

Since my first visit to the medieval synagogues of Cordoba and Toledo about twenty-five years ago, I have remarked with interest the effects of the prevailing social conditions of Jewish communities on the architecture of their synagogues. My attention was attracted in particular to the way in which their design catered to the liturgical requirements within a framework influenced by the local style and often subject to local restrictions; and my interest was further stimulated by the exhibition of synagogue paintings by Schwarz Abrys in Paris in 1969. In 1973, when George Mott and I were in India, Muriel Spark, who was one of our party, urged us to write a book on the synagogue. This is the book and it is dedicated to her.

I am most grateful for the courtesy and patience of the officers and members of congregations whose synagogues we visited. Our travels took us to the Near East, to the United States and to nearly every country in Europe, from Poland to Spain, from Italy to Sweden. It would be impossible, therefore, to name all the people whose co-operation helped to make this book. I am grateful to them all. Those whose books proved especially valuable I have mentioned in the Bibliography. I would also like to thank in particular the librarian, Virginia Sharp, and the staff of SIUC, Rome; the Rev. Dr Robert Tamushansky of the Byelorussian section, Vatican Radio, who helped me with topographical problems regarding places once in Greater Poland; Ruth Feldman of Cambridge, Massachusetts; Dr Magdalena Rodzeiger of the Department of Architecture, Warsaw Polytechnic; Barbara Moro, Director of Broadcasting, Chicago Public Library, and Jodey Schonfeld and Phil Lolotits; Sylvia A. Herskowitz, Director, Yeshiva University Museum, New York City, and members of her staff; the Administrator and staff of the Jewish Museum, New York City; Rabbi Schlomo Pappenheim and Ezra P. Gorodetzky, Jewish Museum of Art, Jerusalem; Irene Levitt, Israel Museum, Jerusalem; David Cassuto, Jerusalem; Dr Liesel Franzheim, Cologne City Museum; Dr Hannelore Kunzl, Martin Buber Institute, Cologne University; Dr Wulf Schirmer, Professor of Architecture, University of Karlsruhe; Irina Donner, Helsinki; René D. Maduro, Curaçao; and Shelley Donnelly, who sent me useful information from South Africa. The illustration credits appear at the end of the book, but many other individuals and institutions provided me with useful material or allowed us to take photographs. I must also thank those who helped with translations: from German, Irma Elsas, who also typed the manuscript; from Swedish, my wife; from Hebrew, Lina Manor; from Polish, Sister Magdalena (Maria) Morawska, Canoness of St Augustine; from Hungarian, Ursula Kalloy Lazzari. George Mott, who took most of the photographs in

the book, also collaborated extensively on Chapters 8 and 9.

I found no adequate translation of the Hebrew word 'bimah', for the platform from which the Torah is read to the assembly in the synagogue and from which the Benediction is recited. Therefore I have used 'bimah' throughout my text even in the case of Sephardic synagogues, although I am aware that these communities use the name 'revah' for this platform. I thought it could confuse the reader to employ both terms. However, rather than the Hebrew 'Aron Kodesh' for the Holy Ark, I have used 'Ark', since I believe that its meaning is widely understood. Other Hebrew terms which are not explained in the text itself, together with a number of architectural ones, appear in the Glossary at the back of the book.

For a number of reasons ranging from indifference to anti-Semitism, the art and architecture of the synagogue have been widely neglected by both Jews and non-Jews. The usually very complete guidebooks of the Touring Club of Italy, for instance, rarely mention the fine synagogues in that country, some of which are now in a state of ruin. In other countries, otherwise comprehensive national architectural surveys frequently ignore synagogues of undoubted architectural merit. In the United States, rapidly shifting urban communities have often, in erecting new houses of worship, discarded earlier buildings which are stylistically and historically worth remembering. There are a number of these on the Lower East Side of New York City, and I was pleased to learn that an enthusiastic scholar is making a study of them and calling attention to their plight. In fact, in the last decade there does seem to have sprung up a trend towards popular interest in Jewish monuments. A German art historian is preparing a study of the Neo-Byzantine and Neoromanesque synagogues in Germany. The exhibition of synagogue models at the New York Yeshiva University Museum has awakened considerable interest. The archaeological discoveries at Sardis and Ostia and above all in recent years in Erez Israel have attracted worldwide attention, as has the restoration of the old ruined synagogues of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem.

It is my hope that this book will stimulate pride in, and care for, synagogues past as well as present, and thereby contribute to the preservation of those in danger of decay. In discovering more of the social, cultural and architectural development of the synagogue, I have inevitably learned more of Jewish concepts, teachings, practices and observances. For this too I am grateful, because it has increased my esteem for the vital essence of Judaism and for the Jewish contribution to the world in theology and ethics.

