as the Byzantine period, is characterized by two distinctions in architectural form. Initially, permanent quarters for the Ark with Torah scrolls was provided by either a niche or an apse. Secondly, instead of stone sculpture, decoration was confined to mosaic art on the floor.

The interior of the synagogue was characterized by rows of benches which lined the walls of the sanctuary. The area of the Torah shrine was usually, but not universally on the wall of the sanctuary that faced Jerusalem. In the early synagogue this was the wall of the facade, and in the later synagogue, it was characterized by the wall containing either an apse or a niche. The interior of the synagogue may well have also contained Menorahs, lions and a reading desk.

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Introduction

Wherever Jews settled, they established houses of worship. During the Middle Ages, the synagogue was the hub from which the religious, educational, social and charitable spokes of community life radiated.

How wonderful an institution is the synagogue! What an influencing element it has been over many centuries of history, welding Jews in the Diaspora to their faith. But the synagogue as an institution has not always been. Prayer has not always been the dominant motif of worship. Testimony is given by the Bible that at one time the primary institution of Judaism was the Temple, and the primary mode of worship was sacrifice. Why did the Jewish people give up sacrifices, and use prayer as the means to communicate with God? When did the synagogue emerge, where, and why?

It is the intent of this investigation to analyze some answers which have been postulated as suggestions for the origin of the synagogue. By examining these conclusions, it is hoped that some light may be shed, as to the reasons for the emergence of the synagogue, as well as when and where this happening of such great magnitude and import took place.

Basically those theories under consideration may be divided into three groups based on historical perspective. Included are those who consider that the synagogue emerged in the Pre-exilic period; those who consider that the synagogue emerged in the Exilic period; and those who consider that the synagogue emerged in the Post-exilic period.

CHAPTER I

The Origin of the Synagogue

Professor Julian Morgenstern is among those who postulate a Pre-exilic theory for the emergence of the synagogue. He bases his theory on an understanding of Psalm 74:8b, "שרפו כל מועדי אל בארץ," "They burned all of the meeting-places of God in the land." Morgenstern suggests that "כל מועדי אל," is a cryptic phrase that refers to the synagogue. He therefore says, if one will date this phrase in Psalm 74:8b, the necessary conclusion will be the terminus a quo of the synagogue. By dating Psalm 74:8b very soon after 486-485 B.C.E., Morgenstern postulates that the synagogue was definitely in existence by that very same time.

Having concluded that the synagogue was definitely in existence no later than 486-485 B.C.E., Morgenstern then investigates the situation that prompted the inauguration of such an institution.

Stating that such an institution by its nature could not be created ex-nihilo, there must therefore be a specific reason for the existence of the synagogue. This event is for Morgenstern, the Deuteronomic Reformation of 621 B.C.E.[1] The rational that leads Morgenstern to that conclusion is as follows; since the Deuteronomic Reformation removed the availability of local worship by postulating that only the Jerusalem Temple in its cleansed condition was an acceptable place of worship, and since it be highly unlikely that all of the people all of the time made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship, there would be a need for an approved form of neighborhood religious institution.[2] To Morgenstern, out of such a need crystallized the synagogue. His con-

clusion would not necessarily be that the new institution of around 621 B.C.E. should be called the synagogue, but rather that out of this new institution, the synagogue slowly emerged, so that by 486-485 B.C.E. the synagogue was a definite existent, as is proven by the phrase " מועדי אל בתוך צרינו," in Psalm 74:8b. He does imply, that this chain of events led to a more rapid development of the institution, rather than a slower crystallization. Hence, he would definitely postulate a rather early origin for the synagogue, and this development took place in Palestine.[3]

Morgenstern is by no means alone when he takes his position that the synagogue had a Pre-exilic origin. Other distinguished scholars who have suggested such an origin are Leopold Loew who believed that " בית מועד " in Jeremiah 39:8 was a forerunner of the synagogue,[4] and Isaac Levy who concludes that " מקדש מעט " in Ezekiel 11:16 refers to the synagogue in a cryptic manner. Levy feels that the synagogue was definitely institutionalized by the time of the Babylonian Exile, and further suggests that its antecedents reach back to Pre-exilic days.[5] Both of these scholars suggest that prayer meetings under prophetic guidance led to the development of a more definitely institutionalized synagogue.[6] Therefore, when the use of the Jerusalem Temple was denied to the people during the years of the Babylonian Exile, they had an already accepted norm to which they could concentrate their attention.

Professor Louis Finkelstein utilizing much of the above mentioned material, promulgates a theory of the origin of the synagogue, which

takes cognizance of the differences between "the synagogue as an institution," and "public prayer meetings." The proof that Finkelstein offers is in two parts. Initially, he proves there were prayer meetings during the reigns of Manasseh, Amon, and the beginning years of Josiah, and secondly, that the synagogue had its roots in these early institutions.

Finkelstein offers II Kings 4:23, where the Shunamite woman, finding her child dead, tells her husband that she is going to visit the prophet. Her husband not knowing of the catastrophe inquires why she is making the trip since it is neither new moon nor Sabbath, as evidence of prayer meetings on fixed occasions such as the new moon, and the Sabbath. He further offers I Kings 8:28 ff., the prayer at the dedication of the Solomonic Temple, as evidence of prayer meetings. And he also cites Jeremiah 10:23 ff., 12:1, 14:7, 17:12 as instances of prophetic prayer, as well as Jeremiah 11:14 as an instance of a prophet being denied the privilege of praying for his people. From this Biblical evidence, Finkelstein concludes that prayer meetings were a well-organized institution. He also suggests that the occasion that seems to have prompted persecution of the prophetic party, and equally so, their prayer meetings, was the reign of Manasseh, by relating the reign of Manasseh with the dating of Jeremiah.[7] The basis for this conclusion can be summed up as follows: Since during the reign of Manasseh the Temple could not be used because it was polluted by such things as the violation of the Second Commandment, and since the village sanctuaries and their practices were nearly universally abhorred by the Prophetic

Party, during the reign of Manasseh, Amon, and the first years of Josiah, there were secret meetings which took the form of prayer for the purpose of Divine Communion among the Prophetic Party. Finkelstein then concludes that the synagogue had its roots in these early prophetic institutions. The proof that Finkelstein offers to connect the prophetic prayer meeting with the synagogue of the Second Commonwealth is based upon linguistic analysis.

The word " דרש " meaning "to inquire of" is used in the Bible to refer to prayer meetings.[8] Connecting the word " דרש " with the word " בית דרש " which Finkelstein suggests at one time meant "the place of inquiry" Finkelstein concludes: The connection between the prophetic prayer meetings and the synagogues is based on a change of meaning.[9] Thus, Finkelstein intimates a fairly early origin of the synagogue as an institution, claiming it was in existence during the time of the Babylonian exile.

Typical of those theories expressing the point of view that the synagogue is a child of the Babylonian Exile is that of George Foot Moore.

> "The origin of the synagogue is unknown, but it may be reasonably surmised that it had its antecedents in spontaneous gatherings of Jews in Babylonia and other lands of their exile on the Sabbaths and at times of the old seasonal feasts or on fast days, to confirm one another in fidelity to their religion in the midst of heathenism, and encourage themselves in the hope of restoration."[10]

This position, unlike those postulating a Pre-exilic origin for the synagogue suggests that the impetus which directed the growth of the synagogue came from a situation of location. A people in exile

in a foreign land needed a means whereby they could worship God, in order to meet the demands of a new life, in a new land. A land where the Temple the former means of worship could no longer be used.

Wilhelm Bacher also suggests that the synagogue originated during the Babylonian exile. He feels that Ezekiel 11:16 " מקדש מעט היו להם בארצות ", "I will be to them as a little sanctuary", is a Biblical reference that proves his point.[11]

While those who postulate an exilic theory are fully aware of the existence of prayer meetings prior to the time of the exile, they do not see any necessary connection between these prayer meetings, and the emergence of the synagogue. And it is partially in this light that they choose to cite the exile itself as the situation that preempted the emergence of the synagogue.

Solomon Zeitlin finds neither the theories postulating a Pre-exilic origin for the synagogue, nor those which express an Exilic origin for the synagogue as satisfactory. He feels that these expressions of possibility do not adequately answer the questions prompted by the reality of a synagogue as a new and different means of religious self-expression, nor do they concur with the true character of the synagogue.

Zeitlin states that the term " בתי כנסיות " betrays not only the origin of the synagogue, but also the character of the synagogue itself. He argues that the synagogue had its origins in Post-exilic Palestine; that in settlements scattered throughout Judea, meetings were held to confront practical problems of a socio-economic nature, and that in these meetings the seeds for the synagogue were sown. In this context he states:

> "The meetings were called by different leaders for the purpose of considering problems of an economic and social character, as was the case when Joseph, the son of Tobias, called an ecclesia, assembly, in the Temple to discuss the question of taxation in connection with payment demanded by the Ptolemies. Such meetings, though called primarily for economic reasons, were no doubt attended with some sort of prayer, as was the custom among the Jews. When the Hasmoneans called the people to rise against the Syrians, they assembled the Jews at Mizpah and offered a prayer.[12]

Initially these meetings were not held on a fixed schedule. Eventually, however, they assumed a regular character and two days of the week Monday and Thursday were set aside for such meetings.

In accordance with his thesis that the term " בית הכנסת " suggests the origin and character of the synagogue, Zeitlin states that the days set aside for regular meetings came to be known as "שני וחמישי," the people attending these meetings as " אנשי כנסת הגדולה," and the place where the meetings occurred as " בתי כנסיות ".[13]

Up to this point, we have no obvious connection which necessitates a relationship between these meetings of a practical nature, and a synagogue, an institution which would serve as a means of religious expression.

Zeitlin confronts this problem with the following argument. When the daily sacrifice became a communal offering and only representatives went to the Temple in Jerusalem, the remainder of the community would assemble in the local " בתי כנסיות " at regular times to recite the Torah portions related to the sacrifice, as well as a fixed liturgy. With the passage of time, the " בתי כנסיות " achieved its new role. What was formerly the primary reason for the existence of this community

center, an institution to confront problems of a practical nature, became relegated to minor importance. The role of a religious center soon became its significant import.

In this way, Zeitlin argues for a Post-exilic Palestinian origin for the synagogue. He states that the reasons which prompted the emergence of the synagogue were practical in scope. The people needed a means whereby the religious significance of their communal sacrifice, taking place in the Temple, could be transmitted to the whole of the community, the folk at home. The synagogue, a community meeting hall was transformed to meet this need.[14]

Zeitlin is not alone in his use of proper names to present an argument for the origin of the synagogue. At times the term " בית כנסת," is translated as synagogue. The New Testament utilizes the word synagogue. And Philo of Alexandria uses two words; synagogue and proseuche.[15]

It has been suggested by some that the word proseuche can help determine the origin of the synagogue.[16] They argue that an inscription from the ancient Schedia quarter of Alexandria dated during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes, 247-221 B.C.E. which refers to a proseuche is archaeological evidence that the synagogue existed at this time.[17] If this line of reasoning is found to be acceptable, this inscription would in fact be the first archaeological evidence to substantiate the existence of the synagogue.

