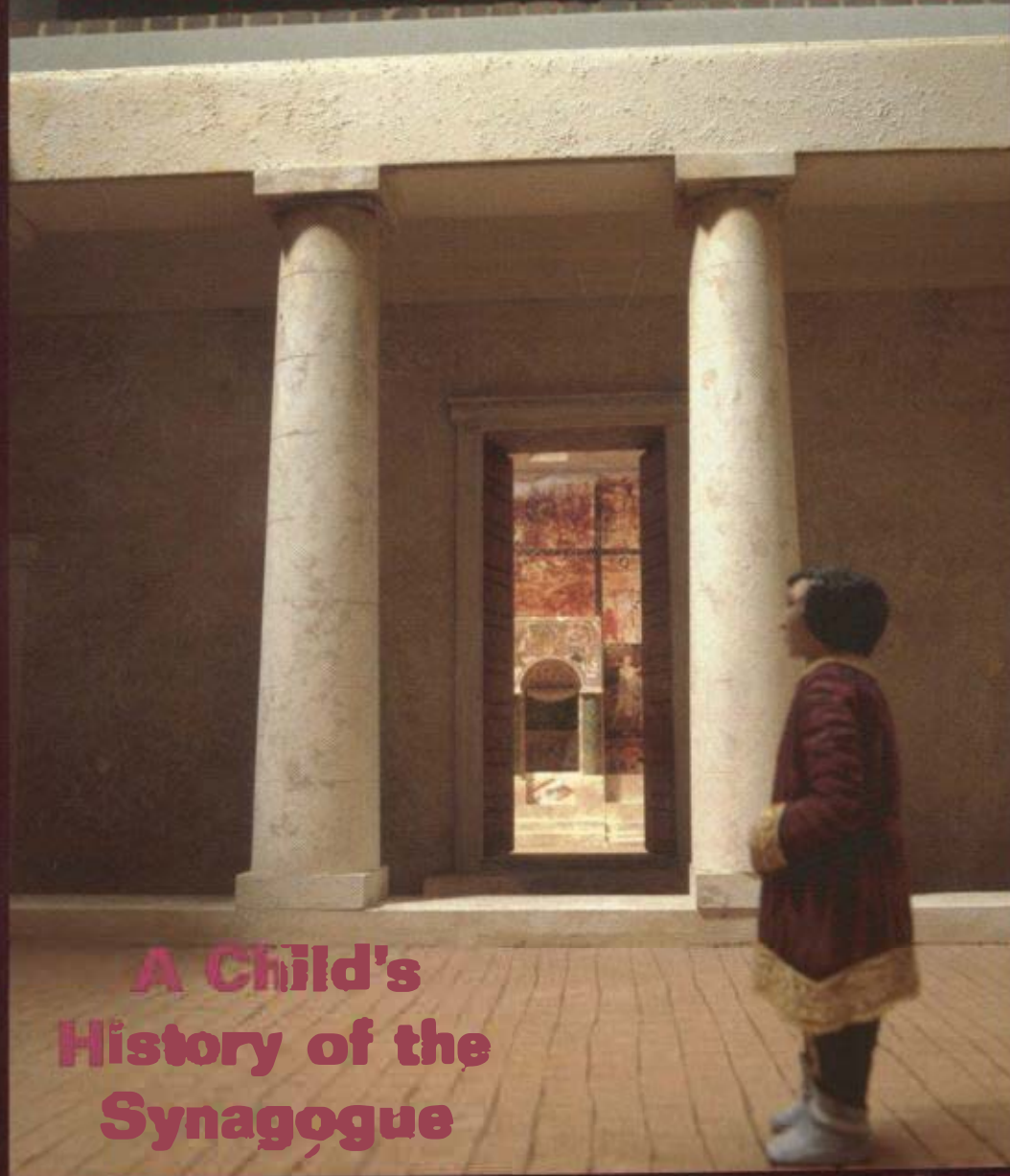


וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשֹׁכְנֵתִי בְּתוֹכָם

Where God Dwells



A Child's History of the Synagogue

**Dr. Steven Fine
and Leah Bierman Fine**

Torah Aura Productions



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» for Elisha »

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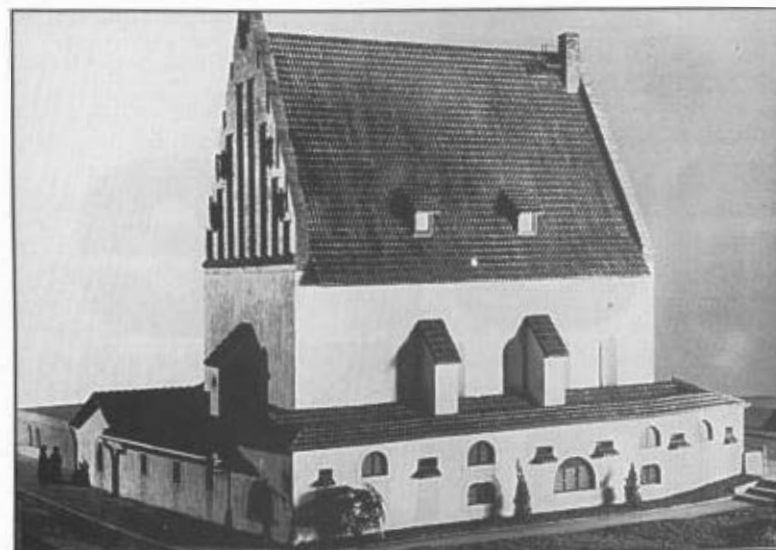
Where God Dwells

A Child's History of the Synagogue



THIS BOOK IS PUBLISHED IN COMMEMORATION OF *SACRED REALM: THE EMERGENCE OF THE SYNAGOGUE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD*, AN EXHIBITION MOUNTED BY YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM, FEBRUARY-DECEMBER, 1996

SYNAGOGUE BUILDINGS TAKE MANY DIFFERENT SHAPES AND FORMS. ALL SYNAGOGUES HAVE A TORAH SCROLL AND AN ARK TO HOLD IT WITHIN THE BUILDING.