BREFFNY, 1978



1 The Origins of the Synagogue



Since Jerusalem fell to the fierce besieging legions of Titus <sup>E 70 and</sup> the Second Temple went up in flames, the Synagogue has been the most important institution in Judaism. As an institution it also influenced both Christianity and Islam: they adopted and adapted for their own communal worship the form first organized in the Synagogue.

Early authorities including Josephus<sup>1</sup> believed that the Synagogue existed from the time of Moses. This was also apparently the belief of the author of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>2</sup> This indicates, at least, how well established the Synagogue was by the first century CE. Some scholars date its origins to the period of the First Temple, built by Solomon about 950 BCE;<sup>3</sup> others claimed it to have been an invention of the Hellenistic Diaspora.<sup>4</sup> It appears, however, that the foundation of the Synagogue as a place of assembly for public worship, prayer and instruction occurred during the period of the Babylonian exile after Solomon's Temple was razed to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE, when he captured Jerusalem after a two-year siege. The invaders deported a number of Jews to Babylon between 597 and 586 BCE.

For some time prior to the Babylonian victory the people of Israel had been lax in their religious observances, and refused to recognize their moral decadence. They had ignored the admonitions and exhortations of the prophet Jeremiah, but when calamity befell them in the form of a crushing defeat, the consequent dissolution of the sovereign state of Judah, and the deportation of the flower of its inhabitants, they saw their troubles as the punishment of God, divine retribution for their waywardness. Chastened and repentant they turned back to Torah, that is to the Five Books of Moses and their oral explanation and interpretation, the source of God's will. They sought to learn again how to live according to God's will and to learn to know through study his nature and their relationship to him.

The teaching of Torah to the people became of primary importance under the prophet-priest Ezekiel and the scribes who followed him. Without the Temple the sacrificial rites could not be performed by the people assembled to receive instruction. It is a unique Jewish teaching that study is worship: to study Torah is a form of worship. These regular assemblies for study and communal worship were the foundation of the Synagogue. The *bet ha-messeh*, literally 'The House of Assembly', is the Jewish house of worship, whose establishment was without doubt one of the most important and significant events in the history of religion. The English Unitarian theologian Robert Travers Herford has written of it: 'In all their long history, the Jewish people have done scarcely anything more wonderful than to create the synagogue. No human institution has a longer continuous history, and none has done more for the uplifting of the human race.'<sup>5</sup>

From its inception the Synagogue was essentially a creation of the people in response to their needs, and during the exile it grew and developed in its function as a place where the sacred texts were read and the meaning enshrined in them explained and expounded, where the people could gather on the Sabbath to hear God's word and to pray. At the same time it grew as a communal centre, not only of the religious, but also of the social, cultural, and sometimes even the commercial life of the people.

Eventually the Synagogue was to become to the community what the home is to the individual.

The Temple, in Hebrew *bet ha-mikdash*, literally 'The House of Sanctuary', was the spiritual centre of the people of Israel, the hub of religious life. In the Temple the Jews offered their sacrifices and oblations; as the Second Temple was rebuilt only seventy years after the destruction of Solomon's Temple, which it replaced, those Jews who remained in their land were able to resume these observances. Many Jews from Babylon and Egypt were able to make occasional pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem, but in their scattered communities in foreign countries the children of Israel experienced the need for an accessible centre of worship. The Synagogue, which fulfilled this need, therefore grew in importance in the Diaspora. While religious life in Judaea, which became a theocratic state, actually declined, largely due to lack of adequate teaching, in Babylon a vigorous religious life developed, based on a piety engendered by knowledge. It was from Babylon that Ezra and Nehemiah came to Judaea to institute religious reforms and it is to Ezra and his successors that the Talmud ascribes the formulation of the earliest prayers, the *Amidah*, a collection of benedictions forming the principal prayer of religious services, the *Kiddush*, with which the Sabbath and the Festivals are welcomed, and the *Havdalah*, with which these holy days are closed.

According to tradition the Shef Ve-Yativ synagogue at Nehardea, the great Jewish settlement in Babylon, was actually founded by the first exiles under the dethroned Judean King Jehoiachin in the sixth century BCE. However, the earliest evidence of a synagogue is of a later date and from elsewhere in the Diaspora, in Egypt. The evidence is epigraphical, an inscription on a marble slab found at Shedia near Alexandria which states that the synagogue there was dedicated by the Jews to Ptolemy III (who reigned from 246 to 221 BCE) and his Queen, Berenice.<sup>6</sup> The Jews enjoyed favourable conditions under the Ptolemies; the Macabean writings mention the establishment of a synagogue at Ptolemais in the reign of Ptolemy IV (221-204 BCE).<sup>7</sup> Another document of this period, from Alexandru Nesos in Faiyum, west of the Nile,<sup>8</sup> records that one Dorotheos, accused of the theft of a pagan woman's cloak, sought asylum with the stolen article in the *proseuche* of the Jews. This description, *proseuche* (prayer house), was used quite frequently in inscriptions on buildings identifiable as being Jewish at various places in the Diaspora; it did not, however, apply invariably to a Jewish building. A *proseuche* at Arsinoe Crocidolopolis, also in Faiyum, is mentioned in a papyrus of the second century BCE, a register of landed property.<sup>9</sup> The Septuagint, a translation of the Canon from Hebrew into Greek and the first translation of the Jewish scriptures into another tongue, was made by Jewish scholars in Egypt in the third century BCE for the use of the flourishing émigré communities there, because for most of them Greek had become their first language.

