Introduction

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Introduction

The Handbook of Synagogue Architecture is a digest of the evidence from all known synagogue remains uncovered within the boundaries of ancient Palestine. Its purpose is to provide a research tool for archaeology, history and religious studies.

Organization of the Handbook

The handbook is divided according to the following seven regions and forty-four city-territories (or districts) formed by the Romans in the province of Palestine.¹

A. Phoenician cities
   1. Tyre
   2. Ptolemais

B. Galilee
   1. Tetracomia (district)
   2. Sepphoris/Dioecesarea (includes Helenopolis and Exaloth-Nain)
   3. Tiberias
   4. Beth She'an/Scythopolis
   5. Legio/Maximianopolis

C. Coastal cities
   1. Dora
   2. Caesarea
   3. Apollonia
   4. Antipatris
   5. Joppa
   6. Jamnia
   7. Azotus
   8. Ascalon
   9. Gaza
   10. Raphia

D. Samaria
   1. Sebaste
   2. Neapolis

E. Judaea
   1. Aelia-Capitolina (Jerusalem)
   2. Lydda/Diospolis
   3. Nicopolis/Emmaus
   4. Bethgabra/Eleutheropolis

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F. Limes Palaestinae (district)
1. Saltus Constantiniaces
2. Sycomazon
3. Saltus Gerarticus
4. Jericho

G. East of the Jordan River
1. Caesarea Philippi/Paneas
2. Gaulanitis (district)
3. Batanaea
4. Hippos/Susitha
5. Trachonitis
6. Auranitis
7. Dium
8. Gadara/Umm Qeis
9. Abila
10. Pella
11. Gerasa
12. Philadelphia/Amman
13. Heshbon
14. Medeba
15. Peraea (district)
16. Rabbath Moab/Areopolis
17. Charachmaba

All entries are placed in one of three categories:

I. Validated: The ruins of a building bear Jewish inscriptions and/or motifs.

II. Attested: Architectural or decorative fragments bear Jewish inscriptions and/or motifs from a synagogue; location of the building is unknown.

III. Disputed: Two subcategories are given.

A. Attributed: The ruins of a building or fragments lack Jewish inscriptions or motifs but are identified as the remains of a synagogue by some scholars.

B. Not Accepted: The ruins of a building or fragments lack Jewish inscriptions and/or motifs; attribution is questionable on the basis of present evidence.

To qualify as a synagogue (category I and II) a building or its architectural/decorative fragments must be decorated with common motifs, such as the image of the Torah Shrine, menorah, lulab, ethrog, and shofar, or contain inscriptions that establish its identity as having been constructed and used by a Jewish community for a form of assembly. Neither a building's plan nor its location within a presumed Jewish village can qualify a ruin as a synagogue. Only rarely is it possible to identify a
building as a synagogue solely on the basis of its architectural
form or location (category III A). The available archaeological
and literary evidence has in only a few instances been analyzed
to the extent that it can be used to verify a building's identi-
fication. The Khirbet Shema' publication is a rare example of
the validation of a site and synagogue that has used all the
available literary and archaeological evidence; it is a model for
future endeavors of this kind.2

The entries are arranged according to the numbered list
below. If no information for an entry-section is available, that
section is omitted. Each entry contains a bibliography; citations
of those references are given in parentheses. The letter (A)
refers to the present author. The form of the data entries is:

1. Name of site and map reference. The accepted name is
followed by its variations; the map reference is for
the 1:100,000 map edited by the Survey of Israel, 1967-
1972. Map coordinates are for the synagogue site (4
numbers), or if that is unknown, the village or ruin.
The map number is placed in parentheses.
2. Survey of site.
3. Character and sections of the building as suggested by
extant and identifiable remains.
4. Measurements (as published, length followed by width).
5. Orientation.
6. Character and form: apse, niche, Torah Shrine, bema,
chancel.
7. Auxiliary rooms and structures.
8. Ornamentation.
9. Coins, ceramics, and other artifacts found within the
building complex.
10. Inscriptions.3
11. Donors and patrons.
12. Date, as suggested by excavator or documentor of entry.
13. Bibliography. A selected rather than exhaustive biblio-
graphy is given for each site. The major source is
listed first, the remainder chronologically. Abbrevia-
tions are used for commonly cited sources. (See: List
of Abbreviations, pp. 365 ff.)

Each entry is given a catalogue number. For example, the
number of Kefar Bar'am A is: B:1, I-2. This breaks down as
follows:
Each entry, regardless of category, is listed alphabetically in the index, followed by its catalogue number. Entries beginning with Horvat, Kafr, Kefar, Kfar, Khirbet, are alphabetized under the first word of their names, so that Kefar Bar'am would be under the letter K. Transliterations of Hebraic and Arabic terms and place names are written according to the system approved by the American Library Association and Library of Congress, bulletins 43 and 91.

