

Lutz Doering / Andrew R. Krause (eds.)

Synagogues in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods

Archaeological Finds, New Methods, New Theories



Ioudaioi

Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum

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Volume 11

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in co-operation with Hermut Löhr

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

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ISBN 978-3-647-52215-9

Table of Contents

Preface.....	7
<i>Lutz Doering and Andrew R. Krause</i>	
Introduction: Synagogues in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods	9
I. Advances in the Archaeology of Synagogues from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods	
<i>Zeev Weiss</i>	
The Synagogue in an Age of Transition, from the Second Temple Period to Roman Times: Recent Developments in Research	25
<i>Uzi Leibner</i>	
The Dating of the “Galilean”-Type Synagogues: Khirbet Wadi Ḥamam as a Case-Study	43
<i>Mechael Osband and Benjamin Arubas</i>	
The Discovery of a Roman Period Synagogue in the Golan at Majduliyya	71
<i>Monika Trümper</i>	
The Synagogue in Delos Revisited.....	81
II. Interpreting Material Remains and Literary Sources	
<i>Lutz Doering</i>	
The Synagogue at Magdala: Between Localized Practice and Reference to the Temple.....	127
<i>Judith H. Newman</i>	
Contextualizing the Magdala Synagogue Stone in its Place: An Exercise in Liturgical Imagination	155
<i>Andrew R. Krause</i>	
The Rhetoric of Synagogue Space: Theoretical Issues in the Study of Jewish Institutions in Literary Sources	175
<i>Jordan J. Ryan</i>	
The Contributions of Historical and Archaeological Study of Early Synagogues to Historical Jesus Research.....	189

III. Theorizing Practice in Ancient Synagogues

Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer

What Were They Doing in Second Temple Synagogues?

Philo and the *προσευχή*.....215*Hermut Löhr*In Search of the *Petichah*: Some Thoughts on the Torah, the Prophets,
and the Scriptures in the Synagogues and Beyond.....

239

Ruth Langer

Rabbis, Nonrabbis, and Synagogues in Roman Palestine:

Theory and Reality.....253

Clemens Leonhard

The Origins of Torah Reading as a Ritual and its Social Context.....277

IV. Legal, Political, and Cultural Contexts of Ancient Synagogues

Kimberley Czajkowski

“Synagogues” in Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt295

Benedikt Eckhardt

Synagogues as Associations in the Roman Empire313

Markus Öhler

Synagogues in Inscriptions from Asia Minor: The Iulia Severa Inscription

Reconsidered.....339

Katrin Kogman-Appel

Dress Codes in the Synagogue of Dura Europos?369

Contributors to this Volume401

Index of Ancient Sources403

Index of Modern Authors420

Index of Subjects429

Preface

The origins of the present volume lie in the international conference, “Synagogues in the Hellenistic-Roman Period: New Finds—New Theories—New Methods”, which took place at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 13–15 June 2017. This conference was part of the research programme in the project, “EXC 212 C2-24 Integration and Diversification in the Judaism of Palestine during the Hellenistic-Early Roman Period (300 BCE–135 CE)”, headed by one of the editors, Lutz Doering, within the DFG-funded Münster Cluster of Excellence *Religion and Politics* during the years 2014–2018. The other editor, Andrew Krause, was employed as a postdoctoral researcher by the Cluster of Excellence between 2016 and 2018. One area of enquiry of the project was the relationship between the Jewish institutions of the Jerusalem Temple and the local synagogues, as well as the role and function of early synagogues. Alongside chapters and articles authored by the editors individually and published elsewhere, this volume presents some of the results of this collaborative enquiry. The 2017 conference was organized in co-operation with Hermut Löhr, who led the Cluster of Excellence project, “EXC 212 A2-10 The Jewish Nomos between Normativity and Identity using the Example of Alexandria in the 1st–3rd Centuries A.D.”, until 2017. We thank the board of directors of the Cluster of Excellence *Religion and Politics* and the International Office of WWU Münster for the generous funding of the conference.

While not all the papers given at the conference were eventually submitted for publication in this volume, we invited a further chapter by Jordan Ryan on the contribution of synagogue studies to Historical Jesus research, in order to round out the volume with an aspect that was not present at the conference.

