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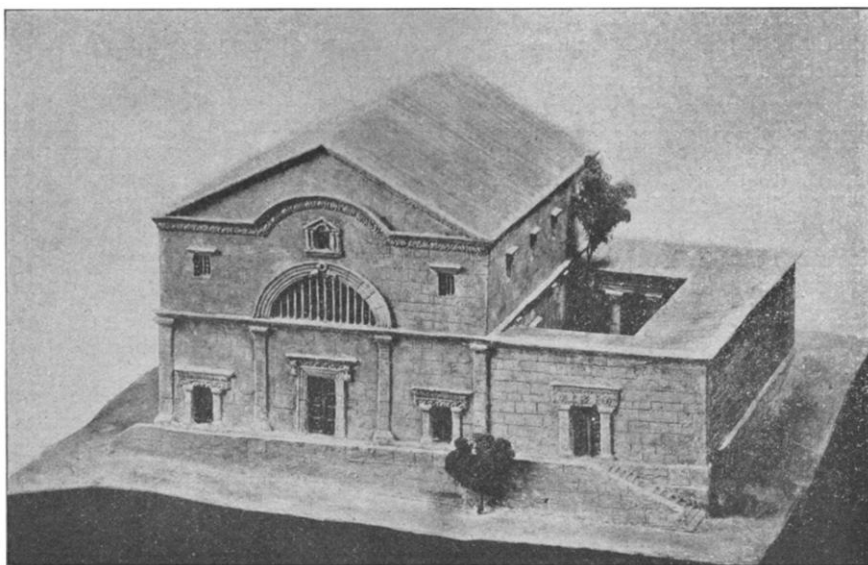


Fig. 1. Model of the Synagogue at Capernaum. From H. Kohl and C. Watzinger, **Antike Synagogen in Galilaea**, Leipzig, 1916, Pl. V.

SYNAGOGUES IN PALESTINE

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Both Christian church and Mohammedan mosque, in their origins, were indebted to the synagogue. Occasionally we find that synagogues have even been transformed into churches and mosques. At Gerasa in Trans-

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jordan a synagogue was rebuilt as a church, and at Eshtemoa, south of Hebron, one was turned into a mosque. The New Testament records the importance of the synagogue in the beginnings of Christianity. Because of these things, and because of the significance of the synagogue in ancient and modern Judaism, there is a natural interest in the earliest synagogue discoveries.

SYNAGOGUE ORIGINS

The origins of the synagogue are shrouded in the mists of the past. Synagogue is a Greek word meaning "assembly." The Hebrew form meant "the house of (the) assembly." Although our first actual knowledge of the synagogue comes from the third and second century B.C. (in the Greek period) it may have been the result of a long development from informal meetings for prayer and worship in the private homes of the Jews of Palestine and the Diaspora (dispersion or exile). It has been maintained that even before the destruction of the temple there were prayer gatherings under prophetic guidance, and that out of these gatherings there grew the more definitely institutionalized synagogues, which played an important role in the Maccabean period of the second century B.C.¹ It is strange that there are no indubitable references to the synagogue in the Old Testament. The most probable is Ps. 74:8, which may come from the Greek period, and where the expression "assemblies of El (= God)" is usually translated "synagogues." Very improbable is Ezek. 11:16, where an obvious mistranslation produces "a little sanctuary," i.e., a synagogue. Some think that many of the Psalms were written for use in the synagogue, and it has been suggested that the priestly legislation in the Pentateuch was written for reading in the synagogue as a substitute for temple sacrifices, but there is no direct evidence for this. The place of origin of the synagogue, whether in Palestine or among the Jews of the Diaspora, is as obscure as its time of origin.

THE EARLIEST SYNAGOGUES UNEARTHED

Our discussion of synagogue archaeology will be limited to Palestine, with one reference to Syria, although early synagogues are known at other places, such as on the Greek islands of Delos and Aegina, or at Miletus and Priene on the eastern coast of modern Turkey. The earliest excavated synagogues in Palestine belong to the late second, the third, and the fourth centuries A.D.² The reason why none from the first century has been re-

1. See Louis Finkelstein, "The Origin of the Synagogue," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1930, pp. 49 ff.

2. There are otherwise a first century A.D. synagogue inscription from Jerusalem, to be discussed later, and a few fragments of Jewish architecture which might have belonged to a synagogue, and are to be dated before 130 A.D., possibly before 68 A.D., found in the fallen debris around the large arch south of the village of Jerash in Transjordan. See **BASOR**, No. 87 (1942), pp. 10 ff.

covered may be that they were quite completely demolished during the two violent rebellions against Rome in 66-70 A.D. and 131-135 A.D. In the first of these both Galilee and Judaea were subdued by the Emperor Vespasian, and Jerusalem, with its temple, was burned in 70 A.D. by the Romans under Titus, Vespasian's son. The Jerusalem Talmud credits Vespasian with the destruction of four hundred eighty synagogues in Jerusalem (*Megillah*, III, 1). The extant synagogue ruins come from after this period, but we may assume that their general plan conformed to those in the first century, although they differed in certain architectural features and ornamentalations. Each town and city had its synagogue, sometimes more than one. Although we cannot give credence to the tradition that there were four hundred eighty at Jerusalem, the tradition that there were at one time thirteen at Tiberias is plausible (*Berakoth*, I, i, 8a; IV, vii, 30b).

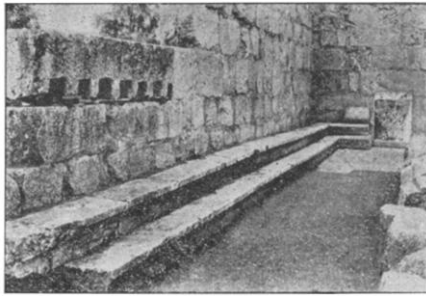


Fig. 2. Benches in the Capernaum Synagogue. From E. L. Sukenik, **Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece**, London, 1934, Pl. IVa. (Courtesy of the British Academy and the Oxford University Press.)

There were several synagogues at Damascus (Acts 9:20). Acts 6:9 may imply that at Jerusalem Jews from various countries worshiped in synagogues with men from the same country. Synagogues in Galilee are mentioned frequently in connection with Jesus' preaching there. In view of the frequency with which synagogues occurred in ancient Palestine, it is not surprising that their remains have been found at more than forty places in the Holy Land. The larger number of them come from the Galilee district and vicinity. Occasionally more than one has been found at a single site, as at *Kefr Bir'im* and *Gischala*.