To this line of reasoning, Dr. Ellis Rivkin takes exception. He says that the inscription of Ptolemy III Euergertes does not necessarily preclude that the proseuche is in reality evidence of the existence of

the synagogue during the third century B.C.E. He contends that the proseuchai of Alexandria and those of the other Hellenistic cities as described by Philo are symbols of loyalty to the "divine" monarchs. The proseuche was offered to, and accepted by, the Ptolemies as a substitute for the refusal to worship them as gods. Rivkin continues, that Philo was aware of the institution that we now call the synagogue, and conceivably used the term proseuche interchangeably to refer to a symbol of loyalty, and the institution, much in the same way the Conservative and Reform houses of worship are at times given the appelation Temple. Hence he states:

> "...the dedicatory inscription to Ptolemy from Schedia in Alexandria and dating from the third century B.C.E. is...a dedication to the emperor and his consort, manifestly then a symbol of Jewish loyalty, a prayer-house instead of a statue, a proseuche instead of a sacrificial shrine. This is the most that the brief line communicates; to insist that it means more is without warrant. If this proseuche were a synagogue, the inscription should have said so. Since it does not, we have evidence for a proseuche, not a synagogue; and nothing can alter the status of the evidence - unless evidence of equivalent authority is forthcoming."[18]

Rivkin further argues that Ben Sira

> "...stands as a sentinel over a segment of the historical continuum. His words...communicate information about his society: Temple cult, Aaronide priests, a High Priest, a divinely revealed Law, a class of soferim. ...Whatever is unclear in Ben Sira cannot be clarified by non-existent data."[19]

Since Ben Sira communicates information regarding the society in which he lived, and there is no mention of the synagogue, Rivkin concludes that this silence implies the non-existence of the synagogue during

his time.

This argument, when placed in juxtaposition with the discussion regarding the <u>proseuche</u>, gives us the origin of the synagogue as being later than ca. 270 B.C.E., or ca. 180 B.C.E. depending on where your disposition to the dating of Ben Sira is to be included.[20]

The theories for the emergence of the synagogue encompass a period of more than four hundred years, from Morgenstern's suggested date of ca. 621 B.C.E., to Rivkin's suggested date of ca. 180 B.C.E. Given the additional data that the first archaeological finds definitely established to be synagogues are no earlier than the second century of the common era, and more probably of the third, we have a span of nearly a thousand years. This large span of years could conceivably confuse the issue. But to our advantage, there are some facts that will clarify this situation.

On the basis of the term "מועדי אל," found in Psalm 74:8b, Morgenstern postulates an early date for the emergence of the synagogue. However, the term "מועדי אל," is nowhere to be found in the archaeological vocabulary suggesting that it was the proper name for a synagogue. It alone is found is Psalm 74:8b. Secondly, if this term were indeed a reference to the synagogue, an institution which we recognize to be of notable import, how strange it is that nowhere else in all of Biblical literature is this proper name to be found. One conclusion is obvious. There is no warrant to assume that "מועדי אל" alludes to the synagogue.

A second point, which in particular is directed against those arguments for an Exilic origin for the synagogue, is also useful in showing that a Pre-exilic origin is equally fallacious. This argument is

based on the fact that the synagogue was an institution that utilized prayer, so that it was the sole means of communication with God, and the only means of achieving total expiation.

If the synagogue were in existence during the period of the Babylonian Exile, the absence of the Temple during this period should have been at most, an occurrence which would have strengthened the support for a synagogue as the lone valid institution for prayer. At the same time, it would seem logical that the importance of the Temple should have diminished. This line of reasoning directly contradicts the historical memory of the Bible. The Biblical concern, as can be noticed by an examination of the books of Haggai and Zechariah, as well as Exekiel, chapters 40-47, seems to reflect a concern with the Temple, a desire to rebuild the fallen Temple. The Bible testifies to the continuing importance of the Temple. The Bible testifies that the Temple and its cult represent the means of communication with God. The house of worship is the Temple, and the means of worship is sacrifice.

The synagogue was a new type of institution for the Jewish people, and it was certain presuppositions that gave the synagogue its new character. One of the basic presuppositions upon which the synagogue is based is the nature of prayer. The synagogue assumes that prayer is the sole means of acceptable worship, and that prayer is for all people. Any person can pray, and a person's prayer, providing of course that his intention is correct and that he is a worthy person, will be acceptable to God. Hence, the synagogue exhibited a type of democracy. It was for all people, and all people could make use of its means of communication.. For the synagogue

and its worship service, it was not the building that was holy, but rather the people and their actions.

In this context, S. Hoenig states that there is no basis whatsoever, to assert the existence of Synagogues within the Temple precincts.

> "Moreover to assert that there were regular 'religious meetings' in the Temple Court is also incorrect. The populace gathered there on the festivals, but mostly as observers of the Temple ritual, not as participants in a synagogue service."[21]

He continues, only after the destruction of the Temple in 70C.E., did the synagogue emerge as a house of prayer, " בתי תפלה."

Thus it is impossible to admit the existence of the synagogue within the Temple itself.

Dr. Solomon Zeitlin has postulated that the synagogue emerged in Post-exilic Palestine out of problems that were practical in scope. In response, the people built a public meeting house. When the people confronted a problem that was religious in character they utilized their public meeting house. With the passage of time, what was formerly the primary role for this public meeting house became secondary, as its role as a religious center became its significant import. Hence, the synagogue emerged.

What seems to be a convincing argument for the origin of the synagogue is to join the theory of Dr. Solomon Zeitlin with the findings of Dr. Ellis Rivkin. Dr. Rivkin has suggested that the book of Ben Sira is a complete chronicle revealing the tenor of its age. Ben Sira does not mention the synagogue. Dr. Rivkin therefore argues that this silence implies the non-existence of the synagogue during his time, ca. 270 B.C.E., or ca. 180 B.C.E. Given the rather late date for our earliest archae-

ological ruins which have been identified as synagogues, the findings of Dr. Rivkin seem quite coherent.

Hence, I would conclude that the synagogue as a religious institution emerged in Palestine during the late Post-Exilic times, probably some time after 270 B.C.E. or 180 B.C.E. It developed out of a meeting house which was originally built in consequence to practical needs, and only later developed into a full fledged synagogue as a house of prayer.

CHAPTER II

The Roman Synagogue

Among the ruins of synagogues that have heretofore been uncovered, are a cluster of remains to the north of Jerusalem, in the area known as the Galilee. These ruins represent what has been called the early synagogue. It should also be noted that many references have been found in literary sources which attest to the existence of the synagogue during the first centuries of the common era. The Talmud states that there were synagogues in Jerusalem[1] and Tiberias,[2] and the New Testament reports synagogues in Nazareth and Capernaum,[3] to mention but a few. References such as these shed light on the location and possible date of early synagogues, and are of some help in determing the nature of the synagogue itself. Hence, it will prove fruitful to analyze the Galilean synagogues which have been located, Capernaum being one of these, in an attempt to gain some insight into the nature of the early synagogue.

Located on the shore of the sea of Galilee, the synagogue of Capernaum embodies many of the architectural details that are typical of synagogues that have been discovered in this area. Avi-Yonah suggests that this synagogue is to be dated in the third century of the common era.[4] Considering its early date, this synagogue proves to be a fruitful starting point for our investigation of the early synagogue and its architectural details.

The rectangular sanctuary had a floor plan measuring 20.40 meters long by 18.65 meters wide. The interior was divided by two rows of columns that ran lengthwise in the building, as well as a third row of columns along one of its short walls. Hence the interior included a nave,

with aisles on the east, west, and north sides of the building.[5]

This building, a two-storied, white, limestone structure, no doubt contrasted vividly with the black basalt, native to the area.[6] The floor of the synagogue consisted of limestone flags of various sizes which rested on a bed of small basalt stones.[7]

The south wall of the building, which is the facade, faced Jerusalem. It contained four pilasters which divided it into a wide middle and two narrow lateral fields. The middle field contained the main doorway, and each of the others was provided with a smaller entrance, providing the facade with a total of three doorways. On the facade, above the sima which united the pilasters of the lower part of the synagogue, was a large open arch provided with an iron grating. Above the arch was a window. On each side of the window were two small columns with Attic bases and Corinthian capitals. The window was crowned with a pediment having a shell in its center and ivy and tendrils above its two acroteria. There may have also been windows above each of the side doors to light the aisles. A frieze and a cornice, many parts of which were found among the ruins in front of the south side of the synagogue completed the upper part of the facade.[8]

Among the various motifs to be noticed as decorations were the figures of lions, deliberately defaced, acanthus leaves, strings of eggs, a dentil band, and a Lesbian cyma.[9]

On the east side of the synagogue was a courtyard containing a columned portico. There was a door leading into the synagogue from this courtyard, and to judge from the remains of a window sill with sockets for bars and for the insertion of window posts, Sukenik postulates that there

was a window which opened above the doorway.[10]

The north wall of the building contained no doors. But at the west end of the north wall, a small square structure was found, joined to the main building. A door opened from it into the synagogue itself. Many fragments of glass vessels and large earthen jars were found in this room which suggests that it may have been used as a store room. There were two basalt staircases leaning one against the east and one against the west walls of this store room. Parts of a window were found in this area similar to those parts of windows found on the south side of the building.[11]

The west side of the building contained neither doors nor windows. Sukenik suggests that this may have been due to climatic conditions.[12]

In front of the building, on the south side, was a porch, with steps leading up to it from both the east and west sides.[13]

The interior of the building contained benches on the east and west sides. On each side there was both an upper and a lower bench. In the southwest corner there was a rounded piece of the upper bench with a back carved out of stone, which was decorated in front with the relief of a head with disheveled hair. Sukenik suggests that this may have been a cathedra. Since small quantities of colored distemper have been found among the ruins, he also suggests that the walls above the benches may have been plastered with distemper of various colors, and perhaps stuccoed.[14]

There were seven columns on each of the long sides, with two between the northernmost columns of each row. Their capitals were Corinthian decorated with acanthus leaves. Sukenik proves to his own satisfaction

the existence of a gallery by the presence among the ruins of the synagogue, of columns and capitals different from those just mentioned.[15]

The decoration inside the synagogue on the frieze contained motifs from the vegetable kingdom, as well as geometrical figures. The only exception to this rule was apparently a few stones from the north wall. They bear traces of figures, which were later defaced like the figures that graced the exterior of the building. Included herein are figures of eagles as well as a sea horse. One other stone from the frieze of the north wall bears particular interest. At its end is carved a carriage in the shape of a small temple standing on wheels, of which only two are visible. More will be said about this stone at a later time.[16]

In the interior of the nave, in front of the south wall were found various carved stones. It is suggested that they belonged to the Ark. This structure, which occupied almost the entire width of the nave made the main entrance inaccessable. It seems to have formed no part of the original plans for the synagogue, and was apparently a later innovation.