Jews who returned from exile to Judaea took the rudiments of the institution of the Synagogue back with them. There is no actual mention of synagogues in Judaea during the persecutions of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV, who reigned from 175 to 164 BCE, but it was probably in the synagogues that the teachings of Torah were kept alive and disseminated

PREVIOUS PAGE Ruined interior of the small synagogue built as part of Herod the Great's hill-top citadel at Masada. This was the place of worship of the heroic patriots who perished there in CE 73.



when the Temple was desecrated and converted to the cult of Cyprian Zeus, and ritual prostitution introduced. Antiochus wanted to Hellenize the people so he sought to impose a Hellenistic national culture on them and tried to extirpate the Jewish religion entirely. Jewish rituals and festivals were forbidden. Defence of Torah was the battle-cry of Judas Maccabaeus and his followers who revolted against this tyranny. They routed the enemy from Jerusalem, repossessed the Temple and had it reconstructed in 165 BCE.

In the two centuries that followed these events, until the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman legions in CE 70, the Synagogue and the Temple enjoyed an organic relationship in harmonious coexistence. The services of sacrifice in the Temple alternated with prayer in the synagogues. The Mishnah, an authoritative digest of oral Torah teachings compiled about CE 200, gives a detailed account of the service on the Day of Atonement in a synagogue before the destruction of the Temple. The hazzan of the synagogue took the scroll of the Torah and handed it to the chief of the synagogue; he handed it to the prefect, who in turn handed it to the high priest, who received it standing and read it standing.<sup>10</sup> While the quorum of priests, Levites and others who were currently due for service in the Temple at Jerusalem were in attendance there according to the weekly rota, the remaining members of the *ma'amad* who did not accompany them would assemble in their local synagogues to fast and pray. There is ample evidence that by the first century CE the Synagogue had become an integral part of Jewish life, an established and revered institution.

Josephus, relating his experience at Tiberias when he went to the synagogue wearing a breastplate and carrying a sword inconspicuously because he feared an attempt on his life, makes it clear that the people were used to assembling in the synagogue to receive important announcements and for discussions as well as to pray. On the Sabbath there was a 'large crowd' in the synagogue and early the next morning the people had again assembled there although 'they had no idea why they were being convened'.<sup>11</sup>

One passage in the Talmud gives the number of synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple as 480, another as 394.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that the synagogues were numerous and most if not all of them must have been small buildings. One stood on the Temple Mount itself.<sup>13</sup> The Talmud mentions synagogues of the Alexandrians and Tarsians at Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> The New Testament mentions the 'Synagogue of Freedmen' at Jerusalem whose members included people from Cyrene and Alexandria;<sup>15</sup> these were probably descendants of Jews carried off to Rome in 63 BCE and sold as slaves but later released. An anonymous Christian pilgrim who visited Jerusalem in 333 recorded that out of seven synagogues on Mount Zion only one remained.<sup>16</sup> Epiphanius, in the second half of the fourth century, also wrote of the seven synagogues which had remained as huts on Mount Zion, of which one lasted until the reign of Constantine.<sup>17</sup> These synagogues must have been built before the Jews were banished from Jerusalem in CE 135 and probably existed at the time of the Temple. The one which survived until the fourth century may have been used by Judaeo-Christians who con-

tinued to assemble in synagogues, and whose practices appear to have differed little from the main body of followers of the Mosaic law except for their recognition of Jesus as Messiah.<sup>18</sup> An epigraph survives from one of these pre-70 CE synagogues in Jerusalem; the Greek inscription reads in translation: 'Theodotos son of Vettenos, priest and archisynagogos, son of an archisynagogos, built the synagogue for the reading of the law and for the teaching of the commandments; furthermore the hospice and the chambers and the water installation for the lodging of needy strangers. The foundation stone thereof has been laid by his fathers and the elders and Simonides'.<sup>19</sup> This inscription indicates that the didactic and social functions of the synagogue were already well established in the first century CE, and that it was exerting its influence even before the destruction of the Temple.