ROMAN PERIOD SYNAGOGUES IN PALESTINE

These Galilean synagogues were the first to attract the attention of explorers almost a hundred years ago, when they were identified by Edward Robinson at *Tell Hum*, *Meron*, *Kefr Bir'im*, and *Irbid*. The most recent discovery occurred at *Sheikh Abreiq*, the Rabbinic site Beth Shearim, ten miles west of Nazareth, where important Jewish catacombs have also been found. The synagogues excavated in Palestine may be roughly classified into two major types. The first may be illustrated from the remains at *Tell Hum*, the site of Capernaum, from *Kerazeh*, the site of Chorazin (cf. Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13), and from *Kefr Bir'im*; and they belong to the third and fourth centuries A.D. Chorazin was destroyed by the first half of the fourth century, but Capernaum and other sites were occupied

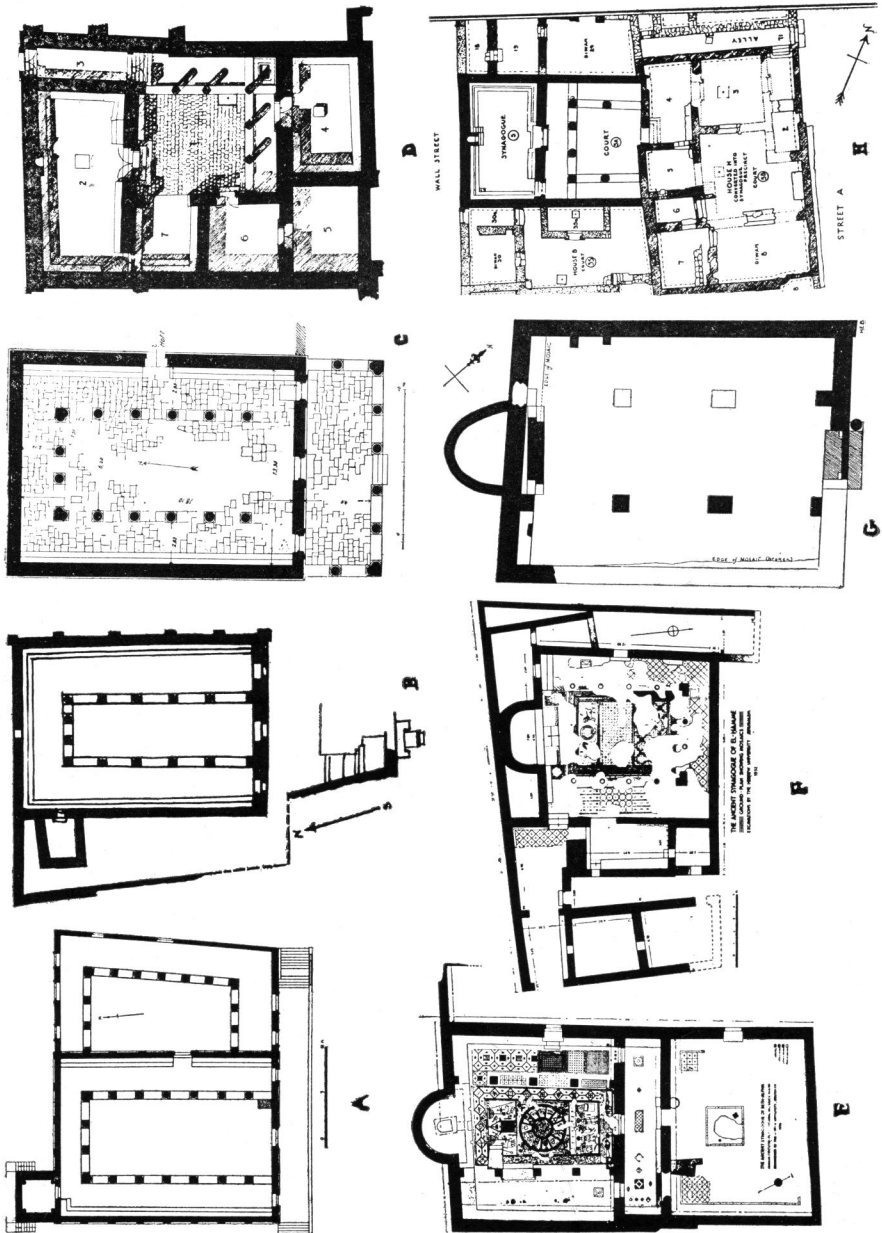


Fig. 3. Plans of Ancient Synagogues. **A.** Capernaum (from Sukenik, *op. cit.*, Fig. 1). **B.** Chorazin (from *ibid.*, Fig. 2). **C.** Kefr Bir'im (from Kohl and Watzinger, *op. cit.*, Pl. XII). **D.** The Early Synagogue at Dura-Europos (from M. I. Rostovtzeff et al., *The Excavations at Dura-Europos*, VI, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1936, Pl. VII). **E.** Beth Alpha (from Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*, Jerusalem, 1932, Pl. XXVII). **F.** Hamath-by-Gadara (*Jour. Pal. Or. Soc.*, XV, 1935, Pl. VII). **G.** Near ancient Jericho (*Quar. Dept. Antiq. Pal.* VI, Fig. 1 on p. 74). **H.** The Later Synagogue at Dura-Europos (from Rostovtzeff, *op. cit.*, Pl. IX).

longer. Their architectural ornamentation, about which more will be said later, is characteristic of this period. Father Orfali, who has attempted a partial reconstruction of the Capernaum synagogue, has without success maintained a first century A.D. date for the earliest parts of this synagogue. In view of the New Testament associations, one would like to be able to claim an early date for it. Located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, its white limestone superstructure contrasts sharply with the black basalt of which most of the city's buildings were made. Its main external Fig. 3:A should be compared with those of nearby Chorazin in Fig. 3:B and *Kefr Bir'im*, about twenty-five miles to the northwest, in Fig. 3:C. It is a basilica, with rows of columns supporting a gallery which ran around the north, east and west sides of the building. The entrance is on the side of orientation, where there are a main portal and two side entrances. The interior is paved with flagstones, and around the walls on three sides run two benches, one built above the other (Fig. 2). The gallery was for the use of the women, while the men sat on the benches or on mats in the central nave, facing the entrance. The women entered the gallery from a staircase which was attached to an annex near the northwest corner. In front of the Capernaum synagogue was a platform, while a columned porch graced the facade at *Kefr Bir'im*, and probably also at Chorazin. On the east of the Capernaum synagogue was a trapezoid court with a portico. Besides the three main entrances on the facade, there were several windows, including a large open arch with an iron grating above the central portal.