The decoration for the ark included two shells with a frieze above, carved out of one stone. The ornamentation of the frieze included vegetable motifs as well as deliberately defaced figures of animals. Sukenik feels that two statues of lions, of which remains were found during excavations, were originally placed on the pediment of the building. They were acroteria placed on either side of the buildings facade.[17]

Again in Galilee, not far to the north of Capernaum are the ruins of the synagogue of Chorazin. This rectangular structure was about 20 meters long and 13 meters wide. The interior of the building was divided

lengthwise into two aisles about 3.20 meters wide and a nave of 6.60 meters in width by two rows of columns running parallel to the long sides of the rectangle. There was an additional row of columns parallel with the breadth of the building, leaving a third aisle along the north wall about 3.50 meters in width.[18]

This structure, built of local stone, basalt, was oriented in such a manner that its facade, like that of Capernaum was the south wall. It was broken by three doors, the main portal in the center entering into the nave, with two additional smaller doors each respectively leading into one of the two lengthwise aisles. Above the main portal was an arched window, crowned by a gabled roof. Excavations have revealed several terraces in front of the building leading to a platform, on top of which Sukenik suggests the presence of a portico.[19]

Much of the detail of the upper courses of the building have been lost to time. The excavations have disclosed two annexes on the west side of the building. The smaller and more northern of these annexes contained a staircase, which no doubt led to a gallery which the columns on three sides supported. In addition, Sukenik suggests that there was probably a court on the east side of the building.[20]

The ground plan that Sukenik has reproduced suggests that there was a double tier of benches on three sides of the building; the east, west, and north.[21] The walls of the synagogue itself were decorated, like that at Capernaum, with a frieze employing human, animal, and geometric motifs. Unlike the synagogue at Capernaum, at Chorazin there is no evidence of deliberate mutilation of the forms. Interior fragments of miniature architecture in the area of the south wall suggest the existence of an ark in

this immediate vicinity.[22]

Goodenough suggests that there was a screen between the two southernmost inner columns. The basis for such a postulation is the finding of two shells of almost identical size. Goodenough states:

> "They were not thick enough to have stood in the walls, and their backs were finished in such a way as to make it clear the backs had not been set in a wall, but had been exposed to view."[23]

Goodenough states that the screen was:

> "...the ancestor of the iconostas, or image screen, of the Orthodox church, and that the space behind that screen stood in the synagogue, as it does in Orthodox churches, for the Holy of Holies,..."[24]

Also located in the Galilee, to the northwest of the ruins of Capernaum and Chorazin, are the ruins of the synagogue of Kfar Bir'im. The sanctuary was rectangular in shape, measuring 18.10 meters by 13.95 meters, and was divided into a nave and three aisles by two longitudinal and one transverse row of columns. Only the south side of this structure was free of an aisle.[25] Goodenough suggests that the columns carried a balcony on the east, north and west sides of the building, and that steps seem to have gone up to the gallery on the north side of the building, much as was the case at Capernaum.[26]

Parts of the facade at Kfar Bir'im are still standing; namely, the lower section with three doorways, and a part of the portico. Though the facade at this structure was not as heavily ornamented as the structures of Capernaum and Chorazin, it was still the central feature of the building. The main feature of the facade was the three doors, the middle one of which was topped by an arch. There were little windows on the right and left.

Their ornamentation was somewhat meager in juxtaposition to the elaborate ornamentation at Capernaum. They only had a "...gable with its elaborate acroteria, and a 'round object' in each tympanum."[27] In the center of its lintel was a wreath flanked by two figures which were deliberately defaced.[28] The portico in front of the south side, was carried by six columns in the front and a single column on either side. It was a new feature for the Galilean synagogue.[29]

Also of interest to us, particularly with reference to our impending discussion of the Ark, was the fact that the central door was blocked by masonry, while the two side doors were open. This suggests that at some time after the building was completed, a need apparently arose to protect whatever was permanently situated in front of the central door.[30]

CHAPTER III

Structural Elements of the Roman Synagogue

Certain structural elements were integrated at all of the Galilean synagogues. The structures at Chorazin and Kfar Bir'im, like that of Capernaum were free standing structures, rectangular in shape, constructed of well-dressed stones. Their interiors were divided by two longitudinal and one transverse row of columns. The double row of columns which ran parallel to the long sides of the building helped to carry a gabled roof. The facade, one of the short sides, and the focal point of these structures, contained three doors which were oriented in such a manner that they faced to the south, toward Jerusalem. These common features suggest that these buildings represent a particular phase in the construction of early synagogues. Goodenough has likewise concluded that such an early synagogue existed, and concludes that the following are representatives of it: Capernaum, Chorazin, Kfar Bir'im, Irbid, Umm el-Amed, Meron, En Nabraten, El-Jish, Ed-Dikkeh, Umm el Kanatir, Khirbet Semaka and Sheikh Ibreiq.[1]

With regard to the early synagogue, which he classifies as Palestinian he states:

> "That type is the basilica, oriented with its facade and its worship toward Jerusalem....In the synagogue the main entrance with its usual three doors itself was on the end of the building toward Jerusalem, and the sacred enclosure was directly in front of these doors, or of the central door....In these Galilean synagogues there is normally no niche for the Torah scrolls. The screen across the end toward Jerusalem seems to have taken the place of this entirely, and the Torah shrine itself was probably portable or on wheels. ...As to the separation of the women, this seems to me to have come to the synagogue from usuage in the Temple, and was probably a very early feature of synagogal worship. From the point of view of ornament these synagogues have also established a type...it is surprising that the ornament has thus far

> consisted almost entirely of vines, wreaths, shells, and animals, usually lions or eagles. Victories have supported the wreaths, and we have seen centaurs, cupids, hares, and various types of vintners. One certain and one probable Torah shrine were carved in Capernaum, but the menorah appeared only once on a capital at Capernaum, perhaps three times at Chorazin, once over a doorway at En Nabraten, and once in the synagogue at Sheikh Ibreiq."[2]

Scholars have suggested that these synagogues represent the earliest phase of known synagogue construction. Avi-Yonah dates these structures from the second to the fourth centuries of the common era,[3] the Jewish tradition of the Middle Ages assigns these Galilean synagogues to the period of R. Simeon B. Yohai, i.e., to the second century C.E.,[4] and the early scientific explorers proposed dates near the turning-point of the second and third centuries of the common era.[5]

Richard Krautheimer, in his article "The Beginning of Early Christian Architecture" describes the basic Roman Basilica as follows:

> "...it was always an oblong building....Its entrance was generally from the forum; only in a few groups of basilicas, in Italy, in Africa and in the Near East, does the small side contain the entrance....The interior of the basilica consisted of a nave, which was normally accompanied by two aisles, or surrounded on all four sides by aisles. The aisles sometimes had galleries above them....If apses were included in the construction, there were frequently two or three, attached to the two small sides, or to the two small sides and one long side of the edifice; usually they were separated from the nave by the aisles or by a series of columns. Variations occur, but never in the basic design...."[6]

One conclusion is obvious. That some elements that characterized the Roman basilica were found in the early synagogues: a rectangular shaped building, interiors divided into a nave and aisles by longitudinal and transverse rows of columns, and some even suggest that there were galleries above the aisles.[7]

Krautheimer maintains that the basic Roman pattern remained relatively intact from the first half of the first century, or in the second century B.C.E., until the end of the third century C.E.[8] Therefore, given the dating of the early synagogue as outlined above, the dating of the Roman basilica, and the similar structural elements found in both types of buildings, one must conclude that here was an example of adaptation. The structural elements that were inherent in these two types of structures was more than accidental. This phenomenon must have been an example of cultural adaptation.

We are not alone in reaching this conclusion, for H.L. Gordon states that the synagogues of the first centuries display basilican features,[9] and Eleazar Sukenik states "...the basilica, which was so universally employed in the Hellenistic world for public buildings of various sorts, became the standard type of building for Jewish synagogues as well,..."[10]

Hence, I believe we are on fairly safe ground when we assert that the synagogue was patterned after the Roman basilica, and that the Jewish people adapted this basic architectural structure as a model for a new type of institution for the people.

Though the synagogue adapted its basic stylistic features from the Roman basilica, there were structural features indigenous to the synagogue. I would suggest that these variants can be explained in terms of the raison d'être of the building. The synagogue was primarily a house of worship. It was an institution wherein man prayed to God, and this prayer was recognized as an effective means of communication with God.

Hence, the construction of this building had to take into account the function of the building, providing room for the community it was to serve, and space for the necessary accouterments germane to the worship service. The raison d'être of the building would of course explain the inclusion of various features such as the Ark, benches, and the bemah. Avi-Yonah explains the absence of the apse in the early synagogue by also taking into account the raison d'être of the building. The synagogue represents an attempt on the part of the Jewish people to spiritualize divine worship. Therefore, the synagogue had no need for an altar, and certainly no need for a statue of the god.

> "In their zeal to differ from their pagan prototypes, the synagogue architects in the earlier phase (of synagogue construction) abolished even the apse of the Roman basilica, which served both as a tribunal and a place for the statue of the god or emperor. No permanent external construction was to mar the simple spirituality of the hall."[11]

Therefore, the impetus to build the synagogue resulted in an adaptation of the basic Roman basilica wherein the Jewish people utilized the basic art forms of their day, and attempted to reinterpret and redesign them for use in a new symbolic surrounding. This new setting was spiritualized divine worship, "...in which prayer, the reading of the Law, and an occasional discourse replaced the incense-burning, libations and sacrifices of the Temple."[12]

Avi-Yonah, in an attempt to explicate the basic changes in the process of redefining the art form, offers an opinion as to what must have been the basic relationships between client, architect, and craftsman.

> "...we must consider separately three different groups: the donors and their spiritual advisers, the synagogue elders; the architects who drew up the plans; and lastly,

> the stonecutters and masons who actually executed the work. Obviously, the plans of the buildings were adapted to the needs of the first group. These decided on the size of the synagogue, and on its arrangements so that it should conform to ritual purposes and, in general, to their idea of what was fitting for a place of Jewish worship. The architect who drew up the plans and elevations, and who in some cases may have prepared the detailed drawings of the ornament, had to satisfy, of course, the desires of the donors, but he naturally drew upon his experience and observation of other (usually non-Jewish) constructions. On the other hand, the workmen who carried out the architect's plans were almost certainly local masons, steeped in the traditions of the country. They would carry their mannerisms even into the carving of decorations originally derived from the Greek ornament. In addition to their inherited tendencies towards stylization and geometric repetitions, it would be difficult for them to render in the hard basalt of the Galilean hills the supple Hellenic shapes originally conceived for cutting in marble.[13]

As such, I believe we can understand how there could be such an intimate relationship between a specifically Jewish institution, the synagogue, which was adapted from the most prevalent secular institution of its day, albeit with some basic differences, the basilica.

Judging from the archaeological evidence before us, it is highly suggestive to conclude that there was a specific intent on the part of the architects of the early synagogue to orient their structures in the general direction of Jerusalem. Usually it was the side with the three monumental doorways that faced toward Jerusalem, and was consequently the basis of orientation.

Herbert Gordon May suggests that the synagogue was oriented toward Jerusalem so that worship going on in the sanctuary would be directed toward the Temple mount.[14] Sukenik concurs with this point of view. On

the basis of I Kings 8:44:

> "If Thy people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatsoever way Thou shalt send them, and they pray unto the Lord toward the city which Thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Thy name;..."

Daniel 6:11:

> "...he went into his house -- now his windows were open in his upper chamber towards Jerusalem,..."

and the Tosephta, Berakhoth chapter three:

> "Those standing outside the Land of Israel shall direct their hearts towards the Land of Israel and pray, for it is written, 'and pray unto the Lord toward their Land' (2 Chron. 6:34 ff.). Those standing in the Land of Israel shall direct their hearts unto Jerusalem and pray, for it is written, 'and they shall pray towards this city' (2 Chron. 6:34 ff.). Those standing in Jerusalem shall direct their hearts towards the Sanctuary and pray, for it is written, 'and they shall pray towards this Place' (2 Chron. 6:34 ff.)."

Sukenik concludes that the focus of prayer is important in terms of orientation, and, that focus should be directed toward Jerusalem, toward the Temple mount. He concludes; "Although these rules are intended for individual worshippers, the orientation of the houses of worship was determined by them."[15]

Reasoning such as this insinuates a longing for the return of the Temple cult, implying that the synagogue was a temporary institution, to be employed only till the Temple could be rebuilt. Such thinking is not well grounded. Although synagogues were generally oriented toward Jerusalem, the Galilean synagogues toward the south, those below Jerusalem toward the north, those in Transjordan toward the west, and those west of Jerusalem toward the east, this general principle was not universally adhered to. The synagogue of Esfia on Mount Carmel, as well as that of Khirbet Semmaka, both in Palestine, were oriented toward the east, away

from Jerusalem. Such is also the case with the synagogue of Yafa.