Parenthetical numbers following the descriptions of certain mosaic pavements refer to the system developed by the Association Internationale pour l'Etude de la Mosaique Antique.²

Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums chronological table has been used in this handbook unless otherwise indicated.⁵

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<tr>
<td>Hellenistic I</td>
<td>332-152 B.C.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hellenistic II (Hasmonean)</td>
<td>152-37 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Roman I (Herodian)</td>
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<td>Roman II</td>
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<td>Roman III</td>
<td>180-324</td>
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<td>Byzantine I</td>
<td>324-451</td>
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<tr>
<td>Byzantine II</td>
<td>451-640</td>
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<td>Early Arab</td>
<td>640-1099</td>
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Although Samaritan synagogue data are problematic because the relationship among Jews, Christians, and the Samaritans during the Roman and Byzantine periods is uncertain, Samaritan entries are catalogued in their appropriate city-territory.⁶

Several prior attempts have been made to organize and systematize synagogue data. Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger, in their monumental study of synagogues published in 1916, gave the name "Galilean" to a type of synagogue they uncovered in Galilee.⁷ This was a basilica with two or three rows of interior columns and a monumental facade facing toward Jerusalem. Buildings of this type often were decorated with reliefs and paved with flagstone. For a time this was believed to be the standard architectural form of the ancient Palestinian synagogue; further discoveries, however, proved this conclusion wrong. The dramatic finds at Na'aran, Beth Alpha, and Hammat Gadara almost a
half-century ago led scholars to add a second category of Palestinian synagogues. Eliezer Sukenik referred to these as "new," as compared with the "earlier" Galilean type. The "new" synagogue was dated to the Byzantine period, and was characterized by its mosaic pavement and an apse or niche facing toward Jerusalem. Later discoveries in Palestine showed these two categories to be inadequate. The changes apparent in the orientation of the synagogue at Beth She'arim, the discovery of the "broadhouse" type in Palestine, at Eshtemoa and Khirbet Susiya in Judaea and Khirbet Shema in Galilee, required a third category. Thus, Michael Avi-Yonah postulated three types of synagogues, which were grouped into three related chronological periods: 1. Early (Galilean); 2. Transitional (broadhouse); 3. Fifth century (Byzantine). E. R. Goodenough adopted a similar division: A. Galilean; B. Broadhouse; C. Synagogues with mosaic pavements. Nevertheless, Avi-Yonah, in one of his last writings on the subject, realized the shortcomings of such a rigid typological-chronological categorization and cautioned against the use of these "types" as a basis for determining chronology.

Problems created by the indiscriminate use of such a rigid method are manifold. Only a few synagogues are dated by inscription and equally few are dated through the use of stratigraphic evidence. The ongoing controversy regarding the dating of the synagogue at Capernaum serves only to illustrate the problems that may arise if one insists on a rigid typological or stylistic categorization of synagogue architecture. Furthermore, the category "transitional" soon became a catchall for synagogue types that did not conform to the other two categories. It became apparent that the evolutionary concept of an early, middle, and late form of synagogue was untenable and a new system would have to be proposed.

The two most recent catalogues listing synagogue sites have chosen to avoid the typological-chronological issue entirely, by listing the entrants alphabetically. S. Sailer's catalogue must be used with great caution owing to numerous errors and questionable attributions. The effort of Frowald Hüttenmeister and Gottfried Reeg is more accurate and complete. Hüttenmeister and Reeg have elected to list synagogue sites for which actual archaeological evidence exists with those known solely through references in ancient literature. This arrangement can lead to confusion on the part of the reader. Furthermore, buildings they consider "uncertain synagogues" are included in
their catalogue with those considered "certain." On closer examination of all available evidence, the attributions of a number of their "certain" synagogues are in reality unconfirmed.

The most recent publication on the subject, edited by Lee Levine, Ancient Synagogues Revealed (Jerusalem, 1981) arrived too late to be included in this publication.

All studies of Palestinian synagogues have ignored the important evidence that the related field of historical geography can provide. The diversity of the Jewish communities within Roman and Byzantine Palestine has finally begun to be recognized. The long held concept of "normative" Judaism, as posited by George Foot Moore, has now been rejected. Morton Smith, writing of Judaism in first century Palestine notes "... the different parts of the country were so different, such gulfs of feeling and practice separated Idumea, Judea, Caesarea, and Galilee, that even on this level [the religion of the average people] there was probably no more agreement between them than between any one of them and a similar area in the Diaspora."  