One who visits these ruins is impressed and surprised by the ornate almost baroque style of ornamentation. He finds Corinthian capitals, and cornices, pediments, and lintels which are decorated with reliefs. Among the designs he sees the egg and dart pattern, garlands, rosettes, acanthus leaves, vine branches, grapes, ivy, date palms, shell designs, pentagrams, hexagrams, amphorae, lions, eagles, an animal suckling its young, birds, cupids, centaurs, sea-horses, and zodiac signs. He will also note the seven-branched candlestick, pomegranates, etc. In the Capernaum synagogue recent excavations have disclosed the Bema (or pulpit), the platform where the lessons were read, in the southeast corner of the nave, next to the pillar (cf. Luke 4:16 ff.). The central feature of the synagogue was the Ark or Torah Shrine in which were kept the scrolls of the Law. The Ark was at first portable, and during the services placed inside before the central portal. Later a permanent Ark was placed there, and the doorway blocked up. Fragments of miniature architecture from such an Ark were discovered at Capernaum, as well as fragments of two stone lions which stood on either side of the Ark. Remains of two such stone lions associated with the Chorazin synagogue were recovered, and also a fragment of one from *Kefr Bir'im*.

The Beth Shearim synagogue consisted of an interior court and a basilica, with a terrace in front and various side-courts and side-chambers. Near the steps to the terrace a male skeleton was found. The man apparently had been killed by a blow on the chest, probably at the time of the destruction of the synagogue. Like the other Galilee synagogues, it was oriented towards Jerusalem, in this instance, southeast. Three entrances led into the court and two into the basilica, and between the two was the

site of the Ark, while the stone platform of the Bema (pulpit) was near the northwest wall of the nave, occupying a space enclosed by walls. Marble slabs, from the walls above the benches and from the floor, were decorated in relief, some being part of a Zodiac design. The inscriptions showed that the synagogue was also used as a court house. It dates from the third and fourth centuries A.D., and there was some evidence that it was preceded by a more simple structure in the second century.

THE SYNAGOGUE AT DURA-EUROPUS

Before we turn to the second type of synagogue, our readers should be invited to two superimposed synagogues outside of Palestine, at Dura-Europos on the middle Euphrates. The earlier synagogue (Fig. 3:D) was a private house which had been transformed and reconstructed about 200 A.D. Unlike most synagogues, it was in the midst of other dwellings. The

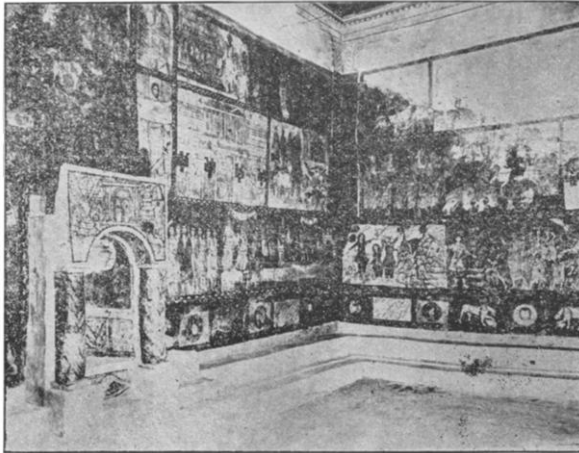


Fig. 4. Interior of the Dura-Europos Synagogue. From Rostovtzeff, **Dura-Europos and its Art**, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1938, pl. XXI.

long narrow entry led into a colonnaded court, in the corner of which was a cesspool, used as a drain for the laver basin. Originally there had been three doors leading into the main chamber, but one was blocked up, and now there were two, one from the court and one from a side chamber. Benches ran along all four sides, and the wall opposite the main entrance doubtless contained a niche for the ark, as did the later synagogue. The walls of the side chamber, which may have been used by the women, were decorated with foliage, fruit, and flower designs, while the main chamber was decorated geometrically. The later synagogue (Fig. 3:H) belonged to the period 245-256 A.D. The main room was enlarged and the courtyard extended, and also a house to the east was used as a synagogue precinct with a court. The plaster columns of the colonnaded court supported a portico, and in the northwest corner was a laver basin. Two doors led into the main room, which was furnished with two tiers of benches along the walls. The main entrance was for the men, the women using the smaller

door to the left. The benches between the two doors and along the left wall, which were without footrests, were for the women. The niche for the Ark was in the opposite wall, and beside it the elder's seat. A canopy over the niche supported the curtain or veil before the Ark. The ceiling was tiled, and on the tiles were fruit, flower, animal and bird designs, signs of the zodiac, Greek and Aramaic inscriptions, etc.

More striking were the murals on the walls, something of the nature of which is illustrated in Fig. 4. They are as yet unique in synagogue art, although the decoration, apart from the subjects, may be compared with that in contemporary pagan temples. Above the niche were depicted the temple (alternatively interpreted as a Torah Shrine), the seven-branched candlestick, and the story of Abraham offering Isaac on an altar. In facing the niche, the worshipers turned towards Jerusalem, and saw this picture

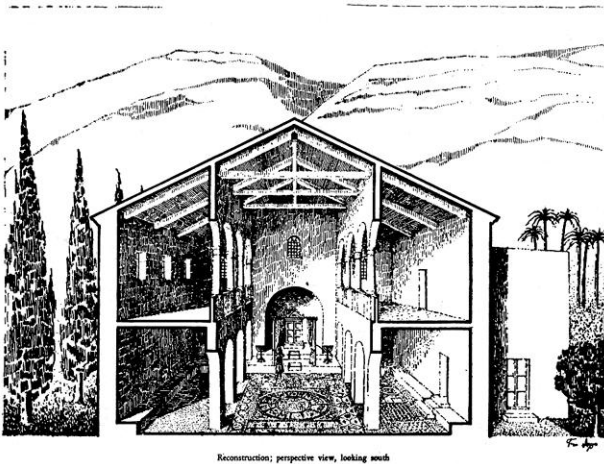


Fig. 5. Reconstruction, showing the interior of the Beth Alpha Synagogue. From Sukenik, *loc. cit.*, Pl. VII.

of the temple and the scene which, according to popular tradition, took place on the temple mount. It may not be without significance that two other representations of the temple are on this same wall, equally distant from the niche to the right and left, one glorifying the Aaronic priesthood, and disclosing the Ark within the temple (cf. Rev. 11:19). The murals around the walls represent scenes from the careers of Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Solomon, David, Elisha, and Esther, and incidents connected with the Exodus and the Ark. The lowest zone on the walls was decorated with masks, leopards, lions, or tigers in circles. The scenes on the murals are titled in Greek and Aramaic, and to some of them are appended inscriptions in Pehlevi. Kraeling, du Mesnil, Goodenough, Rostovtzeff, and others have added to our understanding of the significance of these murals for interpreting synagogue religion and Jewish art, but here we cannot go into detail concerning this. Rather we turn to the type of synagogue which is particularly characteristic of the Byzantine period.

