

his wife Berenice, three from the reign of Ptolemy VII (143–117 B.C.E.) and his two wives named Cleopatra, three from the second or first century B.C.E., and one from the first century C.E.<sup>7</sup> Two other inscriptions are more difficult to date and stem from the late Hellenistic or early Roman eras.<sup>8</sup> One inscription from Leontopolis may be referring to a *proseuche*, and fragmentary remains of four inscriptions make mention of a *temenos* (holy place), probably also referring to synagogues.<sup>9</sup> Finally, four papyri dating from the late third century B.C.E. to the beginning of the second century C.E. note local synagogues in a variety of contexts.<sup>10</sup> Altogether, this evidence sheds light on many important aspects of the early Egyptian synagogue.

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

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

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

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

later re-edited by Lewis in vol. III of *CPJ*. The last-mentioned work remains basic for papyrological material. See also Tcherikover, "Prolegomenon," 10.

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

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

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

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

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

12. *Ibid.*, no. 25.

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

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

Joseph, Simon, Judas, and his sisters. We are told that those gathered were highly offended, although the reason for this is not made clear. Jesus' reply that "a prophet is not without honor except in his own country [i.e., hometown] and in his own house" (Mark adds: "among his own kin") may well be what triggered the above account. Both gospel pericopes add that owing to his townsmen's disbelief, Jesus did not succeed in performing miracles there. Mark notes, however, that Jesus nevertheless managed to heal some sick people.

Luke's account of Jesus' visit to the Nazareth synagogue is markedly different, so much so that it has been suggested that Jesus made two different visits to Nazareth, one described in Mark and Matthew, the other in Luke.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the case, the importance of Luke's pericope cannot be overestimated for our understanding of the first-century Judean synagogue. It has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention.<sup>16</sup>

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. And he was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recover the sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" [Is. 61:1-2].<sup>17</sup>

And he closed the book, and he gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all those in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say unto them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears." And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" And he said unto them, "You will surely quote me the proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself': what we have heard you did in Capernaum, do also here in your own country." And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you in truth, many widows were

15. Luke 4:16-30; Perrot, "Jésus à Nazareth," 47. See also Lagrange, *L'évangile*, 123, 201. The gospels themselves do not know of two visits. Alternatively, the account in Luke may be a rewriting or reworking of Mark 1-6 (see Leaney, *Commentary of the Gospel According to St. Luke*, 51-52; Bultmann, *History of Synoptic Tradition*, 31-32), honed to fit Luke's theology (Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*, 34-38) or part of Luke's programmatic agenda (Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*, 11-12; cf. J. T. Sanders, *Jews in Luke-Acts*, 164-68). See also Kümmel, *Introduction*, 130-51.

16. See, for example, Finkel, "Jesus' Sermon at Nazareth," 106-15; idem, "Jesus' Preaching," 325-41; Anderson, "Broadening Horizons," 259-75; Combrink, "Structure and Significance of Luke 4:16-30," 27-47; Perrot, "Luc 4:16-30 et la lecture biblique," 324-40 and bibliography in n. 11; J. T. Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 75-106; Chilton, "Announcement in Nazara," 147-72; C. A. Evans, *Luke*, 70-76; Monshouwer, "Reading of the Prophet," 90-99; Tyson, *Images of Judaism*, 59-62. On the date and authorship of Luke, see Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 35-62.

17. This passage is used also in Matt. 11:4-5 and Luke 7:22. The verses in our present context have been carefully edited by excluding some phrases, incorporating a clause from Is. 58:6, and generally following the Septuagint version. See R. A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 250-51.