One other factor that must be considered along with historical geography is the material culture of the community, that is, the evidence uncovered by archaeology. To ignore this evidence is in effect to "speak in vacuo." Furthermore, to date synagogues solely on the basis of typological observations, without considering the related data, is inaccurate.

In this handbook, unlike the catalogues and surveys described above, synagogue sites are listed within the boundaries as they existed in Palestine during the Roman and Byzantine periods (Map 1). These limits are those of the city-territories formed by the Romans following their conquest of the country, not boundaries derived from Talmudic or Biblical sources. Rome's division of Palestine accurately reflects the religious, social, and cultural configurations of the province.

Historical Summary

The following brief summary of historical events that occurred in Palestine during the time in which the synagogues were built is taken from the standard works on the subject by Avi-Yonah, Jones, Neusner, and Smallwood; all are cited in notes and in the bibliography.
Palestine was divided by the Romans into city-territories, each of which possessed distinctive traditions and characteristics. The locations of the majority of city-territories can be determined by the use of literary sources, archaeological evidence, and epigraphy, although their actual territorial extent is often less certain. The Romans instituted a territorial division following the first Jewish revolt (which ended 70 C.E.) as an effective method of controlling the province's Jewish population, which had settled in two compact regions: Judaea, including Jerusalem, and Galilee. Up to the time of the first revolt, the Jewish people living within the Province of Judaea had easy access to one another and, through Galilee and adjoining Gaulanitis, to the large Jewish population residing under Parthian control in Babylonia. The Jewish rebels had hoped that with the cooperation of Babylonian Jewry they could force Rome and Parthia into a conflict in which the Parthians would support the rebels' cause. The large number of Jews in Babylonia, although outside the Roman Empire, when included with those of Judaea and Galilee, rendered the Jewish people potentially more powerful than their number within the Roman Empire would imply. The Palestinian and Babylonian communities formed in fact one national body separated by an artificial political boundary. That many Jews resided in the westernmost provinces of the Parthian Empire and were in such close contact with their Palestinian neighbors was of major political and military importance to the Romans.

The Roman emperors had tried several times to conquer Babylonia to prevent a Parthian conquest of Syria that would inhibit Rome's expansionist policies in the east. Rome had to find ways of keeping the three areas of concentrated Jewish population separate, so as to alleviate the threat of a second uprising that would involve Parthia. The Romans were no doubt aware that the Greek cities within Jewish territory had generally remained passive during the rebellion, probably for economic as well as political reasons. Three of these cities, Caesarea, Sebaste, and Scythopolis, controlled territories that reached from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, strategically separating the two large Jewish population centers—Judaea to the south and Galilee to the north. In light of the passive role played by the Greek cities during the rebellion, the Romans decided to extend the municipal system over much of the remainder of the province. The Romans' attempt to confine the Jewish
population within certain districts did not, however, prevent a second revolt in 132 C.E.; it lasted for three years before the rebels capitulated. This revolt was confined primarily to the region of Judaea; the Jews residing in Galilee and Babylonia did not participate actively. \(^{25}\)

The emperor Hadrian, angered by the revolt, instituted radical measures against the surviving Jewish population in Judaea. They were expelled not only from Jerusalem, but also from Judaea, and were replaced by Syrians and Arabs. Several Jewish villages were allowed to exist along the fringes of the Judaean Hills: in the Jordan Valley, in the Daromas, and along the Coastal Plain. \(^{26}\) Rome expanded its policy of urbanizing Palestine and only three areas were left without city-status. These were the imperial estates around Jericho, which included the three districts of Peraea, the two adjoining territories of Tetracomia and Gaulanitis, and the Daromas. Tetracomia and Gaulanitis had large conservative Jewish populations, which may account for Rome's unwillingness to provide them with city-status. \(^{27}\) The Daromas became part of the Roman *limes* and was administered by the military. \(^{28}\)

The territorial division of Palestine remained essentially unchanged throughout the reigns of the Antonine and Severan emperors. Diocletian, assuming imperial power in 284 C.E., initiated an administrative and military reorganization of the Roman provinces. The diocese of the Orient included the province of Palestine. Its territorial extent was enlarged by the acquisition of the area between Idumaeas and the head of the Red Sea, together with Moab, located south of the Arnon River and east of the Dead Sea. The date of this transfer is unknown; however, the earliest evidence from Eusebius speaks of copper mines between Petra and the Dead Sea that belonged to Palestine during the period of Diocletian's persecution of Christians. \(^{29}\)