However, Sukenik feels that he can reconcile this problem. He states that these synagogues were not considered to be north of Jerusalem, but rather east of Jerusalem in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun, of whom it is written:

זבולן ימי חוף ימים

"Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea."[16]

Sukenik therefore concludes that these synagogues were regarded as coastal synagogues, and therefore oriented to the east.[17]

If this explanation be the reason for the a typical orientation of Esfia, Khirbet Semmaka and Yafa, we have only partially solved the problem. For Umm el-Kanatir,[18] as well as Hammam Lif,[19] seem to be orientated away from Jerusalem. Goodenough suggests however, that at Hammam Lif the apse may not have been the seat of the Torah Shrine, and that the synagogue was actually orientated in accordance with accepted custom.[19] This does not however, explain the variance at Umm el-Kanatir.

The conclusion that one must reach is obvious. Synagogues were in many places orientated so that when the worshippers were at prayer they faced Jerusalem. But this was only a custom, a custom that was by no means universally accepted. And if orientation was an accepted practice, it had nothing to do with a longing for the restoration of the Temple and its cult, and further had no implication whatsoever, regarding the permanent nature of the structure.

No doubt when a community entertained thoughts of building a

synagogue, one of the important considerations was that of the primacy of the building. The community probably desired to place their house of worship in such a location so that it would immediately attract attention reenforcing the importance of this public institution.

The Talmudic sources suggest that synagogues should be built on the highest sites in the towns.[20] According to Sukenik, "The Palestinian synagogues mostly satisfy this specification,"[21] although he suggests that it became politically infeasible in the Diaspora, as well as in Palestine for this practice to continue.[22] Although there are no Rabbinic sources to suggest the proximity of water as a suitable location for the construction of synagogues, this too, seems to have been a prevalent custom. The synagogues of Aegina and Miletus lie close to the edge of the shore, as also does the synagogue of Capernaum. Sukenik gives further evidence. He states:

> "Although official Judaism has preserved no trace of a precept to that effect (synagogues were to be built near bodies of water), there is abundant evidence that Jews in Hellenistic countries built their synagogues by preference in the proximity of water. Josephus, Ant. xiv. 10, 23, para. 258, tells of a decision of the people of Halicarnassus to suffer the Jews to observe their laws and sabbaths and build synagogues, as was their custom, by the sea."[23]

These ancient synagogues must have been imposing sites as they stood in the most desirable locations, contrasting vividly with the surrounding locale.

Adding to their grace and splendor, particularly in the Galilean synagogue, was an imposing facade. Central to the facade were three doors, the larger and more richly decorated being in the middle. There was a window above each of the doors. Although it was considered proper for

each of the windows to be decorated, the primacy of the center door was reenforced because the window over that door was larger and more richly decorated than were the other two windows.

Some authors have suggested what appeared to them to be cogent reasons for the existence of the three doors. Israel Renov suggests that the three-door facade with the emphasis on the middle door, emphasized its special function as the entrance, and shows that in this location, during times of worship, were to be found the Ark and the Torah scrolls.[24] Franz Landsberger suggests that in order to pray in the direction of Jerusalem through an open space, one utilized the opening of the two smaller portals.[25] Goodenough has developed another theory. He postulates that there was a screen corresponding to the iconostas or image screen of the Orthodox church, which was found in front of the Holy of Holies. Therefore, this screen would have been located in these early Galilean synagogues in front of the three doors. Given the additional evidence of the central door being blocked at Capernaum, Chorazin, and Kfar Bir'im, plus the fact that the facades of Jewish onossuaries and tombs were in many instances divided into three parts, Goodenough proposes the following theory. He suggests that this form was not a functional form, whatever its first origin, but rather a device and symbol, showing that whatever was put under, behind, or in front of it was consecrated.[26]

Louis Ginzberg, on the basis of his understanding of the Jerusalem Talmud suggests that the three-door facade has implications with regard to orientation. He states:

> "Public prayer originally meant recital of prayers by the reader, and hence his orientation at prayer was all important. As he had to face the congregation - this rule is often not mentioned - it was considered desirable to have the people enter from the south side so that the reader faced them and at the same time the Holy City."[27]

In this way, he suggests the three-door facade permitted the reader to maintain the proper direction with regard to prayer, and with regard to facing the congregation. Hence, a most convincing suggestion regarding the rationale for the doors being on the southern wall.

It is obvious that the need for a means of entrance to the sanctuary, as well as the desire for architectural grace and symmetry are adequate and sufficient reasons for the utilization of the three-doors. These doors gave the buildings balance and symmetry, two ideals of Classical Architecture, the form out of which the synagogue developed. In addition to the argument of Ginzberg, one must also include the obvious fact that these openings permitted additional light within the sanctuary, a great necessity in an era prior to the discovery of the incandescent bulb.

CHAPTER IV

The Interior of the Roman Synagogue

The evidence found at the early Galilean synagogues further suggests that there was no permanent structure intended to house the Ark. Sukenik did find some various carved stones at Capernaum which he postulated belonged to an Ark, but it would have been rather difficult to place any sort of a permanent structure at the south end of the building without blocking off the doors.

It would seem to me that if the architect placed doors in the building, it was his intention, as also the intention of those who commissioned the building, to utilize the doors for their obvious purpose. It would seem to be faulty logic to suppose that the people would have rendered those doors inaccessible, immediately following their commissioning and building them.

I do not mean to suggest that worship services at the early synagogue did not utilize an Ark containing the Torah scrolls, for such would not be at all true. The Mishnah suggests that originally the Ark was not a permanent structure, but rather it was portable, for it states:

...הי' מוציאין את הארון

"They used to bring out the Ark..."[1]

Hence, what seems to be the logical solution to this problem is that originally the people utilized a portable Ark. During services, at the appropriate time, the reading of the Law, the Ark would be brought out and placed in its proper location, in front of the congregation, i.e., in front of the south wall, no doubt making the central entrance to the synagogue inaccessible. This solution does not however assume that these

doors were not utilized, but rather suggests that only during Scripture lessons were they rendered inaccessible.

Additional evidence is to be found for a portable Ark by investigation of one of the frieze stones found at the synagogue of Capernaum. Sukenik describes this frieze stone as "...a carriage in the shape of a small temple standing on wheels, of which only two are visible."[2]

Kohl and Watzinger explain this piece of sculpture as a Roman carruca reserved for conveying princes and other dignitaries. They state it was introduced in the decoration of the synagogue in order to commemorate one of the privileges of the house of R. Judah ha-Nasi.[3]

Sukenik, calling attention to two facts offers another suggestion as to what this piece of sculpture portrays.

> "(a) that Capernaum was the seat of mystics and sectarians (Eccles. Rabba, 1, 8) who, to a certain degree, might have influenced the ideas of the orthodox community; (b) that this is the only synagogue with representations of pentagrams, hexagrams, and heptagrams, which certainly have the value of magic symbols."[4]

With these facts in mind, Sukenik suggests that this may have been a representation of a chariot having a mystical character influenced by the vision of Ezekiel (chapts. 1 and 10). This particular chariot was represented by an artist in the form of what was to him a contemporary vehicle.[5]

Others, however, have suggested another interpretation for this piece of sculpture which seems to be the most logical. This suggestion is that this frieze offers a picture of a portable Ark on wheels, such as the one which might have been used at the synagogue of Capernaum. It is true that the Ark was at one time portable, and from other sources; mosaic

floors, gilt glasses, etc., we know that the Ark was a building in miniature. Hence, it seems highly consistent to assume that this frieze portrays the portable Ark.

For some reason, the main entrances at the synagogue at Kfar Bir'im, as well as at the synagogues of Chorazin and Capernaum were eventually walled in. What probably occurred was the desire to no longer have to move a portable Ark that was no doubt heavy and bulky. In its stead, the congregration probably desired a permanent location for the Ark on the south wall of the building in front of the main entrance where the portable Ark was located during prayer. Given the existence of a permanent location for the Ark, logic would suggest that the door be walled in, not only because that door could no longer be used, but also to protect this new permanent structure. This explains the reason why the main entrances were walled in. I would also suggest that the stones that Sukenik found at Capernaum and suggested were part of a permanent Ark belong to this period. They are no doubt the remains of a permanent Ark.

The change to specific location for the Ark, leads to the building of an apse in the synagogue, as well as to the inclusion of niches for the Ark or Torah. (The question of whether the Ark or the Torah was placed in the niche, as yet has not been answered) But these apses and niches are the result of a transitional step that is to be noted by an analysis of the floor plan of the synagogue at Ain Duk, the Biblical Naaran.

The synagogue at Ain Duk was a basilica, but its orientation was unique and therefore of special interest. This building had the usual

three doors, but instead of their being on the south side facing Jerusalem, they were on the north wall. The building was oriented on its site so that an individual upon entering the building would have faced the south wall, i.e., the permanent location for the Ark. This change in the basic structure of the early synagogue can also be noted at Beth Alpha. Hence, not only was the early synagogue able to retain the structural feature of the three doors, but it was also able to incorporate the need for a location for the Ark.

Avi-Yonah synthesizes the historical development as follows:

> "As time went on, this plan was found inconvenient in orientation and in its lack of a permanent focus of prayer. These were provided, first by making a niche in the wall facing the Holy City, and then providing an apse which could serve also as a platform from which the Law could be read and expounded."[6]

This change prompted by new needs caused structural innovations, such as the apse and the niche; factors that distinguish between the early synagogue of the second to the fourth century, and the Byzantine synagogue dated between the fourth and sixth centuries. However, let us leave these considerations to our analysis of the Byzantine synagogue.

In addition to carrying the gabled roof, some authors have seen fit to suggest that the interior columns of the sanctuary supported a gallery in the synagogue.

Sukenik suggests that there was a gallery in the synagogue at Capernaum.

> "The existence of upper rows of columns and a gallery, which rested upon the lower columns, is proved by the presence among the ruins of the synagogue of columns and capitals different from those described above.

> Most of the upper columns have been removed too, and it is only by means of a surviving fragment of a corner column (1.65 meters long), which apparently stood in the northwest corner, that we are able to infer that it tapered upwards (diameter at the base 52.5 cm., at the capital 49 cm.) and that it was 10 cm. narrower than the lower columns."[7]

He also concluded that the steps on the annex in the northwest corner of the synagogue complex led up to the gallery. Avi-Yonah concurs with this opinion.

> "Inside the hall, we have to assume the existence of a gallery resting on the columns running around three sides and leaving the front wall free. The evidence for the existence of such a gallery consists in part of steps actually found, as at Capernaum. Secondly, some synagogues contain among their debris columns smaller than those of the main colonnade in the hall; these presumably must have formed part of a secondary colonnade supporting the roof from the gallery. In the absence of any evidence of a screen on the ground floor, the finding of screen slabs also suggests the existence of an upper gallery protected by a balustrade."[8]

Goodenough likewise feels that there was a gallery in the early synagogue for he states: "The columns carried a balcony around the sides and back, which was entered by outside steps from the back."[9]

The conclusion that each of these scholars reaches is that this balcony was a women's gallery. Avi-Yonah states that, "...the separation of men and women dates back to the Second Temple where the Court of Women (Ezrath Nashim) was originally used by both sexes till the rabbis ordered an upper gallery to be set up for the women only."[10] And Goodenough feels that the balcony was presumably, as later, for the women. He continues:

> "I must assume that the principle of segregation of the sexes for public worship was a very old one among the Jews. Herod's Temple notoriously admitted the women only to an outer court, and how far back that custom went in Jewish tradition, we have no way of knowing. The principle

> certainly antedates all surviving synagogues. Actually I strongly suspect that in those synagogues, of whatever type, where separate provision was not made for the women in a balcony within the synagogue, they stood outside, in an open court or in the open air, or worshipped as orthodox women still tend to do, through the worship of their men, and ordinarily did not themselves go to the synagogues at all."[11]

The line of reasoning that Sukenik uses to conclude that men and women were to be separated during worship services is as follows. Though there is no specific regulation that the sexes were to be kept apart at public worship, Philo (apud, Eusebius, Praep. Evang. 8:12) attests to the fact that such was the custom. Sukenik suggests that this custom may have originated at the Jerusalem Sanctuary, the Herodian Temple. He states that, "...we have numerous references to 'the Women's Forecourt' (עזרת נשים) as distinct from 'the People's Forecourt' (עזרת ישראל), the latter being the more inner one."