Josephus mentions synagogues at Caesarea, Dora and Tiberias.<sup>20</sup> The New Testament mentions synagogues elsewhere in the country, specifically at Nazareth<sup>21</sup> and at Capharnaum;<sup>22</sup> the references to synagogues in Galilee imply that they were numerous and that many towns and villages had one.<sup>23</sup> Jesus' activity in the synagogues, as recorded in the synoptic gospels of the New Testament, throws an interesting light on their contemporary use. He was able to speak frequently and freely to the assembly in many synagogues, usually on the Sabbath,<sup>24</sup> and it is very evident that it was not unusual for the congregation to be addressed extemporaneously in this way. On one occasion, in his home town of Nazareth, the evangelist records that Jesus 'went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written....' After reading a passage from the scroll, according to the

Inscription from a synagogue in Jerusalem which functioned prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in CE 70, naming the builder and chief of the synagogue.





account, 'He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him.'<sup>25</sup> In he began to speak to them.<sup>26</sup> It appears that at that period women frequented the synagogue.<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to note that at Capernaum, where Jesus often went to the synagogue, the Jewish elders told him that their synagogue had been built for them by a Roman centurion who was stationed in the town and who was friendly to the Jewish people.<sup>27</sup>

The references to the synagogue in the New Testament suggest a friendly, democratic, bustling assembly where the scholars and the devout, rich and poor, rubbed shoulders with beggars, paralytics, blind men and cripples, where a Jew could address his peers and receive a fair hearing and where there was considerable religious and probably also social and political discussion in addition to formal liturgical worship. Jesus' criticism of people who gave alms in the synagogue 'to win men's admiration' and of those who loved to say their prayers ostentatiously, standing in the synagogue for all to see them,<sup>28</sup> implies that begging, alms-giving and individual declaratory prayer were common occurrences in the contemporary synagogue. James, in his letter written at Jerusalem in the early sixties of the Common Era, upbraided the Judaeo-Christians for seating the well-dressed men in the best places in the synagogues and telling the poor to sit on the floor.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately archaeological evidence of the architecture of the Judaeo synagogues prior to the destruction of the Second Temple is very scant. King Herod the Great, who reigned from 39 to 4 BCE, was a superbly wily politician and a prolific and grandiose builder. It was he who rebuilt the Second Temple, replacing the modest post-Exilic structure by an important building with sumptuous courts and impressive colonnades. Remains of synagogues have been found in the fortresses built by Herod at Masada and Herodium.

At Masada, high up on bare rock in the barren wilderness forty miles south-east of Jerusalem, King Herod built himself a luxurious royal citadel overlooking the Dead Sea. The stupendous complex, bounded by a casement wall, included a three-tiered hanging palace-villa complete with Roman baths, frescoed walls and mosaic floors, two other palaces, five villas, administrative buildings, a swimming pool, storehouses and an ingenious water-catchment system with immense cisterns. After Herod's death this fortress was garrisoned for sixty years by Roman legionaries until it was captured by Jewish rebel patriots in CE 66. The patriots, called by Josephus *sicarii* (dagger men), managed to hold the fortress heroically even after Jerusalem fell in the year 70. When the Romans finally took Masada in CE 73 they found the bodies of the entire community of 960 men, women and children, who had chosen death at their own hands on the eve of their defeat rather than face humiliation and captivity.

One building at Masada which has been identified as a synagogue dates from the original Herodian construction but it was altered by the patriots during their seven-year period of occupation of the fortress. While there is no absolute proof that the Herodian building was constructed originally as a synagogue, it is likely that the King would have provided one for

the Jewish members of his court and family. Moreover, the arrangement of the columns (like those of later Galilean synagogues), the direction of the building towards Jerusalem, and the fact that the patriot community chose this particular building for their synagogue all point to its having been used as such originally.

The patriots were very devout: despite the difficulties of their life on the rock fortress, they adhered rigidly to their religious code. There is evidence that they even paid tithes while there and built *mikveh*, ritual immersion baths, as well as modifying the synagogue.

The building is rectangular in plan with the door facing Jerusalem. The original Herodian arrangement had an antechamber or vestibule, and in the main room along the southern, western, and northern sides there stood five columns, which may have supported a gallery. The patriots demolished the partition wall, thus abolishing the antechamber, and they built walls which created an enclosed cell in the north-west corner of the building. It appears that this was done to provide a place in which to store the Torah scrolls. The patriots also removed the two columns of the western row which had become enclosed by the walls of the cell and replaced them in line with the original northern and southern rows, where the partition wall had been thrown down; in this way the columns could still conveniently support a gallery. Then tiered benches were added along the main walls of the building. In the course of excavation it was found that these benches contained portions of columns and capitals quarried by the patriots from one of the Herodian palaces. On the synagogue floor the archaeologists found coins from the period of the revolt and an ostrakon bearing the inscription 'priestly tithe' in Hebrew.