We are grateful to Hermut Löhr for his co-operation not only in organizing the conference but also in preparing the present volume following his move to Bonn. We would also like to thank both Elisabeth Hernitscheck at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht for help with planning the volume and, more recently, her successor Izaak de Hulster for seeing it through the publication process, as well as Renate Rehkopf for advice relating to the production of the volume. We thank Laura von Bartenwerffer and John Dik (Münster) for help with proofreading and Franziska Prokopetz, Yannick Golchert (Münster), and Sebastian Rogowsky-Schmidt (Bonn) for assistance in preparing the indices.

The Editors

Introduction: Synagogues in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods

Lutz Doering and Andrew R. Krause

Research into ancient synagogues has made significant advances over the past thirty years.¹ New sites have been discovered, excavated, and studied, which has led to a better view of the architecture and art of ancient synagogues, particularly those in the Land of Israel. One focus has been on synagogues from the Middle to Late Roman and Byzantine periods.² Spectacular finds of mosaics have allowed new perspectives in the research of synagogue art,³ while the debate about the interpretation of individual scenes continues, revealing differences in method and emphasis.⁴ In addition to the burgeoning field of synagogues in the Middle to Late Roman and Byzantine periods, however, there has also been a considerable increase in the number of excavated sites from the late Second Temple for which the identification of a building as synagogue period has been suggested. It is the earlier synagogues from the Hellenistic and Roman periods⁵ on which the present volume focuses predominantly, both in the Land of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora, both from the Second Temple period and from the period between 70 and 300 CE.

Several decades ago, an identification as a “Second Temple synagogue” was considered only for buildings at Gamla, Masada, and the Herodium (Levine

¹ For a brief history of research until 2005 see Levine 2005: 9–17.

² E.g., “Synagogue II” at Khirbet Wadi Ḥamam (Leibner 2018; and Leibner in this volume), Ḥuqoq (Magness et al. 2018a), and Ḥorvat Kur (Zangenberg et al. 2013).

³ E.g., mosaic floors from Khirbet Wadi Ḥamam (Miller and Leibner 2018), Ḥuqoq (Magness et al. 2018b), and Ḥorvat Kur (Zangenberg 2017).

⁴ See particularly the debate on the Elephant mosaic panel from Ḥuqoq: Britt and Boustán 2017 and the contributions in *JRA* 31 (2018) by K. M. D. Dunbabin (506–508), J. Balty (509–512), R. Talgam (513–523), B. D. Gordon and Z. Weiss (524–541), as well as A. Erlich (542–558).

⁵ In distinguishing between the Hellenistic and Roman periods, we follow widely accepted convention amongst archaeologists and historians, although the precise starting points of these periods may vary for the different areas of the Mediterranean as well as between scholarly disciplines. From the point of view of Levantine archaeology, it is useful to subdivide the Roman period into the Early, Middle, and Late Roman periods, as suggested by Leibner 2009: Early Roman, ca. 50 BCE–135 CE; Middle Roman, ca. 135–250 CE; Late Roman, 250–350 CE; followed by the Early Byzantine period, ca. 350–450 CE. These distinctions do not exclude the possibility of viewing the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods historically as belonging closely together in the sense of a “long Hellenistic Age”, as suggested by Chaniotis 2018 (e.g., 3).

1996: 428–429), and by some for the so-called “mini-sinagoga” at Magdala (Corbo 1976). Of these, only the building in Gamla was widely seen as a *purpose-built* synagogue, dated to either the middle of the first century BCE or, as the final excavation report prefers, not earlier than the turn of the era.⁶ In contrast, the buildings at Masada and Herodium had previously been used for other purposes and were converted into synagogues only by the rebels of the First Revolt or, at the Herodium, according to some scholars, only in the Bar Kokhba Revolt.⁷ Other scholars raised doubts even about the use of the Masada building as synagogue in the time of the First Revolt (e.g., Flesher 1995). Moreover, Ehud Netzer (1987) made a compelling case for the Magdala “mini-sinagoga” to have been a fountain house right from the beginning. Thus, the evidence for pre-70 CE synagogues in Palestine remained very slim at the time. Textual scholars, particularly from North America, nurtured further scepticism about the Second Temple synagogue. Thus, Howard C. Kee, in a series of articles, expressed doubts that, in the first century CE, “synagogue” denoted a building—rather than an “assembly”—of Jews; in order to maintain this, he had to date the Theodotus inscription from the city of David (CIJ II 1404 = CIIP I 9), which appeared to attest to the existence of such a building, to a much later period (Kee 1990; 1999). Kee found some defenders but also several detractors, who battled the issue out for the better part of the 1990s, with somewhat better arguments on the side of Kee’s critics.⁸