He further states that the Babylonian Talmud gives evidence of a separation of the sexes. In connection with the Water-Drawing Celebration which took place on the night following upon the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles it says:

> "At first the women used to be within and the men without, and frivolity would result; accordingly it was ordained that the women should sit without and the men within, but still there was frivolity. Finally it was ordained that the women should sit above and the men below."[12]

Sukenik therefore feels justified in concluding that the galleries of which remains have been found in several of the ancient synagogues of Palestine served, as in modern synagogues. as a women's section.[13]

S. Safrai presents an altogether different argument. Many scholars have argued that women were separated from men at the Temple on the basis

of the " עזרת נשים ." Safrai shows that the " עזרת נשים " was not exclusively used by women, and that only once during the year, at the " שאיבה בית ," the Festival of Water Drawing, were men and women separated. And that was only to insure against the possibility of revelry. Since there is no reason to assume that there was a specific women's section in the Temple, and since we definitely know women were accustomed to attend synagogue, we have no basis to assert that the synagogue copied any such custom from the Temple, nor can we assert that women did not frequent the synagogue. Though we can be assured of the existence of galleries at certain early synagogues, they were by no means found at all sites. (Note Dura Europos) Safrai therefore concludes, that the problem of the women's gallery is indeed perplexing, but we cannot assert in any way shape or form, at this time, that it definitely existed.[14]

On the basis of the archaeological evidence, it would be rather difficult to assert that if a women's gallery did exist, it was to be found at all of the sites so far excavated. This problem is indeed perplexing. The suggestion that the galleries so far discovered were women's galleries, is indeed inviting. But one must be prudent. At this time, it is impossible to assert that women were separated from men. There is no conclusive evidence to prove this.

The interior of the early syngagoue offered a distinctive difference from the richly decorated exterior. The facade of the synagogue, with its carved figures and its relief contrasted vividly with a simple, plain interior.

I do not mean to suggest that there were no furnishings in the

early synagogue, rather, it is my intention to assert that those elements to be found in the early synagogue were more functional or symbolic in character than they were decorative.

Avi-Yonah suggests that the startling plainness of the interior of the synagogue was deliberate. "The place of worship was meant to attract and impress the faithful by its richly-ornamented exterior, but once inside, attention was to be kept concentrated on prayer."[15] The role of the synagogue had already become fixed in the mind of the populace, and it was their intention to assert this role in the architecture of the structure. "The only exception to this internal plainness was apparently the back-wall of the upper gallery, which was surmounted by a richly-carved frieze."[15]

But what did the interior of the synagogue look like? The worshippers occupied two plain rows of stone benches, which ran around the side walls of the building, one above the other. Occasionally these benches also ran along the back wall. Sukenik suggests that when the congregation overflowed the benches some probably sat on mats on the floor.[16]

At some of the synagogues, in addition to the stone benches, was a decorated stone seat, probably the cathedra mentioned in Matthew,[17] and in the Pesiktha de Rab Kahana.[18] They were found at Chorazin, Capernaum and Hammath-by-Tiberias. A questionable stone seat (throne) was also found at Dura-Europos. With reference to the cathedra S. Buber states:

> "...it is natural that the presiding judge (of the Sanhedrin) had a seat of a particular form. The following passage mentioned below, in which Moses is designated as President of the Sanhedrin (San. 1,6) explains the name of the seat. The well known passage in Matthew 23:2 establishes the early usuage of the term 'Seat of Moses.' Since the scribes and Pharisees were the heirs to the legal authority of Moses, and

> the 'Seat of Moses' on which the Presiding Judge of the Sanhedrin sat was the symbol of that Authority, the absence of the term until the fourth century C.E. is surprising."[19]

In this context Bacher says:

> "...scholars of Israel, as heirs of the legal authority of Moses, were justified in occupying the physical symbol of that authority as represented by the 'Seat of Moses.'"[20]

While Bacher suggests that the Cathedra de Moshe was a seat of honor, others hold that it served as the stand for the scroll of the Law during services.[21] Israel Renov states that it seems highly unlikely that the Cathedra de Moshe was a stand.[22]

In general, the 'Seat of Moses' was carved out of one block of stone, and situated near the wall orientated toward Jerusalem. It had a rounded top and arms, and was sometimes decorated with a rosette, as at Chorazin.[23]

The complex of the Torah shrine is also of interest to us in determining what the inside of the early synagogue looked like. The Ark, as stated above, was originally portable, and perhaps on wheels, as suggested by the frieze carving at Capernaum. Various frieze carvings, as well as depictions on gold glasses, tombs and ossuaries suggest that the later Ark was a double-doored chest with a gabled or rounded roof. The doors were divided into a number of square or oblong panels, and the doorposts sometimes were shaped like columns. The pediment was ornamented, sometimes with a shell in the center.[24] A decorated arcosolium in a gallery of the Via Nomentana catacomb in Rome gives us a view of the interior of the Ark. It shows the scrolls, each rolled about a rod, lying in rows on shelves.[25] As mentioned above, Goodenough suggests that there

may have been a stone screen in front of the Ark but this is highly unlikely. Evidence from a later period does suggest the existence of a curtain hanging in front of the Ark, but it is rather difficult to draw any connections between a stone screen and a curtain made out of fabric. Goodenough also suggests that steps are a proper approach to the Torah shrine, and are to be found at Eshtemoa, Sheikh Ibreiq, and Chorazin.[26]

Though evidence for other interior furnishings has been found, it is directly applicable to the Byzantine synagogue, and as such, it is better left to that discussion.

Statues of lions were found at Chorazin and Capernaum. They were no doubt part of the ornamentation of the synagogue. Sukenik suggests:

> "Assuming first, as the German explorers did, that a fixed Torah shrine had its place in the prayer-hall, I supposed, - on the analogy of scenes depicted on Jewish gilt glasses from the Roman catacombs, and of mosaic floors in ancient Palestinian synagogues, - that these lion statues flanked the fixed Torah-shrine on either side. Since I now knew, however, that no such fixed structure existed the problem arose of the position of the lion statues in the building. A subsequent study of the remains of the synagogue of Chorazin revealed that these statues are in fact acroteria..."[27]

Though evidence for other interior furnishings has been found, it is directly applicable to the Byzantine synagogue, and as such, it is better left to that discussion.

CHAPTER V

Transitional Synagogues

Although there was a cohesive force in the area of the Gaililee accounting for the similarities in structure of the Roman synagogues which we noted, it is most difficult to believe that such a radically new institution as the synagogue, could in a period of some two hundred odd years, have developed universally accepted norms of structure. Discoveries of contemporary synagogues, from areas other than the Gaililee, exhibit variants in architectural style, as well as locations for ceremonial requirements, so as to suggest that synagogue architecture was still in a state of flux, and that norms or requirements were as of yet not fixed.

The synagogue of Eshtemoa, a Palestinian ruin south of Hebron, is one of these variants. Goodenough says that it is a combination of the broadhouse synagogue and the Galilean synagogue:

> "...for it has our old facade beautifully represented on one narrow end, while the orientation of the building puts a broad side towards Jerusalem,....with the Torah niche built into that broad side."[1]

The facade, the short east side, contained three entrances, and there seems to have been a porch in front of the facade. The building measured 21.30 meters by 13.33 meters, and seems to have been roofed with a gable and red tiles.

The interior of the synagogue was free of columns, and there is no indication that benches lined the walls. On the large north wall, facing Jerusalem, were three niches, a large central one, with two smaller ones on either side. The floor of these niches was six feet ten inches above the floor of the synagogue itself, well above the reach of the

average man. Therefore, if the central niche was the seat of the Torah shrine, as suggested by both Goodenough and Avi-Yonah,[2] it seems quite likely that there was an approach of steps leading to the Torah shrine, and perhaps even a Bemah. In this way, the Torah Scrolls would have been accessible. The floor originally had a mosaic pavement, "...but a local tradition that a treasure was concealed beneath the floor led to its complete destruction."[3]

At some later time, Goodenough posits the early Byzantine period, the building was renovated.[4] Included in this renovation was a new floor above the original floor, and a rebuilt niche.

> "A stone projection was built out in front of the old niches which apparently covered them,...with a bench or step in front of it....In the middle of this was the new niche....A molding ran over the niche, we are told, and beside the niche was 'an inscription in two lines incised in Hebrew characters.'"[5]

This synagogue exhibts some variants as to the acceptable forms of synagogue structure. The most obvious is that the basilical structure was not essential. Secondly, the entrance with its three doors did not have to be located on the wall of orientation. And lastly, the inclusion of a niche marks a radical innovation in the development of the Torah shrine.

The synagogue at Dura-Europos, situated on the Euphrates river on the road from Aleppo to Baghdad, is another Roman synagogue contemporary with the Galilean synagogues previously mentioned. There were two superimposed synagogues found at Dura-Europos. Kraeling feels that the synagogues at Dura-Europos belong to the period of the Roman occupation of the city, beginning with 165 C.E.[6] He feels that the fortunes of the Jewish populace prospered, so that by the year 244/245 C.E., they undertook the ambitious task of rebuilding the synagogue.[7]

It is to this later synagogue that we now turn, to attempt to show the variants in synagogue architecture that existed at this early period. The synagogue was hidden in a complex of other buildings, making it rather inconspicuous. The complex of the synagogue seems at one time to have been a private house. One entered the synagogue through a maze of anterooms which opened onto a forecourt, and then into the synagogue proper. There was a colonnade in the forecourt, and in the northeast corner of the court was a pool for ablutions. The four columns on the west side of the courtyard made a sort of facade with three entrances. This led into a small vestibule. From this vestibule, two doors led into the synagogue itself with its brilliant paintings.

The sanctuary was a broadhouse with benches that ran around the room in two tiers. A niche built in the middle of the western wall, opposite the main entrance and surmounted by a shell, was no doubt the Torah niche. It was approached by three steps. Beside the Torah niche was a throne, "...which consists only 'of four steps leading up to a higher one that served as the seat.' Pearson calls this with reason the 'Elder's seat,' since Samuel the Presbyteros (Elder) is named on one of the tiles as 'founder' of the building. It obviously corresponds to the throne or Seat of Moses we have already seen."[8] There is also evidence, a patch in the stone pavement in the center of the sanctuary, which indicates that there was a bemah.