BYZANTINE PERIOD SYNAGOGUES IN PALESTINE

In contrast to the first type of synagogue we discussed, the Dura synagogue had its entrance on the side opposite Jerusalem, and the ark was placed at the side opposite the entrance. This is particularly characteristic of the synagogues built after the middle of the fourth century A.D. and later, of which the best example comes from Beth Alpha, near Bethshan, to the south of the Sea of Galilee (see Fig. 3:E and the reconstruction, Fig. 5). To the same category belong the synagogue in Transjordan at Hammath-by-Gadara (*el-Hammeh*) on the Yarmuk River (Fig. 3:F) and the synagogue discovered near ancient Jericho (Fig. 3:G). We shall have occasion to refer to others on Mt. Carmel at 'Esfiyeh, at Naaran ('*Ain Duq*) a few miles northwest of Jericho, and at Gerasa (*Jerash*) in central Transjordan. This type is also characterized by an apse, on the side opposite the entrance, in which the Ark was placed, and by mosaic floors. It is usually a basilica.

The Beth Alpha synagogue had on the north a large open court, from



Fig. 6. Mosaic Panels from the Beth Alpha Synagogue. From Sukenik, *loc. cit.*, Pls. VIII and XIX.

which, by two doors, one entered into a narrow vestibule, and from this three doors led into the main room. All were covered with mosaic floors. The Bema (or pulpit) stood on the mosaics near the southeast corner of the nave, and can be seen in the plan. An annex on the west, poorly preserved, contained the staircase mounting to the woman's gallery. The mosaic floor in the nave was divided into three panels, shown in Figs. 6 and 7, especially significant for early synagogue art. The top panel (Fig. 6 left), which was nearest the apse, shows us something of what the congregation saw when they looked toward the apse. We see in the center the Ark or Torah Shrine, from the gable of which hangs the *ner tamid*, the Eternal Light. On each side are two lions, recalling the images of lions found at Capernaum, Chorazin, and *Kefr Bir'im*, and whose prototypes were the Old Testament cherubs. The birds, which are found at other times in early Jewish art with the representations of the Torah Shrine, are less easily interpreted. There are also the two candlesticks on each side of the Ark, one of them more properly a lampstand with oil lamps on the branches. At the sides we see the curtains or veil with the draw-cords. The sockets for the posts holding the veil were actually found on the edge of the platform of the apse. Among other objects on this panel are the *shofar*, the

ram's horn which was blown at New Years, and the *lulab* (palm branches) and *ethrog* (citron) used at the Feast of Tabernacles. The central panel (Fig. 7) shows the Zodiac circle, with the chariot of the sun in the center, and four winged figures, representing the four seasons, in the corners. Similar panels were found at 'Esfiyeh and Naaran.

Of special interest is the lower panel, depicting the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Fig. 6 right), which we have already noted at Dura over the niche. Hebrew inscriptions identify Isaac and Abraham, and the legend beside the ram reads, "And behold! a ram" (Gen. 22:13). Beside the hand of God (top center) as it reaches down from heaven appear the first words of Gen. 22:12, "Lay not (thy hand)." The hand also appears in the Dura scene. The two servants with the ass during the sacrifice (Gen. 22:5)



Fig. 7. A Mosaic from Beth Alpha, showing signs of the Zodiac. From Sukenik, *loc. cit.*, Pl. X.

occupy the left side of the panel. Two other biblical scenes appear on floors of Palestinian synagogues. At Naaran there was the poorly preserved scene of Daniel in an attitude of prayer, with a lion approaching from each side, and the legend "Daniel — Peace." It was Daniel in the den of lions, as told in Dan. 6. The mosaic in the vestibule of the synagogue at Gerasa pictured the departure from the ark after the flood (Fig. 8). It was in a much ruined state; but above the heads of Shem and Japheth were their names in Greek, and above this the dove with olive branch in its mouth. Birds of the air, beasts of the field, and creeping things of the earth are grouped in pairs in three rows (cf. Gen. 8:17). On the border can be seen a bear, lioness, leopard, birds, and other figures, along with plants and flowers, perhaps to indicate a wooded scene.

To the suggested interpretations of the three biblical stories as they

appear on the mosaics of the synagogues, the writer would add one more. They may be related to the central conceptions of the Law and the Covenant. The rescue of Isaac suggests God's fulfillment of his covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen. 17). After the animals left the ark, God made a covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:9 ff.). The idea of the covenant and the Law are brought together in the Ark of the Covenant at Dura and Beth Alpha. Daniel, we recall, was thrown to the lions for being faithful to the Law of his God (Dan. 6:5). Doubtless no single interpretation will explain fully the meaning of these scenes to the worshipers in the synagogues concerned, for each scene is a complicated symbol of many things.

The plan of the Hammath-by-Gadara synagogue illustrates well the numerous rooms which may have served as guest chambers and school-rooms. The mosaic design is more simple. In the top panel two lions stand on either side of a wreath, in which there is a memorial inscription in Aramaic. The synagogue was built not later than the first half of the fifth century, perhaps in the late fourth century. The Jericho synagogue has a



Fig. 8. Mosaic Floor in the Vestibule of the Gerasa Synagogue. From Sukenik, **Ancient Synagogues** . . . , Pl. IX. See Kraeling, **Gerasa**, pl. LXIII.

small porch supported by two columns before its single entrance. The floor design showed the ark and the seven-branched candlestick with palm branches and ram's horn, and below it an inscription reading "Peace unto Israel." Partly on the evidence of coins, the Jericho synagogue was dated to the beginning of the eighth century. Among the Naaran mosaic designs was a panel showing the Ark with seven-branched candlestick on either side. The synagogue belongs perhaps to the fifth century. The synagogue at Gerasa was succeeded by a church, built in 530-531 A.D., in the reign of Justinian (527-565), as shown by a mosaic inscription. It was probably built in the preceding century or the late fourth century, being in use long enough to require extensive repairs. Anti-Jewish riots in the reign of Justinian may have brought this synagogue to an end, as also the synagogue at *Esfyeh*, which was destroyed by fire. The Hammath-by-Gadara synagogue was also destroyed and burned. The Beth Alpha synagogue is dated by an inscription on the mosaic floor to the reign of Justin (518-527).

In some contrast with these synagogues is the one discovered at *es-Samu'*, the site of biblical Eshtemoa, south of Hebron (cf. Josh. 15:50; 1 Sam. 30:28, etc.—see Fig. 10). Like the Dura synagogue among others, it is a broadhouse type. The mosaic pavement was almost wholly destroyed. A porch in front was supported by two pillars, and the entrance on the east had the usual three doors. The building belonged to two periods,

Roman and Byzantine. The north wall in the early period contained three niches, at a height about seven feet from the floor. It is suggested that the central niche was for the Ark, and the smaller side-niches for the candlesticks. In the later period there was a single niche near the floor-level.