The archaeological evidence has expanded dramatically in recent years.⁹ Apart from Gamla, Masada, and probably Herodium (both in secondary use), buildings identified as Second Temple synagogues have been excavated at Qiryat Sefer (Khirbet Badd’Isa; Magen, Tzionit, and Sirkis 2004: late first century BCE to first century CE), Modi’in (Khirbet Umm el-‘Umdan; On and Weksler-Bdolah 2005: a Hasmonaeen-period synagogue, followed by one from the Herodian period), and in the northern part of Magdala, in an area acquired by the Legionaries of Christ and excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority (Avshalom-Gorni and Najjar 2013: two pre-70 CE stages). All of these buildings feature a central room surrounded by one or more rows of benches on three or four sides, and rows of columns along the sides that once supported a roof. There is no indication of a specific orientation of the buildings, for example, to Jerusalem, as is the case in later synagogues. Netzer (2003: 282) had suggested that two further features would be essential for identifying a building as Second Temple synagogue, namely, the existence of a niche, as in the Gamla synagogue, and the connection

⁶ Yavor 2010: 60–61. The earlier date was suggested by S. Gutmann: Levine 2014: 135–136.

⁷ For the debate see Runesson, Binder, and Olsson 2008: 35.

⁸ For a brief review of scholarship on this issue see Catto 2007: 2–5 and *passim*, as well as Ryan 2017: 102–103, which is, however, not free from inaccuracies; see, e.g., the placing of the work of Claußen (2002) with those who deny the existence of synagogue buildings, against which see only Claußen 2002: 129 (Kee’s theory is “[v]öllig abwegig”), though Claußen still deemed evidence for pre-70 CE synagogue buildings slim and hence suggested private houses as additional—and perhaps more frequent—meeting places for Jewish communities.

⁹ The evidence is in part summarized in Hachlili 2013: 23–39; and now Ryan 2017: 61–67.

with a ritual bath or *miqweh*, as evidenced by many of the Second Temple finds. However, Netzer's claim was disputed by David Amit (2007: 27–29). In fact, there is no consistent evidence for a niche or any other form of Torah shrine inside the central room of these buildings, although adjacent rooms—as are evident, for example, in Gamla, Masada, Qiryat Sefer, and Magdala—may well have housed scrolls. In addition, not each of these buildings was directly connected with a *miqweh*, and in some cases, including Magdala, it may be questioned whether the *miqwa'ot* are *specifically* connected with the synagogue. It has therefore been argued that *miqwa'ot* were often placed close to synagogues as public places for general purposes of purification, not specifically for the visitors of a synagogue.¹⁰ While many synagogues feature *miqwa'ot* in their vicinity, the absence of a *miqweh* is not a hard and fast criterion against the identification of a building as a synagogue.

In addition to the sites mentioned above, there are other buildings for which the identification as a synagogue has been proposed. One is a structure next to the Hasmonaean winter palace at Jericho, which Netzer (1999; 2004: 11–17) suggested was a synagogue. However, several scholars have raised doubts about this identification (Ma'oz 1999; Claußen 2002: 185–186; Levine 2005: 72–74), while Anders Runesson (2014: 270–271) allows for its interpretation as an “association synagogue” (a hypothesized synagogue type which will be discussed below).¹¹ Moreover, a first-century CE date is considered for the basalt floor—and the building to which it originally belonged—underneath the limestone synagogue at Capernaum (Binder 1999: 188–193; Levine 2005: 71). In contrast, claims about finds of Second Temple synagogues in Chorazin and Northern Jerusalem (*Khirbet er-Ras*) remain doubtful (Levine 2005: 72).