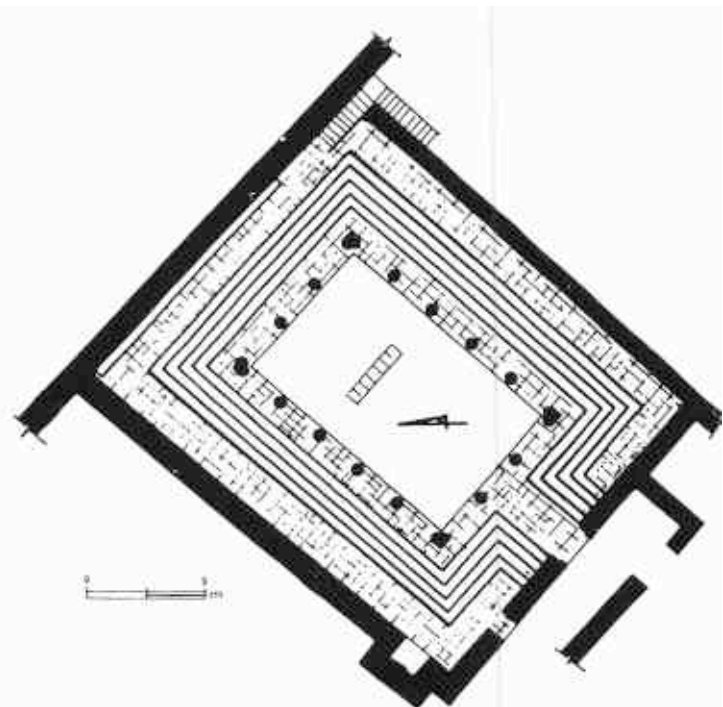
quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, in Samaria and Caesarea, and in other sites. Thus, the attribution of the second stratum of building on the east side of Gamla to the time of Herod after the year 23 B.C.E. also conforms to the general situation in Roman Palestine, as well as to the stratigraphic evidence uncovered from this stratum.

From an architectural standpoint, the synagogue at Gamla belongs to the buildings of this second stratum. This points to a date for its construction between the last part of the first century B.C.E. and the first half of the first century C.E.

### Observations on the Orientation and Plan of the Synagogue

As noted above, the synagogue was erected on the extreme eastern side of the unfortified city on a broad terrace which supported the massive southern wall of the synagogue. The building was oriented on a northeast–southwest axis, with the entrance in the short southwest side. Though the building and the entrance are directed towards Jerusalem, its orientation seems to have been dictated by the exigencies of the topography. Since the synagogue was constructed on an artificial terrace with a sharp incline to the north and south, there was no approach from these sides. Thus, the architects had no alternative in choosing on which side the doorway would be located. The most convenient sides for the entrances are the two short walls to the west and east. Here, however, there was only one possible choice, since the east side led outside the city, and only the west side opened into its interior. In addition, the axis of the building could not be deflected, for it was determined by the contour of the terrace, and a deviation would necessitate great efforts in quarrying or filling in. Thus, the orientation of the building and the location of the entrance are not to be interpreted on ideological or religious grounds, but were rather due to the difficulties of erecting a building on a steep slope.

The main sanctuary of the synagogue (19.60 × 15.10 m.) was divided by four rows of columns into a central nave (9.30 × 13.40 m.)



Reconstructed plan of Gamla synagogue

surrounded by four aisles, one on each side. On the west, north, and south sides, the aisles were 4.10 m. wide; on the east side the aisle was 4.50 m. wide. These aisles were used for seating the congregation. In the eastern aisle, which was preserved almost in its entirety, were found four stepped benches made of well-hewn basalt. The areas above and at the foot of the benches were paved with stone. (The lower area was 1.10 m. wide, the upper area ca. 2 m. wide.) The benches and upper areas were not completely preserved on the other sides. Erosion had washed the southern side down the slope; the other sides had not suffered from the elements but were probably damaged when parts of the synagogue were dismantled during the war with Rome. As at Masada and in the private dwellings in Jerusalem, the arrival of a large group of refugees (*War*, IV, 10; *Life*, 58) led to the requisition of public and private property and their division into improvised dwellings to house the refugees. Traces of cooking fires and other remains of these hastily-erected dwellings were visible in the area of the northern portico. Part of the eastern portico was removed and a small round plastered basin and water channel were installed.

a derivative.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, he does use the term *synagoge* on two occasions.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Philo, too, alludes to the institution's sanctity, invoking the terms *τεμένος* and *ἱερός* and *ἱεροί περίβολοι*.<sup>69</sup>