This synagogue in the diaspora, like the synagogue at Eshtemoa in Palestine, gives ample evidence that no fixed form for the synagogue as yet existed. Dura-Europos, unlike the free standing structures of Galilee, was part of a complex. As a matter of fact, it was hidden from

view, rather than being exposed to common purview. The shape of the buildings itself offers a departure from the norm of the Galilean structures. Whereas the Galilean structures were basilicas, these two buildings are of the broadhouse type. Goodenough distinguishes these broadhouse type synagogues from the Galilean as follows:

> "As the first of these new features the facade with its three doors was no longer put on the sacred end facing Jerusalem...secondly...a niche or apse was built into the wall toward Jerusalem, and the shrine was put into this niche...no vestiges of the basilica appear, and the room is a large rectangle..."[9]

Another distinction also needs mention. Whereas the Galilean structures originally offered no fixed location for an ark and then subsequently a fixed location in front of the facade, the Torah niche at Dura-Europos was a complex arrangement and combination of an aedicula and niche. Renov suggests:

> "Although the synagogue of Eshtemoa in Palestine is contemporary with the one in Dura-Europos, the niche used in the former as a receptacle for an Ark is primitive in form, without the combination of aedicula, columns, and a flight of steps leading up to it found at Dura-Europos."[10]

Lastly, one should also note that up to this time nothing has been found paralleling the frescoes found on the walls of the synagogue at Dura-Europos. We have indeed noted means of ornamentation, and will even see art such as mosaic compositions on floors, but such variants as sculptured frieze work, mosaic floors, and painted frescos show nothing more than a regional variation.

CHAPTER VI

The Byzantine Synagogue

As with the early synagogue, where we attempted to draw some generalizations after surveying the ruins, so too will this be our method regarding the later synagogue.

The synagogue excavated by E. L. Sukenik known as Beth Alpha, is an excellent example of the later synagogue. The mosaic floor is dated by an Aramaic inscription to the reign of "Justin the King." Avi-Yonah believes this inscription probably refers to Justin I, who reigned from 518 to 527.[1] This inscription refers to the composition of the mosaic floor, which in all probability was completed a short time following the building of the sanctuary. Hence, we can date Beth Alpha to either late fifth century, or early sixth century. An analysis of this synagogue will in all probability give us an excellent basis upon which we can make some generalizations regarding the Byzantine synagogue.

The remains of Beth Alpha included a basilica, with a vestibule and a forecourt. Evidence was also found to suggest that there was an annex on the western side. Two rows of columns divided the synagogue into a nave and two aisles. There was an entrance into each of these main divisions from the north wall. The walls of the building were limestone, while the pillars were made of basalt. Stones were trimmed on three sides only. Therefore, it was necessary to fill in the space where two blocks met, with small stones and mortar. Originally, stone benches lined only three walls, but no doubt due to insufficient seating capacity, benches were eventually placed on all four walls. Three narrow steps led up to a platform 75 cm. above floor level, projecting south from the main

rectangle in the shape of an apse. Part of this apse extended into the building. This platform was on two levels. On the lower level, at either side of the steps leading to the upper level, were two perpendicular rounded hollows, cut into that level all the way down to floor-level. Sukenik suggests that these hollows held the columns which supported a curtain which hung in front of the apse.[2]

At the northern end of the synagogue, remains were found that indicated the presence of an upper gallery. These remains included portions of columns, half-columns, a fragment of a column with base, and a second fragment of a simple capital and part of the column shaft. Sukenik concluded that these elements had no place in the arrangements of the lower story, and therefore were part of a women's gallery. He felt that this gallery was over the two sides aisles, as well as the portico.[3] Sukenik offers as further proof that a gallery existed the fact that:

> "...a thick layer of plaster covered the floor of the central nave, and above this layer roof-tiles were scattered. But this was not the case with the other parts of the building: although they were covered with a thin layer of plaster fallen from the walls and the ceilings above them, no tiles at all were found above this layer. This can be explained only by the fact that between the roof and the floor the gallery structure intervened."[4]

The floor of the sanctuary, vestibule and courtyard were paved with mosaic compositions. Of particular importance were three panels found in the nave. The first depicted what was no doubt the front part of a synagogue, the second panel showed the cycle of the Zodiac, and the third panel depicted the story of the "Sacrifice of Isaac." Two heavy rectangles, in front and to the left of the apse, were built on top of

the mosaic floor. These rectangles indicate that some structure was located there sometime after the completion of the mosaic floor, possibly either a bemah or a lectern.[5]

The synagogue at Beth Alpha, a basilica, suggests that maybe the basilica was reworked, so that it became standard as synagogue form. With interest, we note that Na'aran (Ain Duk) and Isfiya, like Beth Alpha, Palestinean structures, as well as Stobi from the Diaspora, all later synagogues, employed the basic basilica. However, once again we cannot assert that the basilica was a universal occurance, for exceptions do occur.

In this context note the synagogue at Hammath Gader, in Palestine, which only partially employs basilical form, as well as Hamman Lif in the diaspora near Tunis in North Africa, which is not a basilica at all. As in the earlier period, we see that again in the later period type of structure was not legally proscribed. Basilicas were still employed, but not universally.

There were a couple of features at variance between the earlier basilical structure and the later. Whereas the earlier structure contained two longitudinal rows of columns as well as a transverse row of columns, at the later synagogue, such as Beth Alpha and Hammath Gader, there were only two rows of columns or pillars. These were in the longitudinal direction. They divided the hall into a nave and two aisles, rather than a nave and three aisles as we found in the earlier synagogue. Avi-Yonah suggests that "The aisles were apparently lower than the nave and were surmounted by the women's galleries, one on each side of the building."[6]

These basilicas also incorporated the apse as the seat of the Torah shrine. If at an earlier time there were reservations about including an apse, because of its use in the Roman basilica, i.e., as a tribunal and a place for the statue of the God or emperor, these negative feelings were overcome. More will be said regarding the apse in our forthcoming discussion of the development of the Torah shrine.

Another feature that needs mentioning is that of orientation. We must keep in mind that orientation toward Jerusalem was not a universal occurance in the early Roman synagogue, though it was a common feature to many of these structures. At Beth Alpha we observed that the apse, which had the Torah shrine, was on the southern wall of synagogue facing Jerusalem. Such is also the case regarding the synagogues of Hammath Gader, Aegina, and Gerasa. In this context Avi-Yonah states:

> "The entrance to the later synagogue halls was as a rule by three doors in the wall opposite the apse, which was directed towards Jerusalem. The arrangement brought into one line the entrance of the building and the direction of prayer, the orientation of the later synagogues is uniform: they face south in Galilee, east at Hulda, west at Gerasa, Jericho and Na'aran."[7]

We must of course temper Avi-Yonah's statement. It has already been pointed out that Hamman Lif is an exception to what Avi-Yonah would present as the rule. They synagogue at Hamman Lif was not directed toward Jerusalem, and because of this phenomena, it is impossible to assert that orientation was fixed at this later date. But the above mentioned information regarding the later synagogue, the Byzantine synagogue, does suggest that orientation was a rather wide spread practice. A practice that cannot be completely discounted.

A third common feature to be noticed at both the earlier synagogue and the later synagogue was the three door facade. We mentioned its import with respect to the early synagogue, and now with interest notice that it was sometimes employed at the later synagogue. At Beth Alpha one entered the sanctuary through three doors off of a vestibule. Similar means of egress were found at Na'aran. Goodenough suggests:

> "The structure of the synagogues with the facade has seemed important and suggestive. Originally the facade of pagan temples, it was used on pagan coins and other places as a setting for deity, until it came to represent, or even to bring, the presence of deity."[8]

In the early synagogue, where the three door facade is almost universal, the Jewish people may have taken over this feature with conscious intent to utilize its pagan symbolic overtones. But such a conclusion can by no means be reached with regard to the Byzantine structure. Although a three door facade was found at Beth Alpha, Na'aran, and Hammath Gader; Gerasa and numerous other contemporary synagogues were found without this architectural feature. This would suggest that it was no longer of great symbolic importance, if it ever had any symbolic import, and the three door facade wherever it was found, was only a structural technique carried over from a previous period of architectural development. It may be argued that the three door facade added additional grace, beauty and symmetry, an obvious fact.

CHAPTER VII

Elements of the Byzantine Synagogue

Up to this point we have been noticing some features common to both the early and the later synagogue. Now we turn exclusively to the later synagogue, as we attempt to typify it.

Mosaic floors have been used by many scholars to differentiate the early synagogue from the later synagogue.

> "The first remains of the later type of synagogue to be noted were in fact isolated fragments of mosaic inscriptions in the synagogues of Sepphoris and Kefar Kenna. Their unusual character led the earlier exeavators to believe that they must have been made by Judaeo-Christians, especially in view of their late date. However, the discovery of the synagogue pavement and inscription at Na'aran...and the discovery of the Beth Alpha Synagogue in 1928, have established our knowledge on a firmer basis."[1]

Avi-Yonah dates those synagogues which had mosaic floors from the fourth to the eighth centuries C.E. He feels that the earlier examples that typify this later type of structure, the Byzantine synagogue, are from the Diaspora. He cites the synagogue at Stobi as the earliest known building from the Byzantine period. He further states that Palestinian examples of the Byzantine synagogue should be dated from the fifth to eighth centuries, the earliest of which he suggests is the synagogue at Gerasa in Transjordan.[2] Goodenough states that synagogues with mosaics are at the earliest dated in the late third century, though he supposes that most were built, "...a century to three centuries later than this."[3]

A statement in the Jerusalem Talmud, found in a fragment of Aboda Zara, is of interest to us with regard to mosaic art. It states:

ביומוי דר׳ אבון שרון ציירין על פסיפסא ולא מחי בידון

> "In the days of R. Abun they began to depict designs on mosaic, and he did not hinder them."[4]

Sukenik suggests that this R. Abun lived in the first half of the fourth century, whereas Goodenough, on the basis of Hermann Strack does not know whether this R. Abun is the father or the son. Hence, there is a discrepancy as to whether this Amoraic passage from the Palestinian Talmud should be dated in the first half of the fourth century, or in the second half.[5] What this statement does tell us, is that during the days of R. Abun, some Rabbis did not attempt to censure mosaic art from a halachic point of view.

Mosaic floors exhibit an interesting change in the mode of decoration between the earlier Roman synagogue and the later Byzantine synagogue. Avi-Yonah suggests that this change in ornamentation was due to the impoverished state of Jewry during the Byzantine period.[6] No longer did the artisans employ sculpture and relief. The elaborate frieze work, the ornamentation in stone that we noticed at Capernaum, Chorazin and Kfar Bi'rim, became a thing of the past. The mosaic floor replaced the flagstone floor, and its geometric design or pictoral representation was the lone ornamentation to be found in the synagogue.

Another difference that we should note in the Byzantine synagogue is the inclusion of a vestibule. The early synagogue had no narthex; the open court adjoining the synagogue, or the porch in front of the building fulfilled the functions of an ante-room.[7] In the earlier synagogue the tendency was to locate the colonnaded courtyard on the side of the building, such as we noticed at Capernaum. In thelater synagogue, the tendency was to transfer this structure to the front of the building. In this context note Gerasa, Beth She'arim, and Beth Alpha.

We also noted that the early synagogue was by and large a free standing structure. Such is not at all the case for the later synagogue. They are by and large part of a complex. We noted at Beth Alpha that there was both a vestibule and a forecourt, and Sukenik suggests that such was also the case for the synagogue on the island of Aegina.[8] The floor plan at Hammath Gader is further evidence that later synagogues were frequently part of a complex.[9] A guest house was even found at the synagogue of Stobi.

But the basic difference between the Roman synagogue and the Byzantine synagogue has to do with the Torah shrine.

In our earlier discussions, it was suggested that the Ark was originally a portable structure. There was no fixed location for the Ark in the synagogue proper, but at the appropriate time during services the Ark was brought out and placed in front of the central door, thus blocking it. This procedure probably became bothersome, because at a later date the central door was bocked in. In this way a semi-permanent location was designated for the Ark. This of course was only a solution for an already existing synagogue.