Thus, archaeological evidence for Second Temple synagogues from Palestine—both Judaea and the Galilee/Golan—is stronger today than previous estimations had allowed. To this, we may add that the Theodotus inscription—for both archaeological and epigraphical reasons—is now firmly dated to the period from the first century BCE to the first century CE (Kloppenborg Verbin 2000; Cotton et al. 2010: 54) and thus attests to a Second Temple synagogue in a Greek speaking milieu in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 6:9). Lidia Matassa in her posthumously published PhD thesis (Matassa 2018), who has doubted the existence of first-century CE synagogues except perhaps for Gamla, seems to have paid too little attention to some of the finds mentioned above. However, she rightly pointed to some of the methodological problems surrounding the identification of early

¹⁰ See Haber 2008: 169–170. Haber thought that persons handling the scrolls inside the synagogue might wash their hands, as suggested by the hand basin in the Gamla synagogue. Adler 2008 suggested that men with seminal emissions immersed before handling scrolls. Adler now believes that *miqwa'ot* were so common that they appeared *also* close to synagogues (in a paper in the Hellenistic Judaism section at the 2019 SBL Annual Meeting in San Diego).

¹¹ See also Runesson, Binder, and Olsson 2008: 40–42; and Hachlili 2013: 42, who lists the Jericho building among Second Temple synagogues.

synagogues. It is indeed not easy to distinguish between an early synagogue and other public, communal buildings in Jewish settlements of Palestine. Or, to put it differently: A public, communal building in an area with a Jewish population in the Land of Israel in the late Second Temple period, with benches and an open space in the middle, should be considered a synagogue unless some other function can be established.¹²

But what about assembly rooms of smaller groups? Allowing for this distinction, Runesson (2001a: 395–400, 478–482; 2014: 267–270) has suggested that synagogues usually functioned as “public synagogues” in places where Jews were in charge of the town or city administration (that is, in the Land of Israel), whereas synagogues run by specific Jewish groups in the homeland (e.g., the Essenes) and also those in the Diaspora were “semi-public” or “association synagogues”. Apart from the central role of communal reading and interpretation of the Torah (and, according to Luke-Acts, also the Prophets), the latter form would have included activities typical for the association, inter alia, communal dining. While there is evidence for dining facilities in some early Diaspora synagogues (e.g., Ostia, as per Runesson’s dating, see below), one might, for the homeland, point to the room L77 at Qumran (Levine 2005: 65; Runesson 2014: 273), which is the larger of the two dining rooms at Qumran (see Magness 2002: 122–126). However, it is unclear whether the reading and studying of scripture would have taken place in this room as well, and there are other rooms at Khirbet Qumran, such as L4, which seems to feature a low bench along three sides and may have been a small assembly or council room.¹³ Runesson’s distinction between “public” and “semi-public” or “association” synagogues, for which he assumes different origins—the former deriving from Torah assemblies in the city-gate, the latter emerging with the rise of voluntary associations, in the Diaspora allegedly by way of a transformation of Jewish temples—has some explanatory potential (see Ryan 2017: 31–33), though it remains debated in current scholarship.

In the homeland, there are further sites for which the identification of a building as a Second Temple synagogue has been suggested, some of which are, however, contested. One such site is Ḥorvat Etri in the Judaeen Shephelah, where a room featuring no benches and a row of three columns in the middle has been identified as a synagogue by Boaz Zissu and Amir Ganor (2004; 2009: 101–110); others, however, have compared this room with halls in domestic dwellings of extended families, such as the one at Ḥorvat Burnaṭ in the vicinity of Lod (Amit,

¹² For a different type of public building in a Jewish first-century context, without benches and unable to accommodate a large group in a single space, see the “basilica” (L2100) at Gamla: Syon and Yavor 2005: 52–59. The excavators tentatively suggest that the northern part of the aisle “could have accommodated judiciary and public functions under the auspices of the town council, while in the side chambers transactions and meetings could be held” (59).

¹³ As suggested by de Vaux; see Magness 2002: 51. Rapuano 2001 compares this room with the Jericho synagogue argued for by Netzer. Hirschfeld 2004: 101, however, reconstructs L4 as serving the storage of clay jars.

Torgü, and Gendelman 2008: 102–103). Another debated issue is the identification of synagogues in small rural settlements or farmsteads. One of these is a building in Khirbet Diab north of Jerusalem recently excavated by Benjamin Har-Even (2016), another one a room in a Jewish farmstead on Tel Rekhesh not far from Mt. Tabor in Lower Galilee, excavated by Mordechai Aviam (Aviam et al. 2019). Whether there were “small” rural synagogues catering for a household or a farmstead remains to be discussed,¹⁴ and the current volume will offer a contribution to this debate. Moreover, despite the increasing evidence for Second Temple synagogues it is unclear how widespread in fact synagogue buildings were in the period.