### A Rabbinic Tradition

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

R. Judah [b. Ilai] said: "Whoever has not seen the double stoa [i.e., colonnade] of Alexandria has never in his life seen the glory of Israel. It is a kind of large basilica, a stoa within a stoa, holding, at times, twice the number of those who left Egypt. And seventy-one cathedrae [i.e., honorary chairs or thrones] of gold were there for the seventy-one elders, each of them [worth] 25 talents of gold, and a wooden platform [במה] was in the middle. And a hazzan of the synagogue [lit., assembly] stood on it with kerchiefs in his hand. When one took hold [of the Torah scroll] to read, he would wave the kerchiefs and they [i.e., those congregated] would answer "Amen" for each benediction; and he would again [wave the kerchiefs] and they would [again] respond "Amen." And they would not sit indiscriminately, but goldsmiths would sit by themselves, silversmiths by themselves, weavers by themselves, Tarsian weavers by themselves, and blacksmiths by themselves. And why to such an extent [i.e., why the rigid division]? So that if a visitor comes he can [immediately] make contact with his trade, and thus he will be able to make a living [רובשם פרנסה יוצאה]."<sup>71</sup>

According to the above tradition, this Alexandrian building was of enormous proportions. The statement that it could "hold twice the number of those who left Egypt" was, of course, never intended to be taken literally; rather, it is a stock phrase in rabbinic literature denoting a very large number of people.<sup>72</sup> In this case, the reference is to an assembly hall of such monumental size that kerchiefs were required in order to signal the congregation when to respond. The description of the golden chairs, each worth twenty-five tal-

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

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

69. *Embassy* 137; *Flaccus* 48; *Special Laws* 3, 171.

70. T Sukkah 4:6 (p. 273); Y Sukkah 5, 1, 55a-b; B Sukkah 51b.

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

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

## PHILO, ON THE EMBASSY TO GAIUS

XX. (132) But as the governor of the country, who by himself could, if he had chosen to do so, have put down the violence of the multitude in a single hour, pretended not to see what he did see, and not to hear what he did hear, but allowed the mob to carry on the war against our people without any restraint, and threw our former state of tranquillity into confusion, the populace being excited still more, proceeded onwards to still more shameless and more audacious designs and treachery, and, arraying very numerous companies, cut down some of the synagogues (and there are a great many in every section of the city), and some they razed to the very foundations, and into some they threw fire and burnt them, in their insane madness and frenzy, without caring for the neighbouring houses; for there is nothing more rapid than fire, when it lays hold of fuel. (133) I omit to mention the ornaments in honour of the emperor, which were destroyed and burnt with these synagogues, such as gilded shields, and gilded crowns, and pillars, and inscriptions, for the sake of which they ought even to have abstained from and spared the other things; but they were full of confidence, inasmuch as they did not fear any chastisement at the hand of Gaius, as they well knew that he cherished an indescribable hatred against the Jews, so that their opinion was that no one could do him a more acceptable service than by inflicting every description of injury on the nation which he hated; (134) and, as they wished to curry favour with him by a novel kind of flattery, so as to allow, and for the future to give the rein to, every sort of ill treatment of us without ever being called to account, what did they proceed to do? All the synagogues that they were unable to destroy by burning and razing them to the ground, because a great number of Jews lived in a dense mass in the neighbourhood, they injured and defaced in another manner, simultaneously with a total overthrow of their laws and customs; for they set up in every one of them images of Gaius, and in the greatest, and most conspicuous, and most celebrated of them they erected a brazen statue of him borne on a four-horse chariot.