When a new synagogue was built, it was necessary to incorporate changes in the basic design of the building so that a location for the Ark would be part of the structure of the synagogue itself. For this reason we noticed two new features in the structure of later synagogues, i.e., the niche, and the apse. Even for buildings constructed during the early period of development, buildings such as those found at Dura-Europos and Eshtemoa, we noted that they contained in the former case an apse, and in the later case a niche. So it is impossible to assert that the apse, and the niche are only features of the later synagogue, the Byzantine building,

although it must be mentioned that no Byzantine structure has been found without either one of these two structural features.

On the basis of an article by C. Hopkins entitled The Parthian Temple, Renov has suggested that the synagogue at Dura-Europos reflected strong Babylonian influences. In paraphrasing Hopkins he states:

> "Since he regards the feature of the niche in the middle of the back wall strong evidence of Babylonian origin, the presence of this element in the same position and wall at the Dura synagogue can likewise be ascribed to the same Babylonian source he sees for the feature in the case of Parthian temples."[10]

Renov therefore concludes that more thought was given to a fixed location for the Ark much earlier in Babylonia than in Palestine. To further substantiate this point of view he cites the fact that not until the fifth century C.E., at the Palestinian synagogue of El Hammeh was there a fixed location for the Ark that could be compared to the complex aedicula and niche preceded by a flight of stairs as is found at Dura-Europos.[11] He further suggests that at Dura-Europos and Eshtemoa there was only a small location for the Ark.[12] Since the panels decorating the synagogue of Dura-Europos portrayed the Ark as a cylindrical container with a dome-like top, and the dimensions of the niche in the synagogue are rather small, Renov concludes along with Sukenik that even with a fixed location for the Ark, this Torah shrine probably only housed a portable Ark, such as is suggested by the panels, and as we suggested was found in the Galilean synagogues.[13] This conclusion would of course also pertain to Eshtemoa.[14] If this point of view be accurate, and it is quite convincing, it would have some ramifications regarding the early Galilean synagogue. It would mean that even when the central door was blocked in at the Galilean

structures, they still only employed a portable Ark. This would therefore mean that there were developmental stages regarding the Ark. Initially a portable Ark with no permanent location, then a fixed location for a portable Ark, and then a fixed location for a fixed Ark, although it is not certain if this development occurred in the Byzantine period, or the Middle Ages.

Conclusions such as this, like so many conclusions reached concerning these early synagogues are at best hypothetical. Until additional synagogues are found, evidence will remain in its present tenuous state.

The location for the Ark, during services as we have suggested, took one of two forms. The Ark was placed either in a niche or in an apse.

Avi-Yonah suggests that the floor of the apse was usually higher than the nave, so that one approached the Torah shrine by climbing a few steps. It was noted that the niche found at Eshtemoa was high enough off of the ground as to suggest that the most feasable means of access would be by a flight of steps. Steps have been found at Sheikh Ibreiq and Dura-Europos, as well as Beth Alpha, as we previously noted. Pictoral representations on gold glasses also show a flight of steps leading to the Torah shrine.[15]

Numerous Arks, depicted on the walls of a Jewish catacomb in Rome, on sepulchral monuments, sculptured reliefs in synagogues, mosaic pavements in synagogues, and gold glass vessels show great affinity to one another. Sukenik when he described the Ark, keeping in mind the various finds, states:

> "In all these illustrations, except for slight variations, the Ark remains unchanged in its general features. Therefore there is reason to suppose that the craftsmen had before them an actual, traditional model of an Ark in which the scrolls of the Law were kept in synagogues. The variations are mainly in the roof of the Ark, which is sometimes pointed and sometimes arched. Sometimes the front of the roof is decorated with a shell. It has almost always a double door, in the wings of which are seen carved squares from two to five in number. Sometimes the Ark is shown with opened doors, and then the scrolls of the Law appear lying on shelves inside."[16]

The first panel of the mosaic floor at Beth Alpha, which was suggested to represent the Torah shrine, offers a fairly detailed description of this area of the synagogue. In this mosaic, the Ark and other synagogue appurtenances,

> "...are included in a space from before which a curtain is being drawn to either side in order to expose its contents. In the centre is the Ark of the Law, flanked by two Menorahs, and other ritual objects and by two lions."[17]

Kraeling suggests that a curtain also hung in front of the niche at Dura-Europos. He theorizes that four holes found in the facade of the Torah niche were associated with the supports for this appurtenance.[18] We previously mentioned that Sukenik thinks a curtain also hung in front of the Torah apse at Beth Alpha. In the mosaic representation, as well as in the cases of Dura-Europos and Beth Alpha, the evidence seems to suggest that the curtain was not hung over the door of the Ark, as our present custom, but rather was intended to conceal the whole Torah shrine and its appurtenances.

The mosaic floor at Na'aran also contains an illustration of an Ark. Here, the Ark is again in the form of a miniature building (or perhaps chest), flanked by menorahs on either side.

The menorah was a frequent design on gold glass vessels, depicting the Ark, as well as on mosaic floors, as is to be noticed at both Na'aran and Beth Alpha. The menorah was also a frequent motif in sculpture, and as such was found in many of the earlier synagogue ruins, such as Chorazin, Capernaum, En Nabraten, and Sheikh Ibreiq. Of particular interest is a seven branch stone menorah discovered at Hammath-by-Tiberias.

It is cut out of a single block of limestone and stands 46 cm. in height, 60 cm. in width and 13 cm. in thickness. On the face side of the branches are carved pomegranates alternating with flowers. The branches are not carved out, so the top consists of one solid slab. On the surface of this slab are seven hollowed out grooves which apparently held seven earthen lamps.[19] Hence, the menorah possibly fulfilled two functions. We noticed that it was a common decorative ornament, and its consistently prominent representation in pictures of the Ark, plus the find of an actual menorah, strongly suggest that the menorah was part of the synagogue furnishings.

In our discussion of the Roman synagogue, mention was made of the fact that statues of lions were found at a number of the Galilean sites. It will be remembered that Sukenik concluded, to his own satisfaction, that these statues were part of the external ornament. This makes excellent sense, but I might add, only with regard to the Roman synagogue. We have noticed that on mosaic floors, and gold glass vessels that lions were found on either side of the Ark.[20] It was previously suggested that the craftsmen of these compositions probably had the model of the actual Ark before them. For this reason, it seems most likely that lions were a part of the decoration of the Ark during the Byzantine period of construction,

when a location for a permanent Torah shrine was incorporated into the design of the synagogue proper.

There were other interior appointments in addition to the aforementioned benches which were found at these synagogues. Kraeling, on the basis of some holes located in the floor at Dura-Europos, suggests that there may have been a wooden bemah and some upright lampstands as part of the appurtenances.[21] The possibility of a bemah at Beth Alpha was also mentioned. Though these considerations are of course highly conjectural, they do give us somewhat of an idea of the interior of the synagogue.

An inscription found at Side in Pamphylia gives us some additional data as to the interior equipment. It states:

> "(I, Is)aac, curator of the most holy first synagogue, made successful construction: I both filled in the marble (floor?) from the ambon to the simma, and refinished the two menorahs and the two chief columns (or capitals)."[22]

It further corroborates the existence of menorahs as part of the furnishings, in addition to which it suggests two new pieces of equipment, the ambon and the simma.

Goodenough suggests that the term ambon refers to the bemah, a fairly obvious conclusion, and that the simma refers to the niche of the Torah shrine.[23] This interpretation of the term simma is however, based on an assumption, which is at best highly speculative. But a statement by Irving Lavin is highly suggestive as to the meaning of the term simma. He says: "The curved portico...constitutes a distinct architectural type, ...it too had a special name, sigma, from its similarity to the capital Greek letter, which was written as the Latin capital C."[24] Lavin suggests

that the word simma is a corrupt form of the work sigma, hence explaining the simma as a curved portico.[25]

It has also been suggested that one additional piece of equipment was part of the synagogue establishment, a water basin. Goodenough asserts that a water basin was standard equipment for the synagogue.[26] We have already suggested that basins for water may have been part of the equipment at Dura-Europos. Sukenik also believes that vessels with water for the washing of hands were to be found at places such as Stobi and Beth Alpha.[27]

While we have definitely noticed two distinct modes of architectural style for the synagogue, the Roman synagogue and the Byzantine synagogue, with a transitional stage between them, what is even more apparent is the fact that in the early synagogue there was little that was considered as fixed form. It is evident from both the archaeological remains, as well as the literary evidence, that it is impossible to note any specific regulations as to structure. Even six hundred to eight hundred years after the synagogue emerged, the synagogue was still sufficiently novel as to preclude many fixed universal particulars.

Conclusions

The synagogue provided a new form of worship for the Jew. Prayer superceded sacrifice, the priest and his honored role were displaced by the scholar. No longer was there a centralized place of worship, a Temple, which was considered to be the residence of God. In its place was the decentralized synagogue where God was called into being through the communal act of prayer.

Research seems to indicate that the synagogue had its origins some time during the Hellenistic period. At this time it is most difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty the exact date, though it seems most likely to have emerged after the Hasmonean revolt. Apparently it was originally intended to serve as a house of assembly, later, after 70 C.E., as a house of prayer.

Synagogues are mentioned in many literary sources. The New Testament, both Talmuds, the Babylonian and the Jerusalem, and sources such as Philo and Josephus attest to the existence of synagogues. Archaeology has also confirmed the existence of the early synagogue in Palestine as well as the Diaspora.

The earliest ruins of synagogues that have been unearthed are from Palestine, in the Galilee. These second century synagogues appear to be patterned after the Roman basilica and exhibit many common features. They are free standing structures, many of which also include an open courtyard. In some of the ruins evidence has been unearthed which suggests the existence of an upper story. Whether this gallery is in truth a women's gallery, has as of yet not been fully established.

The central focus of these early buildings was the facade which faced Jerusalem and which was ornamented. The facade was pierced by three

doors, the central one being the most dominant. The portable Ark which was utilized in these early buildings, and which may have continued in use during the later phases of early synagogue construction, was placed in front of this central door. Due to the inconveniences caused by this arrangement, the central door was eventually walled in.

Though a certain degree of uniformity was to be found among the Galilean structures, this uniformity of structure was not universal. The synagogues of Eshtemoa and Dura-Europos both contemporary structures with those found in the Galilee offer certain distinctions, notably a difference in shape, oblong rather than rectangular, and a housing for either the Torah scrolls or the Ark itself, or both, taking the form of a niche.

The later phase of synagogue construction, during the Byzantine period, exhibited some major changes in synagogal structure. For the most part the basilica was maintained, but the orientation of the structures changed. The Ark with Torah scrolls was no longer kept on the wall of egress, but was moved to the opposite wall and housed in either a niche or an apse, features indicative of this later period of synagogue construction. In addition, whereas the ornament of the earlier Roman structure was by and large contained to stone sculpture, frieze work and the like, the Byzantine structure employed mosaic art. Some would suggest that this change in ornamentation was due to the impoverished state of the Jewish community during this second period of synagogue construction.

Scholars have also offered some suggestions as to what the interior of the synagogue must have looked like. Benches were found lining the walls of the building, and at some locations, notably Chorazin, Capernaum,

and Hammath-by-Tiberias, a Cathedra de Moshe was found. It probably served as a seat for the honored member of the congregation, but the controversy as to its exact function, has by no means been finally solved. Other appurtenances that were part of the early synagogue included Menorahs which were part of the Torah shrine complex, and lions, which at one time were probably part of the exterior ornament of the synagogue, and at a later date were employed as part of the Torah shrine complex also. Some have also suggested that there was a reading stand, a Bemah, which was part of the early synagogue.