Another issue becoming more prominent in recent research is the question of continued use of synagogues—potentially following restoration—*after* 70 CE, as well as the founding of synagogues *between* the revolts. Here, the current research is moving away from the alleged “clear watershed” of 70 CE (Levine 2005: 175)¹⁵ to the question of both continuities and changes in the period after the Temple destruction. The archaeological evidence for such synagogues is still slim and partially debated, and hence more research is called for. Thus, it is unclear whether the tentative synagogue building at Khirbet et-Ṭuwani, excavated by Har-Even (2012), operated before or after 70 CE. The building is also unusual in that the benches, preserved on three sides, were hewn into the rock, and there is no evidence of columns, the absence of which the excavator explains with the modest size of the building. Moreover, the newly discovered synagogue at Majduliyya in the Golan may have operated before and after the First Revolt; it is discussed in the present volume. Additionally, a building at Khirbet Qana in the Lower Galilee has been interpreted as a “possible synagogue”, with the current estimation being that it was built after 70 CE when refugees from the south arrived in the Galilee (McCullough 2015: 141–142). While Levine (2005: 182) still attested “meager evidence, at best” for synagogues from the period between 70 and the third century, such synagogues are now becoming more firmly attested. This may allow new insights into the transformation of the synagogue from a Second Temple/Early Roman building to a post-Temple, Middle to Late Roman period institution. A case in point is the early phase of the synagogue at Nabratein, which—unlike the early Roman synagogues—featured a fixed Torah shrine and an orientation towards Jerusalem; according to Eric Meyers (2010), it dates from the second century CE.

More generally, a crucial issue in this respect is the dating of the “Galilean”-type synagogues. While Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger (1916) classically dated these synagogues to the second or third century CE, a time range recently confirmed for the synagogues in the Meiron area by the team headed by Eric

¹⁴ See also Claußen’s suggestion of synagogue communities in private houses, above n. 8.

¹⁵ But see Schwartz and Weiss 2012 for a more mixed general picture regarding the “watershed” of 70 CE.

Meyers (see Meyers 2001; Strange 2001), Jodi Magness, in a series of studies, has proposed revised dates for these synagogues from the fourth to the early sixth centuries.¹⁶ More recently, this issue has been addressed afresh with the excavation of Khirbet Wadi Hamam, a site apparently abandoned in the late fourth century CE (Leibner 2018). The results of this excavation seem to suggest that this synagogue type began to develop in the Middle Roman to Early Byzantine periods. In addition, the discovery of an Early Roman “public building” underneath the synagogue at Khirbet Wadi Hamam by Uzi Leibner and his team raises the possibility of continuity in location between a potential synagogue from the Early Roman period and one erected in the Middle Roman period. Observations of this kind might shed light on the situation of other places with a potential sequence of synagogue buildings, such as Capernaum or, perhaps, Kefar Shikhin, where a synagogue, “probably not earlier than the second century” reused “pieces of an earlier private villa or public building” (Strange 2015: 105).

A further controversial topic of synagogue research over the past decades has been the earliest archaeological evidence for synagogues in the Jewish Diaspora. There is ongoing debate about the date from which on two of the oldest synagogues in the Jewish Diaspora operated as such: the synagogue at Delos and the synagogue at Ostia. For the latter, two contrasting views are defended, one, viewing the origins of the Ostia synagogue in the first century CE, as the earliest purpose-built synagogue extant from the Diaspora (Runesson 2001b), the other one, suggesting that a multi-use insula complex at Ostia was converted into a synagogue only from the second or third century CE onwards (White 1997); White’s research since 2002 suggests that the complex was not constructed before the third century, went through several phases of renovation lasting into (at least) the sixth century, was probably not converted into a synagogue prior to the mid-fourth century, with the latest phase of renovation (which included the Torah shrine with *menorah* reliefs) taking place after 475. The forthcoming publication of this research will surely advance the discussion. Debate has also been raging on the synagogue at Delos. Thus, the late Lidia Matassa criticized scholars arguing for the identification of building GD 80 as a synagogue (Matassa 2007; 2018), most notably Monika Trümper (2004), who allowed for a function of the building as synagogue well before 88 BCE. Trümper offers a rejoinder in this volume.