In the north, the counterbalancing transfer of Auranitis, Trachonitis, and Batanaea from Syria to Arabia is dated ca. 295 C.E., according to the adoption of the era of Bostra in those districts. \(^{30}\) The transfer of the coastal city of Dor from Phoenicia to Palestine may have occurred at this time. \(^{31}\) In 357–358, Palestine was divided into northern and southern halves along the line of the Roman *limes Palestinae*. The southern half, *Palestina salutaris*, had its capital at Petra. The remainder of Palestine was further divided into two provinces in ca. 400 C.E., *Palestina prima* and *Palestina secunda*. The former
consisted of Judaea, Idumaea, Samaria, the Coastal Plain, and Peraea; its capital was at Caesarea. Palestina secunda was composed of Galilee, the Decapolis, and Gaulanitis; Scythopolis was made its capital. Palestina salutaris was renamed Palestina tertia. Two edicts of Theodosius II (7.4304, dated 424, and 16.8.29, dated 429) are addressed to the Jewish Sanhedrins of the two Palestines, prima and secunda; this evidence suggests that by the fifth century few, if any, Jews resided in the southeastern region known as Palestina tertia.

Citations of Literary Evidence

Citations from the New Testament are numbered according to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (Nazareth: Luke 2:51). The Holy Scriptures, according to the Masoretic text, is used for quotations from the Hebrew Bible (Beersheba: Judges 20:1; 1 Kings 4:25). Often-cited rabbinic sources include the Mishnah, Tosefta, and two talmudim, Yerushalmi (Jerusalem or Palestinian) and Bavli (Babylonian). References to the Yerushalmi Talmud include the abbreviated name of the tractate, chapter and section of Mishnah, followed by folio number and columns (Meron: JT Sheb. 9:2). The Bavli Talmud, because of its standard pagination, uses only the folio number and page side (Chorozain: BT Men. 85a, 85b). Tosefta citations have the letter T preceding the tractate's abbreviated name and the numerals designating chapter and section within the tractate (Gush Halav: T. Sheb. 7:15). The same system applies to Mishnah: the letter M followed by numerals (Khirbet Shema': M. BB:2).

Josephus produced four works following the first Jewish revolt: Antiquitates Judicae, Contra Apionem, Bellus Judaicum and Vita. The translation referred to is the Loeb Classical Edition (Giscala: BJ II:575).

Eusebius of Caesarea wrote his Onomasticon sometime between 326-330. It is a dictionary of some six hundred names of towns, mountains, rivers, and districts mentioned in the Torah and New Testament. The reference numbers refer to the numbering system used in Klostermann’s edition (Chorozain: Onom. 74:23).
Notes


12 See: Capernaum (B:3, I-1) for review and bibliography of dating controversy.


was a development of the Babylonian and Palestinian rabbinic academies, and was to be distinguished from other so-called non-normative, or fringe sects of Judaism. Jacob Neusner has commented on the problems associated with Moore's hypothesis. See: "Judaism in Late Antiquity," Judaism, XV, 2 (Spring, 1966), 231-240; "The Demise of Normative Judaism," in Early Rabbinic Judaism: Historical Studies in Religion, Literature and Art (Leiden: Brill, 1975); his review of E. R. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, in History of Religions, 18 (1978), 178-191; and most recently "Judaism after Moore: A Programmatic Statement," Journal of Jewish Studies, XXXI, no. 2 (Autumn, 1980), 141-156.


17 Eric Meyers, "Galilean Regionalism as a Factor in Reconstruction," BASOR 221 (Feb., 1976), 93.

Ibid. 99.


21 According to Jacob Neusner, the Jews formed minority communities in almost every city of the Euphrates Valley and throughout the western satrapies of Parthia. Jews also occupied large tracts of farmland outside the major cities in Babylonia, forming a minority but still significant group. A History of the Jews in Babylonia I, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 13-15. By the Sassanian Period, Neusner states, the Jewish population of Babylonia and its surrounding territories was approximately 860,000, or a tenth to an eighth of the local population. A History of the Jews in Babylonia II, p. 250.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 18. Avi-Yonah notes that seven Jewish villages in Galilee disappeared following the second revolt. However, in The Holy Land, p. 113, he states there is no evidence of the uprooting of the Jewish population in Galilee during the period of the second revolt, which suggests that it was not included in the rebellion. Smallwood, Jews, pp. 442-443, states that it is barely conceivable that the Jews of Galilee held aloof from the revolt completely, and cites evidence of land confiscations in Galilee following the revolt.

26 Following the second revolt, Jews formed three-quarters of the population of Galilee and one-quarter of the population of the Coastal Plain and lands east of the Jordan River. Avi-Yonah, Jews in Palestine, p. 19.

27 Avi-Yonah, Holy Land, p. 112.
28 Ibid., p. 163.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.