A JERUSALEM SYNAGOGUE INSCRIPTION

We may conclude this part of our survey with a synagogue inscription which comes from Jerusalem and belongs to New Testament times. In excavating on Ophel in Jerusalem, the archaeologist Weill discovered the Greek inscription which is illustrated in Fig. 9. It states how Theodotos, son of Vettenos, priest and archisynagogos (= head of a synagogue), son



Fig. 9. Theodotos Inscription. From *Bulletin of the Am. Schools*, No. 4, p. 1.

and grandson of an archisynagogos, constructed the synagogue for the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments, built its inn, chambers, and water installations for housing needy strangers. It concludes with the statement that the synagogue had originally been built by his fathers and the elders (presbyters) and one named Simonides. Many think that this inscription comes from the synagogue of the Libertines (= freedmen) in Acts 6:9. The name Vettenos seems to indicate that Theodotos was once a slave in the Roman family of Vettius, but had been freed. In all probability it does come from the New Testament period, and with the fragments of architecture from Jerash mentioned in footnote No. 2, constitutes our only synagogue remains from Palestine dating in the formative days of the Gospel.

TEMPLE AND SYNAGOGUE

Our general discussion of the nature of the early synagogues in Palestine may perhaps be made more meaningful to the general reader if it

takes the form of a treatment of analogies and contrasts between the Jerusalem temple and the synagogues. Analogies do not necessarily indicate any direct relationship, but they may perhaps assist us in our understanding. We should keep in mind particularly the Solomonic temple, discussed by the editor of this journal in Vol. 4, No. 2, 1941, and the Herodian temple, which, it is hoped, will some day be presented in these pages. The synagogue has frequently been called an "Ersatz" (= substitute) for the temple. This could be understood more literally by those who conceived the synagogue to have developed soon after the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. and in the Diaspora. It is true that, in function and arrangements, the synagogue had much in common with the temple, but there were also many differences.

The temple ritual, in contrast to that of the synagogue, centered around the sacrificial system. Prayer and the reading and study of the Law, symbolized by the central position of the Torah Shrine, characterized the synagogue. The Talmud represents Rabbi Eleazar as quoting Is. 1:11 in support of the statement that "greater is prayer than sacrifice" (*Berakoth*, V, i, 32b). That the prophetic attitude toward sacrifice had influence on the religion of the synagogue (as, to a lesser extent, it influenced the temple) is abundantly evidenced. Of course, synagogue religion did not deny the importance of the temple, nor the significance of the sacrificial system for the temple. The worshipers faced the temple in prayer. Yet part of the synagogue ritual was considered a substitute for sacrifice, indeed, a sacrifice. The morning and afternoon *Tefilloth* (Daily Prayers) were reckoned a substitute for the continual offerings in the temple. So Rabbi Judah held that the morning *Tefillah* could be said until the fourth hour, because the morning continual offering could be brought until the fourth hour (*Berakoth*, IV, i, 26a, b. Cf. Ex. 29:38 ff.) It was argued that the patriarchs had been the ones to institute the *Tefilloth*, but the Rabbis subsequently found a basis for them in the sacrifices (*Berakoth*, IV, i, 26b).

The teaching function of the synagogue was also important. The Theodotos inscription declared the purpose of the synagogue to be the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments. The Jerusalem Talmud affirmed that each of Jerusalem's four hundred eighty synagogues had a Beth Sepher (schoolhouse) and a Beth Talmud, the former for the text of the Scripture, and the latter for the Mishna (*Megillah*, III, i). Side-chambers in the synagogues described above were doubtless used frequently as places of study. The Talmud mentions frequently the synagogue and the house of study, and often they were doubtless in the same building (cf. *Berakoth*, IX, v, 64a). In the New Testament there are many references to Jesus and others teaching in the synagogues on the Sabbath and to the reading of the Scriptures (Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31; 6:6; 13:10; Acts 13:14, 27, 44; 15:21; etc.).

ORIENTATION OF SYNAGOGUES

The synagogues looked towards the temple. In general, the facade of the early type of synagogues was on the side towards Jerusalem. In the later type the entrance was on the side opposite Jerusalem, but one might say that the apse on the side towards Jerusalem reached out towards the Holy City. The orientation was not always exact; but in general, the Galilee synagogues were oriented towards the south, those below Jerusalem

towards the north, and those in Transjordan toward the west. The background of this general orientation towards Jerusalem is the tradition that prayer should be directed towards the city, a tradition that perhaps appeared first with the Deuteronomic reform at the time of King Josiah. The exiles in Babylonia apparently prayed three times a day before windows opened towards Jerusalem (cf. Dan. 6:10). From Dan. 6:5 we may assume this was a part of the oral law.

THE SYNAGOGUE FACADE

Certain aspects of the facade of the early type of synagogue were

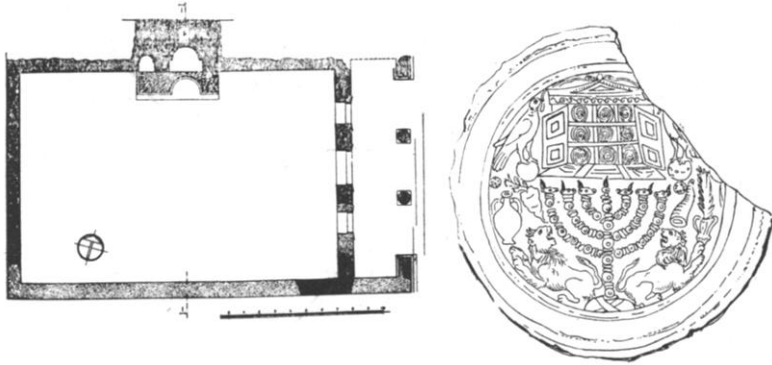


Fig. 10. (Left) Plan of the Synagogue at Eshtemoa. From *Jour. Pal. Or. Soc.* XIX, p. 318. (Right) Ark, Candelstick, etc. on Jewish Glass from Rome. From S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, Berlin, 1922, Fig. 19.

possibly interpreted in the light of the fact that the synagogue looked toward the temple. The facades were abundantly supplied with window openings, and one may wonder whether in the minds of the worshipers they served merely to let the light inside, or whether they may not also have been thought to permit the synagogue, the "Assembly," to look towards Jerusalem and its temple. At Capernaum there were at least three windows in the facade, besides the large arched window supplied with iron bars above the central entrance. Quite pertinent is a passage in the Talmud (*Berakoth*, V, i, 31a) where, we are told, Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba said: "A man should always pray in a room which has windows," and reference is made to Daniel praying through a window open towards Jerusalem (Dan. 6:11). It will be remembered that, although there were no windows at Dura, the Assembly looked toward three prominent representations of the Solomonic temple. Now it is of course true that the windows and arched openings were not unique to synagogue buildings, for they could be found in contemporary pagan architecture. Yet we are justified in believing that these details possessed some symbolic value for the worshipers, as doubtless did also the complex motives used in the ornamentation of the synagogues, even though much of it was typical of pagan Syro-Hellenistic art.