Finally, several issues regarding the function, status, and role of synagogues in the Second Temple period and shortly thereafter continue to be debated in scholarship. What do we know about the function of, and activities in, synagogues, both in the homeland and in the Diaspora when it is realized that the presentation of synagogues by authors such as Flavius Josephus (see Krause 2017) or Philo answers specific rhetorical purposes? What was going on in Second Temple synagogues, and might some of what was going on in them be labelled “worship” (thus van der Horst 2002, contra McKay 1994)? How central was prayer—and

¹⁶ Magness 1997; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2005; 2007; 2009; 2010.

what kind of prayer: communal or private—in early synagogues or *proseuchai*, literally, “prayer houses”? Some have suggested that prayer was rather not central in usual (“public”) synagogues in Palestine and more so in the Diaspora and perhaps Judaeen sects (Levine 2005: 162–169), while others have deemed it central throughout (Binder 1999: 404–415). What do we know about practices of reading and interpreting scriptures in early synagogues, and how do these connect with later evidence? Were the rabbis taking control of synagogues right after 70 CE, or do we see changing attitudes towards synagogues within the developing rabbinic corpus? How can we responsibly correlate material evidence and literary sources? What is the relation between the Jerusalem Temple and synagogues, and were synagogues at the time really “extensions” of the Jerusalem Temple (as suggested by Binder 1999)? These and similar questions have been raised in previous scholarship (see, e.g., Levine 2005: 169–173; or Runesson, Binder, and Olsson 2008: 7–13, distinguishing between spatial, liturgical, social, and institutional aspects), but in view of the emergence of new finds—apart from new proposed synagogue sites, also the discovery of the decorated stone table in the first-century CE synagogue at Magdala¹⁷—the deployment of new methods, and the development of new theories the present volume will take up several of these aspects.

The essays to follow, which predominantly originated in a conference at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster in June 2017, are attempts to push research on the earliest synagogues forward through the discussion of new material finds, the deployment of emergent methods and theories, and/or the timely reassessment of previous work in the field. Those new finds and definitional issues surveyed above dominate these essays. The recent, rapid growth of possible Hellenistic-Roman period synagogues from the Land of Israel excavated over the past decade has expanded our data set for understanding of how synagogues were conceived, constructed, and placed within specific geographic and community contexts during this period. Likewise, the introduction of new critical theory and methods to the sub-field of ancient Judaism has further nuanced the picture of what a synagogue was and how people acted within them over this same period, both in terms of reading specific sources and as we seek to create a composite picture based on the combination of these sources and the relevant material cultures. Moreover, the increased participation by and dialogue with classicists have allowed the field to contextualize the architectural, institutional, and ritual elements that we find in these early synagogue exemplars and the corresponding sources, as well as to incorporate inscriptions at the confluence of the material and literary streams. As with other fields of inquiry pertaining to religion, this combination of new data and new ways of processing the data have led to further problematization of normative reconstructions of Jewish assemblies extrapolated from the archaeological record of later periods and from rabbinic

¹⁷ See, e.g., Avshalom-Gorni and Najar 2013; Aviam 2013; Binder 2014; Bauckham 2015; Aviam and Bauckham 2018; Kershner 2015; Fine 2017; Hachlili 2017.

literature. This increased variegation has led to a toppling of many theories that had been dominant, though also allowing for an enrichment of the field.

In the first section, “Advances in the Archaeology of Synagogues from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” Zeev Weiss commences with a methodological assessment of recent archaeological identifications of synagogues and studies of criteria in such identifications. Weiss voices caution as to the identification of the structures at Khirbet Diab and Ḥorvat Etri as synagogues and discusses the function of the Magdala stone as well as its contribution in reconstructing early synagogue liturgy. Following Weiss’ more programmatic treatment, Uzi Leibner reassesses the date of the “Galilean-type” synagogue through the lens of the synagogue from Khirbet Wadi Ḥamam. Leibner argues that both the stratigraphic dating method and the art-historical method of comparing the architectural decoration indicate that this synagogue, belonging to the “Galilean type” and being abandoned in the late fourth/early fifth century CE, originated in the third century CE. Hence, this evidence raises questions regarding the suggestion that the so-called “Galilean-type” synagogue emerged only in the Byzantine period. Continuing the focus upon specific synagogue finds, Mechael Osband and Benjamin Arubas analyse the discovery of a potential synagogue in the rural Golan settlement of Majduliyya. Osband and Arubas contend that this structure may be identified confidently as one of the few Roman period synagogues in the Golan Heights, and that it was used both before the First Jewish Revolt and beyond 67 CE, which is even rarer—in fact, down to the late third century CE. In the final essay of this section, we move from the analysis of new finds to the reassessment of older, well known finds, as Monika Trümper comprehensively defends her previous identification of the Delos synagogue. Taking the recent criticisms by Lidia Matassa as her starting point, Trümper argues that building GD 80 from Delos may still confidently be classed as a synagogue structure, potentially from its beginnings. She concludes by challenging other archaeologists and synagogue scholars to take up the areas of further research that she previously identified in her 2004 article.