Before voluntarily accepting death the defenders of Masada set fire to most of their valuables. In the cell of the synagogue, in addition to a large number of soot-blackened lamps in a corner of its main room, the members of the archaeological expedition of 1963-5 found evidence of a great fire and the charred remains of glass and metal vessels. The sanctity attached to sacred documents prohibited their destruction so it was orthodox Jewish custom to bury unwanted manuscripts in a hiding-place, called a *genizah*. Two such places were uncovered beneath the floor of the cell in the corner of the Masada synagogue. In one pit was found a rolled scroll containing the last two chapters of the Book of Deuteronomy; in the bottom of the other pit were found the remains of a scroll containing parts of the Book of Ezekiel, including the portion of Chapter 37 describing the prophet's vision of the dry bones. It is likely that such elements as a storage-place for the Torah scrolls and tiered benches around the walls were usual in the early Judaeo synagogues.

Josephus mentions the custom among Hellenic Jewish communities of the Diaspora of building their places of worship near the sea. At Halikarnassos a decree was passed on the motion of one Marcus Alexander that 'these Jewish men and women who so wish may observe their Sabbath and perform their sacred rites in accordance with the Jewish laws and may build a place of prayer τὰς ἡμετέρας προεὐχὰς near the sea in accordance with their native custom.'<sup>30</sup> This may have been to satisfy the need for constructing a mikveh which had to have some 'pure' flowing water, or facilitate its water supply. At Philippi in Greece the



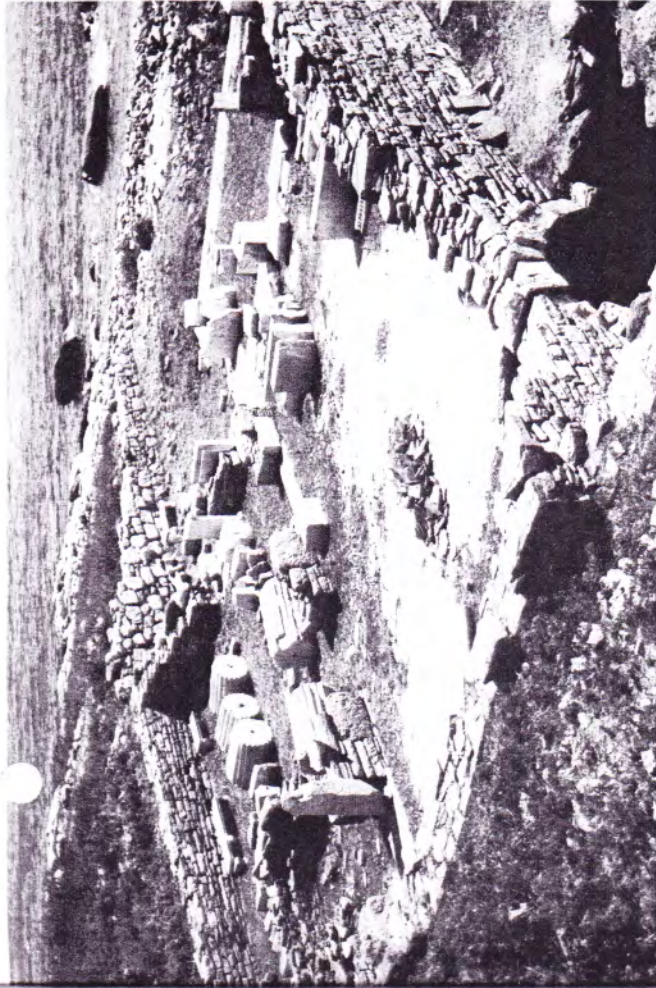
people customarily met to pray on the Sabbath at a spot along outside the city gates.<sup>31</sup> It would appear that there was not then a synagogue building at Philippi, although throughout the Diaspora the synagogue was already a widespread, well-established institution in the first century CE.

The largest synagogue building in the Diaspora, perhaps indeed in the world, prior to the destruction of the Temple, must have been the Great Synagogue in Alexandria in which Caligula wished to have his effigy set up to be adored as a divinity, as it was in the pagan temple. It was destroyed during the reign of the Emperor Trajan (CE 98–117). According to Philo this synagogue, which served a large and powerful Jewish colony, was only one of many in the city.<sup>32</sup> There is an account of it, given about forty or fifty years after its destruction, by the Galilean Talmudist, Rabbi Judah:

He who has not seen the double stoa of Alexandria in Egypt has never seen the glory of Israel. It was said that it was like a huge basilica, one stoa within another, and it sometimes held twice the number of people that went forth into Egypt. There were in it seventy-one cathedras of gold, corresponding to the seventy-one elders of the Great Sanhedrin, not one of them containing less than twenty-one talents of gold, and a wooden platform in the middle upon which the attendant of the Synagogue stood with a napkin in his hand; when the time came to answer Amen he waved his napkin and all the congregation duly responded. They moreover did not occupy their seats promiscuously, but goldsmiths sat separately, silversmiths separately, blacksmiths separately, metalworkers separately and weavers separately, so that when a poor man entered the place he recognized the members of his craft and on applying to that quarter obtained a livelihood for himself and the members of his family.<sup>33</sup>

Even allowing for a certain rhetorical exaggeration, this must have been a splendid building, Hellenistic in style, with lavish furnishings such as the golden chairs, and so large that it was necessary for the hazzan to give a signal for the responses as the precentor's voice was not audible to the entire congregation. Rabbi Judah's account also makes clear the social role of the Synagogue, which was not only a place of prayer but also a useful 'employment exchange' for the community.