The same may be true of the three doors in the facade of the synagogues, which may possibly have been regarded as having as their prototype the gates of the temple, although they are characteristic of pagan Hellenistic-Roman architecture.

PORCH AND COURTS

The porch, a feature of the temple, was frequently a part of the synagogues. It may be found, for instance, at Chorazin, *Kefr Bir'im*, Eshtemoa, Jericho, *Umm el-Qanatir*, etc. Sometimes there is an unroofed platform, as at Capernaum, Gischala, etc. Often, instead of a porch, there is a vestibule, as at Hammath-by-Gadara, Gerasa, Naaran, Beth Alpha, etc. The porch has a long history in Palestinian-Syrian architecture, and can be traced in buildings of megaron type to before the third millennium B.C.

The synagogue also had its court or courts, sometimes with a portico arrangement, as at Capernaum and Dura-Europos. Sometimes laver basins for ritual ablutions, such as hand-washing before prayers, have been found in the courts. The water installations mentioned in the Theodotos inscription were doubtless both for ritual and the usual cleaning purposes. An inscription from the Sepphoris synagogue mentions a laver (basin), and one may be mentioned on a Naaran inscription. We recall the lavers in 1 Ki. 7:38 ff., and that in the Herodian temple in the Court of the Priests there was a laver for ceremonial washing before offering the sacrifice (*Middoth*, III, 6). In the columned forecourt at Gerasa's synagogue stones with channels for water pipes were found, and it is supposed that there may have been a fountain or laver of water there. In the center of the court of Capernaum's synagogue there was a fountain. The water-vessel for hand-washing had been in the center of the court at Beth Alpha. Of course lavers and fountains were common also in pagan temples.

SEPARATION OF WOMEN IN WORSHIP

The women in the Herodian temple worshiped in the Court of Women, and were prohibited from entering the inner court, the Court of Israel. This women's court is thought by some to be a later addition; it is mentioned first by the Mishna and Josephus. There were balconies in the Court of Women, from which the men were excluded (*Middoth*, II, 6). We may compare the balconies in the synagogues, although we may not assume that they were in imitation of the temple, since the balconies in the Court of Women, for all we know, may have been patterned after those in the synagogue. It is probable, however, that the separation of men and women in the synagogue goes back to temple precedents, and that even before the construction of the Court of Women the women stayed outside the Court of Israel. Philo of Alexandria is evidence for the separation of men and women in the synagogues of the first century A.D. Since the first churches were in the synagogues, we may wonder whether there may not have been some such separation in early Christian worship, and whether in this may be found background for 1 Cor. 14:34, 35, where women are told to keep silent in the churches, and if they want to learn anything to ask their husbands at home. Paul talked to the women at Philippi outside the synagogue (Acts 16:13).

LOCATION OF SYNAGOGUES

According to the Talmud, the synagogue should be on the highest site in the town (*Shabbath*, 11a: *Tosephta*, *Megillah*, IV). It was said that a city whose roofs overtop the synagogue is given over to ruin. The sacred mountain on which the temple was situated, Mt. Zion, was important in

the thought of the Hebrews, as we see in Ps. 48:1, 2; Is. 2:2; Ezek. 40:2, and many other places. There is in Josephus (*Ant.* XIII, vii, 215-217) a tradition that in 142 B.C. Simon, the Maccabee, leveled the mountain on which the Jerusalem citadel stood, so that the temple might be higher than it; and it took him three years. It was natural that a high place be selected as the site of a sanctuary. The synagogue at Gerasa stood on very high ground, overlooking the temple of Artemis. The 'Esfiyeh synagogue was on Mt. Carmel. The Hammath-by-Gadara synagogue was on the crest of *Tell Bani*, which stood from sixty-five to eighty-five feet above the level of the plain. In searching for the synagogue at Eshtemoa, the archaeologists looked first and successfully at the highest point of the

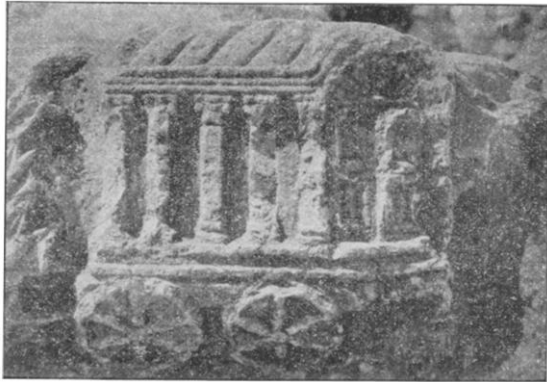


Fig. 11. Ark (?) on a Capernaum Frieze.

village. This rule was, however, not always followed, as, for instance, at Dura. Synagogues were sometimes built near the water (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XIV, x, 258). Capernaum is the outstanding example of this. To judge from Acts 16:12, 13, the synagogue at Philippi stood near the river.

THE ARK, OR SHRINE FOR THE LAW

One of the most striking analogies between temple and synagogue is in the use of the Ark, candlesticks, and veil. The post-exilic temple had no Ark within its Holy of Holies. Where in the Ark of the pre-exilic temple there had been, according to Hebrew tradition, the two tablets of the Law, there were in the Arks of the synagogues the scrolls of the Law. This Ark or Torah Shrine, like the pre-exilic Ark, took the form of a miniature building. As synagogue religion centered around the Law, the Ark was central in the synagogue. In the Talmud we are told that nine people and the Ark may be reckoned together for a quorum (*Berakoth*, VII, ii, 47b). The Ark was at first portable, then stationary; eventually a special niche or apse was provided for it in the center of the wall of orientation. To judge from the data from Capernaum, Chorazin, and *Kefr Bir'im*, it was flanked on either side by statues of lions, which probably had their prototype in the cherubs. It may be that in the later synagogues, as at Beth

Alpha, the lions had become only a graphic feature, represented in pictorial art on either side of the Ark. It has been suggested that the lions in the upper panel of the Hammath-by-Gadara mosaic were thought to be guarding the Ark in the nearby apse. At Dura on the lowest zone of the murals two lions (?) flank the niche. Representations of the Ark are known to us from ancient Jewish gilt glass from Rome, and one appears in Fig. 10, where, as on the Beth Alpha mosaic, we also have the two lions, the two birds, candlestick, ram's horn, palm branches, and citron, as well as other figures. The Ark is not only known to us from the murals at Dura and from the synagogue mosaics; it is found twice at Capernaum ornamenting the stonework, once on a cart (see Fig. 11), while other reliefs come from Chorazin and Pekiin. Also, at Capernaum fragments of miniature architecture came from a double Torah Shrine. The Ark appears on the catacombs at Beth Shearim, accompanied by a lion. Sometimes there was a veil or curtain before the apse or niche, as so clearly indicated at Dura and Beth Alpha, and we remember that a veil was before the Holy of Holies of the temple (cf. Ex. 26:31 ff.; Matt. 27:51, etc.). Sometimes the apse was separated from the prayer-hall by a marble or limestone screen.