In the next section, “Interpreting Material Remains and Literary Sources”, we move to emergent theoretical and methodological studies, and new uses of established theories and methods in the study of the earliest synagogues and synagogue sources. Lutz Doering reviews the current evidence for first-century, late Second Temple synagogues and places the newly discovered synagogue at Magdala in this context. In doing so, he critically reviews previous proposals for the interpretation of the decoration and function of the Magdala stone table. Doering argues that, rather than providing a model of the Jerusalem Temple in the synagogue at Magdala, or bringing visitors of the synagogue into the Temple courts, the stone, through references to the Temple in its decoration, provides a connection between the local activity of Torah reading and the central institution of the Temple. Judith Newman, too, revisits the important Magdala synagogue stone and applies her mastery of ritual studies and religious experience in a study of the

stone, as she moves beyond merely linking the various relief images to the Jerusalem Temple and Wilderness Tabernacle. Distinguishing between space and place (following Yi-Fu Tuan) and using the lens of cultural memory construction as well as ritualized reading of scripture, she argues that the synagogue-as-place was infused with memories of divine presence—in the Temple, in the tabernacle, or in the dispersion—within the textual community gathering in the synagogue on Sabbaths for instruction in scriptures. Subsequently, Andrew Krause assesses several forms of critical spatial theory in the reading of both literary texts (e.g., the works of Josephus) and inscriptions (e.g., the Theodotus inscription). Krause contends that rhetorical constructions of space in texts must be handled critically if they are to be incorporated into larger reconstructions of synagogue development, and critical spatial theory provides many of the tools necessary for such responsible readings. Similarly, Jordan Ryan advocates careful methodological consideration of history and the historicity of synagogue accounts in the New Testament Gospels and Historical Jesus research. According to Ryan, Collingwood’s evidentialist treatment of historical analysis that seeks corroboration in sources should take the place of more positivistic explorations of “what really happened”. Ryan’s essay also attempts to bridge the methodological and ideological divides involved in combining New Testament studies and the study of ancient Judaism, which are too often ignored.

Moving from overarching theoretical concerns in the interpretation of material finds and literary sources to the more concrete—though equally fraught—issues of the constituent, day-to-day practices that were situated in the earliest synagogues, the third section, “Theorizing Practice in Ancient Synagogues”, addresses various sources and activities related to ancient Jewish institutions. Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer commences this section with a detailed study of Philo’s various clues regarding practices in first-century CE synagogues, often labelled *proseuchai*, including also the assemblies of the Essenes and Therapeutae. According to Leonhardt-Balzer, Philo presents the teaching of Torah as the primary activity of these gatherings, with special interest in the organization and discipline therein, while omitting several activities that arise in other sources. The next essay in this section transitions from the careful reading of a specific corpus of sources to the tracing of specific practices over time, as Clemens Leonhard tracks the development of scripture reading as a ritual practice in the synagogue. Leonhard applies Roman reading practices and literacy rates to this question, and he argues that in the early rabbinic period, Torah reading was more akin to elitist Roman reading and study groups than to the highly ritualized Torah reading that emerged only in Talmudic times. Hermut Löhr aptly follows with an analysis of the connection between synagogue readings, the bi- or tripartite division of the Jewish scriptures, and their exegesis. Drawing on sources from the Second Temple period and including early Christian texts, Löhr problematizes simple developmental models and direct attribution to synagogue practices for the so-called *petichah*. In the final essay of this section, Ruth Langer assesses the role of

the rabbinic movement and the introduction of the standardized synagogue liturgies of the rabbinic literature in the synagogue in the Tannaitic and early Amoraic periods. Langer challenges Lee Levine's readings of several of the appropriate sources, as she contends that we must go even further than Levine in questioning the influence of rabbinic practices in the synagogues of the Roman period. Thus, all four of these essays push against simple, normative presentations of synagogue practices during this early period of synagogue development.