It is well to keep in mind however, that synagogue structure was still in a state of flux. We noted that the broadhouse type of synagogue was concurrent with the early basilical structure, and in addition, we should also keep in mind that orientation of the structure toward Jerusalem was not universal, a feature highly indicative of the state of flux of the early synagogue. As such, we should also note that the appurtenances found in the early synagogue were by no means necessarily found at all of the early sites.

There is much yet to be learned about the early synagogue. As of yet, we have no archaeological evidence for the Babylonian mileau. Questions regarding the position and type of Ark need still be answered. The problem of the women's gallery still requires additional data. Hence, although much information regarding the early synagogue is available, there remain many unanswered questions. It is hoped that additional finds will shed some light on these still unanswered questions.

Footnotes

Chapter I

1. Julian Morgenstern, "The Origin of the Synagogue," Estrata da Studi Orientalistic: in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Vol. II, Rome, 1956, pp. 199-200.

2. Ibid., pp. 198-200.

3. Ibid., pp. 197-201.

4. Louis Finkelstein, "The Origin of the Synagogue," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 1928-1930, New York, p. 49.

5. Isaac Levy, The Synagogue: Its History and Function, London, 1963, p. 14.

6. I Kings 8:28ff. and I Samuel 1:3 are examples of such prayer meetings.

7. Louis Finkelstein, Op.cit., pp. 52-53.

8. Note Genesis 25:22 where Finkelstein suggests it means Rebecca inquiring of God.

9. Louis Finkelstein, Op. cit., pp. 54-58.

10. George Foote Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, The Age of the Tannaim, Vol. I, Harvard University Press, 1927, p. 283.

11. Solomon Zeitlin, "The Origin of the Synagogue, A Study in the Development of Jewish Institution," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 1930-1931, New York, p. 74.

12. Ibid., pp. 75-76. Note also I Maccabees 3:46-57 for such a meeting.

13. Solomon Zeitlin, Op. cit., pp. 75-76.

14. Ibid., pp. 69-81.

15. Ibid., pp. 72-73.

16. See E. L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, p. 1, and M. Avi-Yonah "Synagogue Architecture In the Classical Period," Jewish Art, edit. Cecil Roth, McGraw-Hill, 1961, p. 157, for examples of this position.

17. E. L. Sukenik, Op. cit., p. 1.

18. Ellis Rivkin, "Ben Sira and the Non-existence of the Synagogue: A Study in Historical Method," In The Time Of Harvest, edit. D.J. Silver, New York, 1963, p. 354.

19. Ibid., p. 348.

20. Ibid., pp. 320-354.

21. Sidney Hoenig, "The Suppositious Temple Synagogue," Jewish Quarterly Review, October, 1963, pp. 129-130.

Footnotes

Chapter II

1. Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 3.1. Some would even go so far as to suggest a synagogue in the Temple proper. See Isaac Levy, The Synagogue: Its History and Function, London, 1963, pp. 15ff.
2. Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 8a.
3. Luke, 4:16 and Luke 4:31ff.
4. M. Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue Architecture In the Classical Period," Jewish Art, edit. Cecil Roth, McGraw-Hill, 1961, opposite p. 176.
5. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, p. 8.
6. Ibid., p. 8.
7. Ibid., p. 13.
8. Ibid., pp. 9-12.
9. Ibid., pp. 11-12.
10. Ibid., p. 12.
11. Ibid., p. 12.
12. Ibid., p. 13.
13. Ibid., p. 8.
14. Ibid., p. 13.
15. Ibid., pp. 14-15.
16. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
17. E.L. Sukenik, "The Present State of Ancient Synagogue Studies," Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund For the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues, Bulletin I, Jerusalem 1949, p. 21.
18. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, p. 22.
19. Ibid., p. 22.
20. Ibid., p. 22.
21. Ibid., p. 23.
22. Ibid., p. 24.

23. E.R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. I, New York, 1953, p. 196.

24. Ibid., p. 190.

25. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, p. 24.

26. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., p. 202.

27. Ibid., p. 202.

28. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, p. 25.

29. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., p. 202.

30. Ibid., p. 203.

Footnotes

Chapter III

1. E.R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. I, New York, 1953, pp. 181-211.

2. Ibid., pp. 209-211.

3. M. Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue Architecture in the Classical Period," Jewish Art, edit. Cecil Roth, McGraw Hill, 1961, p. 158.

4. E. L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogue In Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, p. 68.

5. Ibid., p. 68.

6. Richard Krautheimer, "The Beginning of Early Christian Architecture," The Review of Religion, Vol. III, No. 2, January, 1939, New York, p. 146.

7. E.L. Sukenik suggests that the interior columns at Capernaum carried a gallery. See E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece, p. 8.

8. Richard Krautheimer, Op. cit., p. 146.

9. H.L. Gordon, "The Basilica and the Stoa In Early Rabbinical Literature," The Art Bulletin, Vol. XIII, No. 3, September, 1931, New York, p. 374.

10. E.L. Sukenik, Anciant Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, p. 46.

11. M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., p. 189.

12. Ibid., p. 189.

13. Ibid., pp. 160, 163.

14. H.G. May, "Synagogues in Palestine," The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. VII, No. 1, February, 1944, New Haven, pp. 12-13.

15. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, pp. 51-52.

16. Genesis 49:13.

17. E.L. Sukenik, "The Ancient Synagogue at Yafa Near Nazareth," Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund For the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues, Bulletin II, Jerusalem, 1951, pp. 23-24.

18. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., p. 207.

19. E.R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. II, New York, 1953, p. 91.

20. Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath 11a.

21. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, p. 49.

22. Ibid., p. 49. Also see Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath 11a.

23. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, p. 49.

24. Israel Renov, Some Problems of Synagogol Archaeology, unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1952, p. 150

25. Franz Landsberger, "The Sacred Direction in Synagogue and Church," Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XXVIII, Cincinnati, 1957, p. 183.

26. E.R. Goodenough, Vol. I, Op. cit., pp. 191-192.

27. Louis Ginzberg, The Palestinian Talmud, New York, 1941, p. lxx.

Footnotes

Chapter IV

1. Babylonian Talmud 15a, Mishnah 2.1.

2. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, p. 17.

3. Ibid., pp. 17-18.

4. Ibid., p. 18.

5. Ibid., p. 18.

6. M. Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue Architecture In the Classical Period," Jewish Art, edit. Cecil Roth, McGraw Hill, 1961, p. 190.

7. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, pp. 14-15.

8. M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., pp. 163-164.

9. E.R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. I, New York, 1953, p. 182.

10. M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., p. 164.

11. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., p. 226.

12. Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 51b.

13. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, p. 47.

14. S. Safrai, "
Vol. XXXII, No. 4, July 1963, pp. 329-338.

15. M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., p. 167.

16. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, p. 47.

17. Matthew 23:1-2,6 "Then Spoke Jesus to the Multitude, and to his Disciples, Saying, The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' Seat....And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogue,..."

18. Pesiktha de Rab Kahana, ed. S. Buber, Lyck, 1865, p.12.

"And the top of the throne was round behind (I Kings 10:19) R. Aha said: It (the throne of Solomon) was like the Cathedra of Moses, with arms on either side of it."

19. Israel Renov, Some Problems of Synagogal Archaeology, Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1952, pp. 205-206.

20. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

21. M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., pp. 167-168. See C.H. Kraeling, "The Synagogue," The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII, Part I, New Haven, 1956, p. 260, for a discussion of the problem of the 'Seat of Moses' at Dura-Europos.

22. Israel Renov, "The Seat of Moses," Israel Exploration Journal, Vol. 5, Jerusalem, 1955, p. 267.

23. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece, pp. 57-60.

24. Ibid., p. 53.

25. Harry J. Leon, The Jews of Ancient Rome, Philadelphia, 1960, pl. XXV.

26. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., pp. 198-199, 208, 233.

27. E.L. Sukenik, "The Present State of Ancient Synagogue Studies," Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues, Bulletin I, Jerusalem, 1949, pp. 19,21.

Footnotes

Chapter V

1. E.R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. I, New York, 1953, p. 232.

2. Ibid., p. 22, and M. Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue Architecture In the Classical Period," Jewish Art, edit. Cecil Roth, McGraw Hill, 1961, p. 175.

3. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., p. 234.

4. Ibid., p. 234.

5. Ibid., p. 234.

6. C.H. Kraeling, "The Synagogue," The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII, Part I, New Haven, 1956, p. 322.

7. Ibid., p. 329.

8. E.R. Goodenough, Op.Cit., p. 229.

9. Ibid., p. 225.

10. Israel Renov, Some Problems of Synagogal Archaeology, Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1952, p. 78.

Footnotes

Chapter VI

1. M. Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue Architecture In the Classical Period," Jewish Art, edit. Cecil Roth, McGraw Hill, 1961, pp. 179-180.

2. E.L. Sukenik, The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha, London, 1932, p. 13.

3. Ibid., p. 17.

4. Ibid., pp. 17-18. Sukenik also postulates that there was a stairway in the annex west of the sanctuary which led to the gallery. However, he doesn't mention any evidence for this stairway in his reports.

5. See E.L. Sukenik, The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha, pp. 11-21, for a detailed analysis and reconstruction of Beth Alpha.

6. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., p. 182.

7. Ibid., pp. 182-183.

8. E. R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. I, New York, 1953, p. 265.

Footnotes

Chapter VII

1. M. Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue Architecture In the Classical Period," Jewish Art, edit. Cecil Roth, McGraw Hill, 1961, p. 180. See also E.L. Sukenik, "The Present State of Ancient Synagogue Studies," Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues, Bulletin I, Jerusalem, 1949, pp. 9-12, for a discussion of the problem of dating synagogues with mosaic floors.

2. M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., pp. 179-182.

3. E.R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. I, New York, 1953, p. 238.

4. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, London, 1934, pp. 27-28.

5. See E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., p. 238. See also H. Strack, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, New York, 1959, pp. 128, 131, 357.

6. M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., p. 180.

7. Ibid., p. 163.

8. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece, P. 44, and E.L. Sukenik, "The Present State of Ancient Synagogue Studies," pp. 20-21.

9. Note M. Avi-Yonah Op. cit., p. 182, for the floor plan of Hammath Gader.

10. Israel Renov, Some Problems of Synagogal Archaeology, unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1952, p. 64a.

11. Ibid., p. 63.

12. Ibid., p. 58.

13. Ibid., p. 88.

14. E.L. Sukenik, The Ancient Synagogue of El-Hammeh, Jerusalem, 1935, p. 74.

15. E.R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. 3, fig. 974, and M. Avi-Yonah, Op. cit., p. 183.

16. E.L. Sukenik, The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha, London, 1932, p. 23.

17. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, p. 35.

18. C.H. Kraeling, "The Synagogue," The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII, Part I, New Haven, 1956, p. 257.

19. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece, p. 55.

20. Ibid., p. 55.

21. C.H. Kraeling, Op. cit., p. 256.

22. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 81.

23. Ibid., p. 82.

24. Irving Lavin, "Aspects of the Role of Palace Triclinia in the Architecture of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," The Art Bulletin, Vol. 44, March, 1962, New York, p. 9.

25. Ibid., p. 9.

26. E.R. Goodenough, Op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 182.

27. E.L. Sukenik, Ancient Synagogues In Palestine and Greece, p. 79, and E.L. Sukenik, The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha, p. 15.

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