## JOSEPHUS, ANTIQUITIES, BOOK 14

[256] The decree of those of Halicarnassus. "When Memnon, the son of Orestidas by descent, but by adoption of Euonymus, was priest, on the \*\* day of the month Anthesterion, the decree of the people, upon the representation of Marcus Alexander, was this: [257] Since we have ever a great regard to piety towards God, and to holiness; and since we aim to follow the people of the Romans, who are the benefactors of all men, and what they have written to us about a league of friendship and mutual assistance between the Jews and our city, and that their sacred offices and accustomed festivals and assemblies may be observed by them; [258] we have decreed, that as many men and women of the Jews as are willing so to do, may celebrate their Sabbaths, and perform their holy offices, according to Jewish laws; and may make their places of prayer at the sea-side, according to the customs of their forefathers; and if any one, whether he be a magistrate or private person, hindereth them from so doing, he shall be liable to a fine, to be applied to the uses of the city."

## ACTS CHAPTER 13

13. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

14. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

15. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye men and brethren*, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

16. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with *his* hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

17. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

18. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

19. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

prayers seem to have been in circulation there.<sup>78</sup> Various opinions have been put forth regarding the required number of times for daily prayer (ranging from two to six).<sup>79</sup>

Talmon, on the one hand, has argued that these liturgical modes were more a continuation of biblical models than variations of forms which later found expression in rabbinic literature, a conclusion likewise reached by Nitzan in her study of Qumran prayer.<sup>80</sup> Weinfeld, Schiffman, and Chazon, on the other hand, have argued for a closer tie between Qumran and later Jewish practices, particularly those recorded in rabbinic literature.<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the centrality of liturgical settings as reflected in the scrolls, nothing whatsoever is said about the public reading of Scriptures. Could there have been a conscious aversion to imitating what was being done in contemporary synagogues—yet another expression of the Qumran sect's desire to maintain biblical precedents while rejecting models which had evolved within the Jewish community in the post-biblical era? Alternatively, did the ongoing practice of study carried out within the Qumran community render such public readings superfluous? Interestingly, it appears that another breakaway group of the Second Temple period, the Samaritans, also did not include the reading of Scriptures as part of its communal ritual at this stage. They, too, may have tried to remain within biblical parameters as much as possible or, alternatively, distance themselves from current Jewish practice.<sup>82</sup>

What might have been the setting for communal worship in Qumran? The Damascus Document mentions a *בית השתחווה* (= house or place of prostration):

And no one entering a "house of prostration" shall come in a state of uncleanness requiring washing. And at the sounding of the trumpets for assembly, he shall have done it [i.e., the washing] before or he shall do it later, but they (the impure) shall not interrupt the whole service; for it is a holy house [בית קודש].<sup>83</sup>

78. On priests at Qumran, see, for example, 1QS 2:19–20; 6:4–5, 8; 9:7; and comments in Cross, *Ancient Library of Qumran*, 128ff.; Gartner, *Temple and Community in Qumran*, 4–15; Licht, *Rule Scroll*, 110–15; Leaney, *Rule of Qumran*, 91–95, 165, 184; Gaster, *Dead Sea Scriptures*, 332–35; Weinfeld, *Organizational Pattern*, 19; Schiffman, *Eschatological Community*, 68–71; Fraade, "Interpretive Authority," 46–69, esp. 56–57. For a suggested additional dimension of Qumran's priestly orientation focusing on basic ideological issues, see D. R. Schwartz, "Law and Truth," 229–40. On the blessings and prayers found at Qumran, see Baillet, *Qumran Grotte 4*, 73–86; Schiffman, "Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish Liturgy," 35–42; Goshen-Gottstein, "Psalms Scroll (11QPs<sup>2</sup>)," 22–33.

79. Schiffman, "Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish Liturgy," 39–40; Talmon, *World of Qumran*, 215.

80. Talmon, *World of Qumran*, 11–52; Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, passim.

81. Weinfeld, "Prayer and Liturgical Practice in Qumran," 241–58 and bibliography cited there; Schiffman, "Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish Liturgy," 33–45; Chazon, "Prayers from Qumran," 265–84.

82. Weinfeld, "Prayer and Liturgical Practice in Qumran," 241–42.

83. CD 11, 21–12, 1; interpretation follows Steudel, "Houses of Prostration," 66; but see also Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 110, and Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 291, for somewhat different renditions of this passage. Talmon (*World of Qumran*, 241–42) and Nitzan (*Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, 62–63) concur that