The final section of this collection, "Legal, Political, and Cultural Contexts of Ancient Synagogues", continues to address everyday matters in the synagogue, though moves to legal and ideological issues and practices pertinent to the study of the synagogue. Kimberley Czajkowski begins this section by surveying the Alexandrian Jewish community's self-expression in both the city and the surrounding countryside. Czajkowski elucidates the applicability and meaning of the term "synagogue" in a context in which the term is given such short shrift. This is followed by two essays relating to the applicability of associational language and concepts in the study of synagogues, both of which focus on inscriptional data. In the first of these essays, Benedikt Eckhardt asks the fundamental question of what it means to portray synagogues as Roman *collegia* or *thiasoi*, in terms of both community practice and legal status. Eckhardt nuances the discussion by arguing that while synagogues before 70 CE certainly cohere with the general characteristics and were even treated as associations by some, we must still recognize the key difference in that Jewish associations were semi-public institutions which were not open to everyone and provided the context for legally practicing Judaism. Eckhardt ends with an invaluable appendix that analyses the evidence in a region-by-region survey. In the second such essay, Markus Öhler narrows the scope to query what makes a particular inscription Jewish. Öhler critiques the criteria used by earlier scholars and seeks to set out more workable principles for such identification, and he ends with the famous Iulia Severa inscription as a case study. In an art-historical coda to this section and the collection as a whole, Katrin Kogman-Appel studies the attire depicted in the iconic murals of the Dura Europos synagogue in order to explicate the "dress code" and its place in the visual storytelling of these paintings. Kogman-Appel argues that the deployment of Roman and Persian dress codes in the murals, rather than being used to demarcate self-identity and otherness, show the ability of the Durene Jews to be multilingual in a broader cultural sense.

This collection thus seeks to survey the current state of the study of Hellenistic and Roman period synagogues, to move the conversation forward in this specialized sub-field, and to bring the various disciplines needed to clarify the meaning, role, and use of early synagogues into a meaningful conversation. Further, the volume suggests that there is still room for increased engagement with data relating to early synagogues in the areas of archaeology, biblical studies, and the historiography of ancient Judaism alike. It is thus hoped that this volume may

both provide a point of entry for those new to the field and stimulate further conversation among the specialists in our burgeoning area of study.

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I. Advances in the Archaeology of Synagogues from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods

The Synagogue in an Age of Transition, from the Second Temple Period to Roman Times: Recent Developments in Research

Zeev Weiss

The synagogue was the central institution of the Jewish community in ancient Palestine and the Diaspora. The earliest excavated synagogue building dates to the end of the Second Temple period, but after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and especially from the third century CE on, the synagogue underwent radical changes in both form and content. A key innovation in the synagogue structure that was maintained throughout history was the creation of a roofed and illuminated space designed to house a group of believers who actively participated in the ritual and, in some places, sat on benches built against the walls of the structure. Each community invested great efforts in building a spacious synagogue, embellishing it with architectural decorations, wall paintings, or mosaics. In the early stage its art was aniconic, but around the third century CE figurative art became prominent in Jewish circles, leaving its mark even in their sacred spaces.

The present study will focus on the early history of the synagogue—the communal building that operated in the late Second Temple period in the shadow of the Jerusalem Temple and developed in the following centuries into an independent institution in ancient Palestine and the Diaspora. The purpose of this article is to raise some methodological problems in current scholarship and to offer some preliminary thoughts about the changes that transpired in the building over the years. Therefore, it will not describe the archaeological finds systematically, but instead will use them to illustrate several issues pertaining to the synagogue in the late Second Temple period and Roman times.

Synagogues were prominent in both urban and rural areas of first-century CE Palestine. To date, these early buildings were discovered in Judaea at Masada, Herodium, Modi'in, and Qiryat Sefer, and in the Galilee at Gamla and, more recently, Magdala (Netzer 2003: 277–285; Levine 2005: 45–80). Jerusalem, too, boasted one such building that predated the destruction of the Temple, as evidenced by the Theodotus inscription uncovered in the city (Roth-Gerson 1987: 76–86; Kloppenborg 2000). The New Testament tells us that Jesus visited and brought his good news to synagogues in Capernaum, Nazareth, and virtually