Although the little windswept holy island of Delos, one of the Cycladean group in the Aegean Sea, only covers an area of five square kilometres, it enjoyed very considerable religious, political and commercial importance and in the second and third centuries BCE it was at the height of its fame. Besides being the sacred pagan sanctuary of Apollo, which gave the island importance and to which gifts poured in from all over the Hellenistic world, Delos flourished as a busy commercial centre with long lines of warehouses and quays. Many foreign merchants lived there. The Egyptian traders built their own temple to Serapis, the Syrians built their own sanctuary, the Italian merchants built an impressive agora, while the Jewish community, it seems, erected a synagogue. There is epigraphical evidence of a Jewish community on Delos in the second century BCE,<sup>34</sup> and in 139 BCE the government of Delos was one of the recipients of a Roman consular recommendation regarding the treatment of Jews. When the Jewish ambassadors returned to Judaea from Rome in that year they carried with them letters to King Ptolemy VI from the Roman consul,



View of the ruins of the synagogue at Delos, from the south-west.

which began, 'Lucius, consul of the Romans to King Ptolemy, greetings. The Jewish ambassadors have come to us as our friends and allies to renew our original friendship and alliance in the name of the high priest Simon and the Jewish people...' and continued '... we have decided to write to various Kings and states, warning them not to molest them nor to attack them or their towns or their country...' <sup>35</sup> The Roman consul sent this same letter to the Seleucid ruler, King Demetrius, to Delos, and to other states: Rhodes, Sparta, Cyprus, Kos, Pamphylia, Lycia, Samos, Halikarnassos and Cyrene. The Jews of Delos are again mentioned about 49 BCE in a decree of exemption from military service cited by Josephus.<sup>36</sup>

A building excavated on the eastern side of the island of Delos where there was a suburb of houses, a stadium and a gymnasium, but standing off from them near the shore, has been tentatively identified as the synagogue of the Jewish community because of inscriptions referring to 'God the Most High', 'the Most High', and to the building itself as a *proseuche*. E. L. Sukenik revised his earlier opinion that the building was a Jewish place of worship and decided that it was a pagan place of assembly.<sup>37</sup> Some time after the original construction the main part of the building was divided into two adjacent halls by a partition wall; the materials used for this were salvaged from the gymnasium, which was destroyed in 88 BCE. The palaeographic evidence of the inscriptions points to a date in the second century BCE for the original building and it appears that the



synagogue hall was divided after 88 BCE. A row of marble niches are arranged on either side of the presidential cathedra on the west wall of the most northerly of the two rooms.

In the kingdom of Bosphorus, north of the Black Sea, epigraphic evidences of *proseuche* have been found, dating from the first century BCE. Greek inscriptions at Berenice in Cyrenaica, North Africa, with reference to the Festival of Booths (*Sukkot*), can be identified with a Jewish community there.<sup>38</sup> One of the inscriptions, of the year CE 56, contains the word *συναγωγῆς*, which signifies the community as well as the synagogue building; another pays tribute to a Decimus Valerius Dionysius, son of Gaius, because he had the floors of the 'amphitheatre whitewashed and the walls frescoed in the good Greek manner'. It may be inferred that this amphitheatre was a meeting-place of the Jewish community at Berenice.

Philo mentioned synagogues in Rome.<sup>39</sup> The names of some of these early Roman synagogues indicate the period of their foundation. The synagogue of the Augustesians was presumably established under the patronage of the Emperor Augustus, who reigned from 27 BCE to CE 14. This emperor and his family were benevolent to the Jews; the Roman synagogue of the Agrippesians was most probably named for his son-in-law, Agrippa, while the synagogue of the Volunnesians appears to have been named for Volunnius, the contemporary Roman procurator of Syria. The synagogue of the Herodians commemorated Herod the Great, King of Judaea and friend of Augustus.