CANDLESTICKS

The seven-branched candlestick was to be found in both temple and synagogue. In 1 Ki. 7:49 there are mentioned ten golden lampstands, five on the right and five on the left of the entrance to the Holy of Holies. Jer. 52:19 describes their despoliation in 586 B.C. In Zech. 4:2 ff. is a lampstand with a bowl on top, and on its rim are seven seven-lipped lamps, each of which would have borne seven lights. In 1 Macc. 4:49 we are told how, at the rededication of the temple in 165 B.C., the lamps on the lampstand were lit — the story of the origin of the Feast of Dedication, Hanukkah. The candlestick of the temple and early synagogues was called, in Hebrew, a Menorah. The seven-branched candlesticks normally appear with small oil lamps at the top of the branches, and are, more properly, lampstands. At the Dura synagogue the Menorah above the niche clearly supports snouted lamps, while the ones on two other panels more probably support cylindrical lamps, although they have been interpreted as candles. On the mosaics at Beth Alpha and *'Esfiyeh* one of a pair of Menoroth is shown obviously with lamps, and one, apparently, without (see Fig. 6 left). That in the latter case candles are intended, is not certain. In the synagogue at Hammath-by-Tiberias a stone lampstand was found, and on the upper surface were seven grooves hollowed out to contain seven pottery lamps. The branches are carved in alternating pomegranate and flower designs. Among the finds at the Beth Shearim synagogue was the marble base of a seven-branched lampstand. In the synagogue the lampstand was placed on either side of the Ark, and we have a representation of the lampstands inside the synagogue on a limestone plaque from Jerusalem, illustrated in Fig. 14. This is obviously the inside, and not, as has been assumed, the facade of the synagogue. A relief showing the seven-branched lampstand of the temple appears in Fig. 12. It is from the Arch of Titus at Rome, and depicts the spoil from the temple at its destruction in 70 A.D.

There is a certain analogy between the synagogue arrangements (with the elders seated beside the Ark and the lampstands) and the symbolism

of Revelation 5:2-8, where the enthroned deity is surrounded by elders, and seven lamps, the spirits of God, burn before the throne, around which are four animals. The common prototype may be the ancient conception of God (El) enthroned in the heavenly courts in the midst of the divine assembly. We have seen that just possibly in Ps. 74:8 the synagogue is called an "Assembly of El."

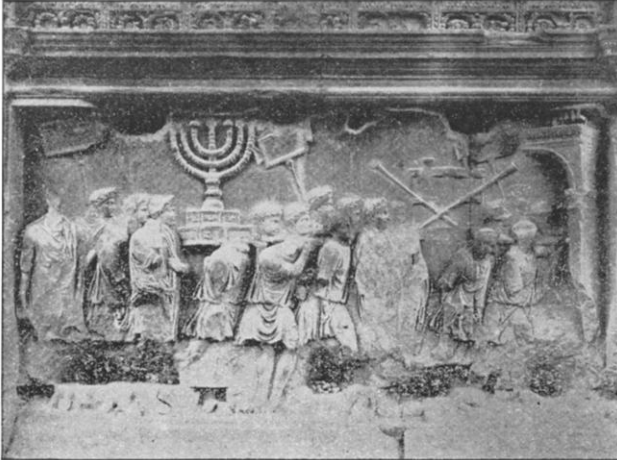


Fig. 12. Detail of the Arch of Titus at Rome. From *Quar. Statement*, 1936, Pl. V.

SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

In contrast with the temple building, the synagogue was a place inside which one assembled for prayer and study. The benches for seating have been already noted. In Matt. 23:2 ff. the scribes and Pharisees are criticized for liking the best places at dinners, and the front seats of the synagogues, and for having taken "Moses' seat." The front seats were perhaps those nearest the side of orientation, or, as in some synagogues such as at Dura and Beth Alpha, the benches on the side of orientation, to the right and left of the niche or apse. These latter were the seats for the elders, and according to Jewish tradition, the elders sat with their faces towards the people and their backs to Jerusalem (*Tosephta, Megillah*, IV, 21). The "Seat of Moses" was for the most distinguished elder (presbyter) of the synagogue, and apparently placed closest to the ark. We have seen that there was such a seat at Dura, probably occupied by Samuel, son of Jedaiah, described both as priest and as elder of the Jews, who founded the synagogue. "Seats of Moses" have been found in Palestine at Hammath-by-Tiberias and Chorazin, the latter bearing a memorial inscription.

THE PRIEST

We find the priest mentioned occasionally in synagogue inscriptions, as at Dura, where Samuel was priest and presbyter, and in the Jerusalem inscription in which Theodotos is both priest and *archisynagogos*. At Naaran a memorial inscription mentions Phineas the priest, who gave a

mosaic and a basin for the synagogue. These would be descendants of the Jerusalem priesthood. If priests and Levites were present in the synagogue, they took precedence over others in the reading of the scripture lesson: the order was "priest, Levite, Israelite . . . for the sake of peace" (*Gittin*, V, 8). A part of the service was the blessing of the priest (*Megillah*, IV, 3). The head of the synagogue was the *archisynagogos*. This official is mentioned several times in the New Testament. Jairus, whose daughter Jesus healed, was an *archisynagogos* (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). So also was Crispus, converted by Paul (Acts 18:8). The *archisynagogoi* summoned Paul and



Fig. 13. Zodiac Circle from Khirbet et-Tannur.

Barnabas to preach (Acts 13:15). The word simply means "head of the synagogue," as did its Hebrew equivalent. Such an official had care of the external order in public worship and the general supervision of the concerns of the synagogue.