The synagogue at Antioch in Syria is mentioned by Josephus.<sup>40</sup> It must have been established by the second century BCE because the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who reigned from 175 BCE, presented it with consecrated pottery vessels plundered from the Temple in Jerusalem. Josephus also records a decree by which the council and people of Sardis, on a notion of the magistrates, decreed that a place be given the Jews of the city to 'gather together with their wives and children and offer their ancestral prayers and sacrifices to God ... to come together on stated days to do those things which are in accordance with their laws and that a place shall be set apart by the magistrates for them to build and inhabit which they may consider suitable for the purpose'.<sup>41</sup>

Damascus, in Syria, had several synagogues in which Paul preached and,<sup>42</sup> according to the author of the Acts of the Apostles, created confusion among the Jewish community there by his arguments that Jesus was the Messiah. On their missionary travels Peter and Paul usually made at once for the synagogue, where they addressed the assembly. Paul and his companions went to the synagogue at Antioch-in-Pisidia 'on the Sabbath and took their seats', an occasion on which the democratic nature of the institution was again made clear: 'After the lessons from the Law and the Prophets had been read, the presidents of the synagogue sent them a message, "Brothers, if you would like to address some words of encouragement to the congregation, please do so."<sup>43</sup> Paul stood up, held up a hand for silence and began to speak.<sup>44</sup> Paul spoke in the synagogue at Ephesus for three months until opposition from the congregation caused him to shift his activities to a hall, where he continued his arguments daily.<sup>45</sup> At Iconium, too, there was a synagogue where Paul addressed the assembly<sup>46</sup> and at Thessalonika in Greece, having in-



Bust of the Emperor Augustus. He was benevolent to the Jews in his realm and one of the ancient synagogues of Rome was named in his honour.

roduced himself, Paul was able to preach in the synagogue on three consecutive Sabbaths.<sup>47</sup> Paul also preached in a synagogue at Berea<sup>48</sup> and in one at Athens.<sup>49</sup> At Corinth he held debates in the synagogues every Sabbath, 'trying to convert Jews as well as Greeks'.<sup>50</sup> Corinth was a splendid city at that time; it had been majestically rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE and besides the theatre, which held 15,000 people, boasted a fine agora with long colonnades of shops and expensive public buildings. A marble block with the inscription '*Ἱναγογὰ Ἑβραίων*'<sup>51</sup> was found by archaeologists at the foot of the steps which led to the ancient propylaeum, or gateway of the city. On the island of Cyprus Paul found synagogues at Salamis<sup>52</sup> and presumably at Paphos.

Unlike the Temple, which non-Jews were barred from entering, the Synagogue was accessible to sympathetic pagans. Judaism drew a number of proselytes in all parts of the Hellenistic world, men and women who were attracted by the social and moral ethics of the Jews and who admired their monotheistic belief and their culture. One of these was Helena,





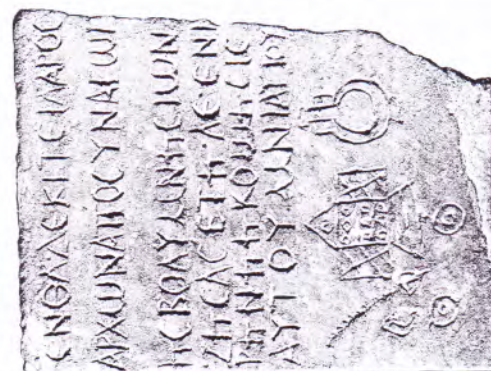
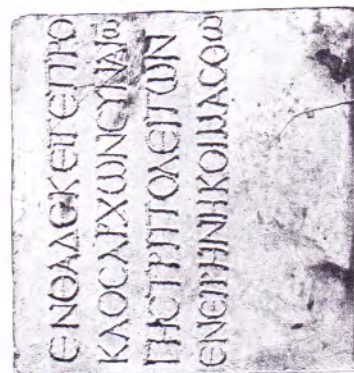
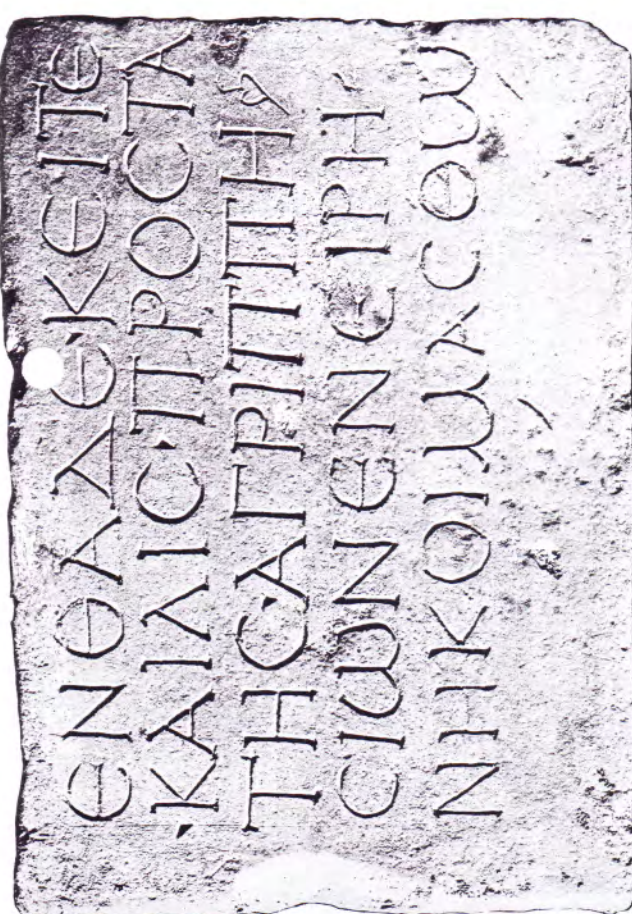
Queen of Adiabene, beyond the Tigris, who was converted to Judaism with her two sons about CE 35–40 and had a burial vault for the family constructed at Jerusalem.

The synagogues of the Hellenistic Diaspora were frequented not only by emigre Jews and their descendants and by converts to Judaism from the local pagan population, but also by Gentile sympathizers who were attracted to Judaism but balked at the necessity for meticulous observance of the Mosaic law which actual conversion entailed. It is not surprising, therefore, that a number of these pro-Judaic pagans – the 'God-fearing' or the 'Proselytes of the Gates' – joined the ranks of the first Christians, embracing a Jewish sect which did not impose exacting requirements alien to their own ethnic origins. Along with those Jews in the Diaspora who accepted Christian teachings, these proselytes continued to frequent the synagogues until their beliefs and practices so separated them from the mainstream of Jewry that they met and worshipped independently. This separation was hastened by the Jewish defeat and the fall of Jerusalem in CE 70, when the Hellenistic Christian communities disengaged themselves socially and politically from Judaism. The Greek word *ekklesia*, used in the Septuagint for the collectivity of Israel as God's People as well as for a worshipping community, and interchangeably with *synagoge* as a translation of the Hebrew *HQI*, became the technical term for the Christian community or assembly. The congregational worship of these assemblies was based on the pattern of the synagogue, with the reading and explanation of God's word, praise, prayers of supplication and thanksgiving, and religious exercises. The Eucharist, which became a fundamental part of Christian worship, can be seen as the continuation of an established Jewish custom, the meal of religious character which celebrated both men's own fellowship and their fellowship with God, and was essentially eucharistic, being an expression of thanksgiving.

In Palestine where the Christians, or Nazarenes as they were then called, were regarded by the orthodox as just another Jewish sect which observed peculiar rites of its own, the Judaeo-Christians withdrew from Judaism and customary Judaic practice much more slowly than their fellow believers abroad. The deliberations of the so-called Council of Jerusalem of about CE 50 barely affected them and at least until the time of Hadrian, nearly a century later, the Hebrew Christian community in Jerusalem was composed of practising Jews.<sup>53</sup> Eusebius referred to their first fifteen successive Hebrew bishops there as 'the bishops of the circumcision'.<sup>54</sup> Until its destruction in CE 70, the Judaeo-Christians in Jerusalem attended the Temple assiduously and, of course, observed the law of circumcision. Even though many Judaeo-Christians fled when the Temple was destroyed, and again during the persecutions under Hadrian in CE 135, some vital communities of them persisted in Palestine and the surrounding countries. It has been suggested<sup>55</sup> that the Tomb of David on Mount Zion was a synagogue. The main room, which has undergone many changes, had an apse or niche 1.92 m above the floor level, 2.44 m in height, 2.4 m in diameter and 1.2 m in depth. This niche is pointed exactly towards the Temple Mount, north with a slight easterly deviation: it could well have been constructed to hold the Torah scrolls. On the floor above and to the west is the room called the Cenacle, according to

19

OPPOSITE Roman funerary epitaphs of synagogue dignitaries mentioning the synagogues of the Agrippesians (ABOVE), the Volumentians (LEFT), the Calcarenses (RIGHT), and the Tripolitarians (BELOW).



18



tradition the 'upper room' (*hyperoon*) where the followers of Jesus, about 120 in number, assembled for prayer in the period just after his death.<sup>56</sup>

It has been estimated that in the year CE 60 there were less than two million Jews in Palestine and about three million in other countries. There were communities in Babylon, in many places in Asia Minor and North Africa, in Egypt, in Greece, in what is now Yugoslavia, in Italy and in Spain. They all looked to the Temple in Jerusalem as their ultimate spiritual centre; desire to attend there was paramount among all believing Jews and in their distant homes they yearned and aspired to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in the Chosen Land.

With the destruction of the Temple in the year CE 70, and the consequent abrupt cessation of the service of sacrifice, the Synagogue immediately acquired a new and more important role in Jewry, for it stood without any rival as the nucleus of religious activity. Prayer, which had previously accompanied the rite of sacrifice, came to be regarded as a provisional substitute for it. In addition, some of the other Temple customs and rituals were deliberately transferred to the Synagogue, thus increasing its importance. To ensure its effective continuity, uniformity of cult became an essential factor, so divergent practices were at first discouraged and then extirpated. Jews everywhere prayed and hoped for the restoration of the Temple; until that day the Synagogue would be their bond, the pivot of their religious life and eventually also of their social life.



## 2 The Patriarchate and the Exilarchate