SYNAGOGUE INSCRIPTIONS

Memorial and other inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek are found frequently in the synagogues. The most common formula begins with the words "Remembered be for good," and there follows the name of the donor and his gift to the synagogue. Those who gave columns, basins, mosaics, money, cloths, lintels, scrolls, and candlesticks are thus memorialized. A Naaran inscription is a petition that Benjamin the Steward (Parnas), son of Jose, be remembered, as well as anyone who shall lend his support and give or has given to the synagogue gold, silver, any precious thing, or any contribution whatever. At the Jericho synagogue the mosaic inscription is a plea that the entire holy community, elders and youths, who exerted themselves and made the mosaic, be remembered and their names written in the Book of Life. One at Hanmath-by-Gadara is in memory of a family of six, whose acts of charity were everywhere, and who gave here five *denarii* (a coin mentioned in Matt. 18:28; 20:2, 9, 10, 13). At Beth Alpha it was prayed that "the craftsmen who carried out the work, Mari-

anos and his son Hanina, be held in remembrance." The inscriptions recall to mind the prayer of Nehemiah: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services" (Neh. 13:14). Professor Sukenik has found in these memorial synagogue inscriptions the prototype to a prayer recited today in the synagogues on Sabbath morning.

PICTURES AND FIGURES IN THE SYNAGOGUE

The Solomonic temple was decorated with cherubs, palm trees, and opening flowers. As archaeological researches have shown, these motives

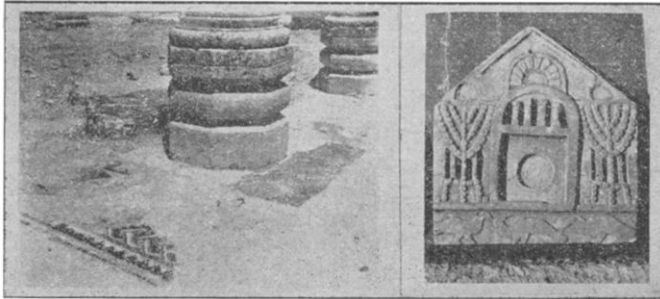


Fig. 14 (Left) Synagogue and Church Levels at Gerasa. From *Quar. Statement*, 1929, Pl. II. See Kraeling, *Gerasa*, Pl. LXIVb. (Right) Limestone Relief in Jerusalem. *Quar. Statement*, 1937, Pl. VIIa.

were not original with the Hebrews, but were characteristic of pagan art. Likewise much of the elaborate ornamentation of the synagogues was characteristic of pagan Syro-Hellenistic art, and many of the motives possessed religious symbolism. As the cherubs and the palm tree certainly had religious meaning for the Hebrews of the time of Solomon, so also, we may be sure, many of these apparently pagan motives had religious meaning for those worshipping in the synagogue. Goodenough argues with reason that these designs were not all purely decorative, but had symbolic meaning.³ Some of the designs are more traditionally Jewish, such as the candlestick, ram's horn, palm branches, pentagram (= "Seal of Solomon") and hexagram (= "Shield of David"). We find this representation of animal, bird, human, and mythological figures in strange contrast with the Second Commandment or the prohibition of images in Deut. 4:15-19. Josephus, criticizing the golden eagle placed by Herod over the great gate of the temple, adds that "the law forbids those that propose to live according to it, to erect images or representations of any living creature" (*Ant.* VI, ii, 151). But as a result of archaeological discoveries we are receiving a new appreciation of Hebrew art. Certain passages in Jewish literature are consonant with this fact. We will here quote only the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum at Lev. 26:1, where we read, "A stoa, carved with pictures and figures, you may attach to the borders of a sanctuary, yet not in order to pray to it, for I am the Lord your God." There were occasional iconoclastic reforms against this pictorial representation. The first was probably sometime after 300 A.D., since it did not affect Chorazin, but did result in the mutilation of the animal and human figures at other synagogues, as at Capernaum.

The second resulted in the mutilation of the mosaics, perhaps two or three centuries later.

We may mention here but one important type of symbolism. We have noted the use of Zodiac signs at Beth Alpha, Naaran, *'Esfiyeh, er-Rafid, Kefr Bir'im*, Dura-Europos, and Beth Shearim. The Zodiac circle at the first three of these sites calls to mind the relief from a Nabataean Arab temple of the first century B.C. and A.D. at *Khirbet et-Tannur* in Trans-jordan. In the center is Tyche, surrounded, like the sun-chariot on the synagogue mosaics, by a circular panel containing the cycle of the Zodiac (see Fig. 13). Sukenik has pointed out the close parallels to the representation of the four seasons in pagan Roman art. Josephus and Philo suggest something of the manner in which this pagan symbolism was adapted by the circle of Jews in which they moved. Josephus, ascribing a cosmic significance to the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the garment of the priest, says of the twelve stones: "Whether we understand by them the months, or whether we understand the like number of the signs which the Greeks call the Zodiac, we shall not be mistaken in their meaning." The origin of this symbolism is ascribed to Moses, as also, for instance, the fact that the seven lamps on the candlestick "referred to the course of the planets, of which that is their number." (*Ant.* III, vii, 181-187.) Philo also finds zodiac symbolism in the twelve stones on the priest's breast-plate, in the twelve wings, six each, of the cherubim, in certain aspects of the candlestick, in the twelve springs of Elim, etc.⁴ While these biblical associations may have been characteristic of the more enlightened, the general populace may have taken this type of symbolism in a more crudely astrological sense.

We may conclude, as we began, with a word regarding the relation of synagogue and church. One might say that as the New Testament is integrally related to the Old, so the church is integrally related to the synagogue. The church drew upon the synagogue for much of its symbolism, and much of early Christian art is indebted to Jewish art in a way that we cannot attempt to describe here. Both the church and the synagogue buildings were of the basilica type. As Crowfoot has remarked in his description of the "synagogue church" at Gerasa, it was an easy matter to convert a synagogue into a church. The place for the Torah Shrine in the west was removed, and the eastern end was adapted to the Christian liturgy. The synagogue was oriented westward towards Jerusalem, and the church toward the east. Thus the vestibule of the Gerasa synagogue lay beneath the apse of the church. The columns of the synagogue were left standing on the synagogue level, but were now used to support the church, with two columns added. The close relation of church and synagogue may be well illustrated by the photograph from Gerasa, which shows the columns resting on the synagogue floor, and the mosaic floor of the church but a few inches above that of the synagogue (Fig. 14). In view of the fine cooperation of Jews and Christians in archaeological research, it is perhaps fitting that this archaeological study of the ancient Jewish synagogues by a Gentile end on this note.⁵

3. E. R. Goodenough, "Symbolism in Hellenistic Jewish Art," *JBL*, LVI, 1939, pp. 103 ff.

4. E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, New Haven, 1935, pp. 98, 112, 113, 209, etc.

5. At the advice of the Editor, the writer has used few footnotes, and will not attempt to indicate here the many sources to which he is indebted. Some of them are suggested by the sources from which the illustrations are taken. The general reader may be referred particularly to the excellent presentation by E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, London, 1934.