ALTNEUSCHUL: MODEL AT THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM IN NEW YORK.



THE ALTNEUSCHUL ON A CZECH STAMP.

THE ALTNEUSCHUL IN PRAGUE IN CENTRAL EUROPE DATES TO THE 13TH CENTURY. THE JEWS OF PRAGUE STILL PRAY HERE.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE.

THE TOURO SYNAGOGUE IS THE OLDEST SYNAGOGUE IN THE UNITED STATES, BUILT IN 1763. IT IS A SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUE, BUILT BY JEWS WHOSE ANCESTORS CAME FROM SPAIN AND PORTUGAL. PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON SPOKE IN THE TOURO SYNAGOGUE IN 1790.

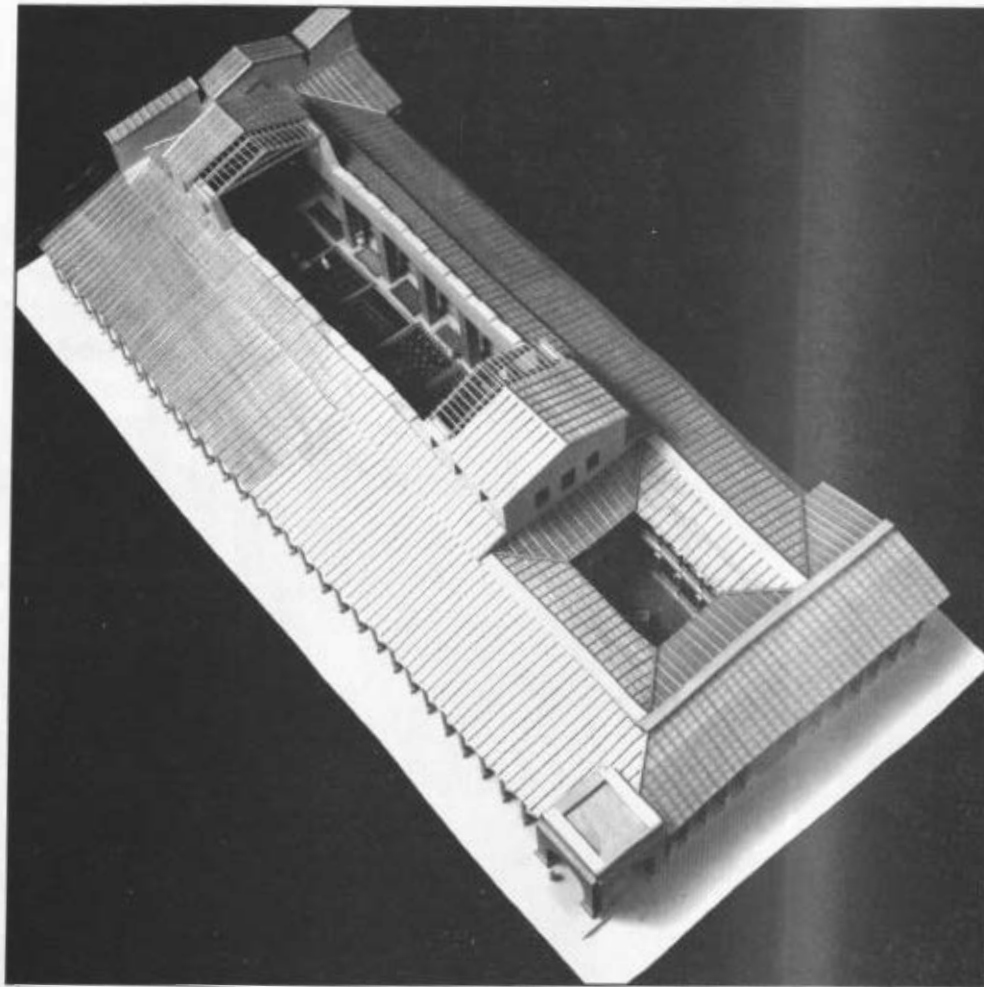


TOURO SYNAGOGUE: MODEL AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

Jews build synagogues wherever they live. In Kiev or Baltimore, Buenos Aires or Singapore, you will find synagogues. Some synagogues are large and beautiful buildings serving thousands of people, others are small places where ten or twelve Jews gather for services. For over 2,000 years the synagogue has been the place where Jews have come together to listen to Torah, to learn with rabbis and teachers, to celebrate Jewish holidays, to pray, to help one another and to meet with friends. It is understandable, then, that the word for synagogue in Hebrew, *beit ha-knesset*, means "house of meeting."



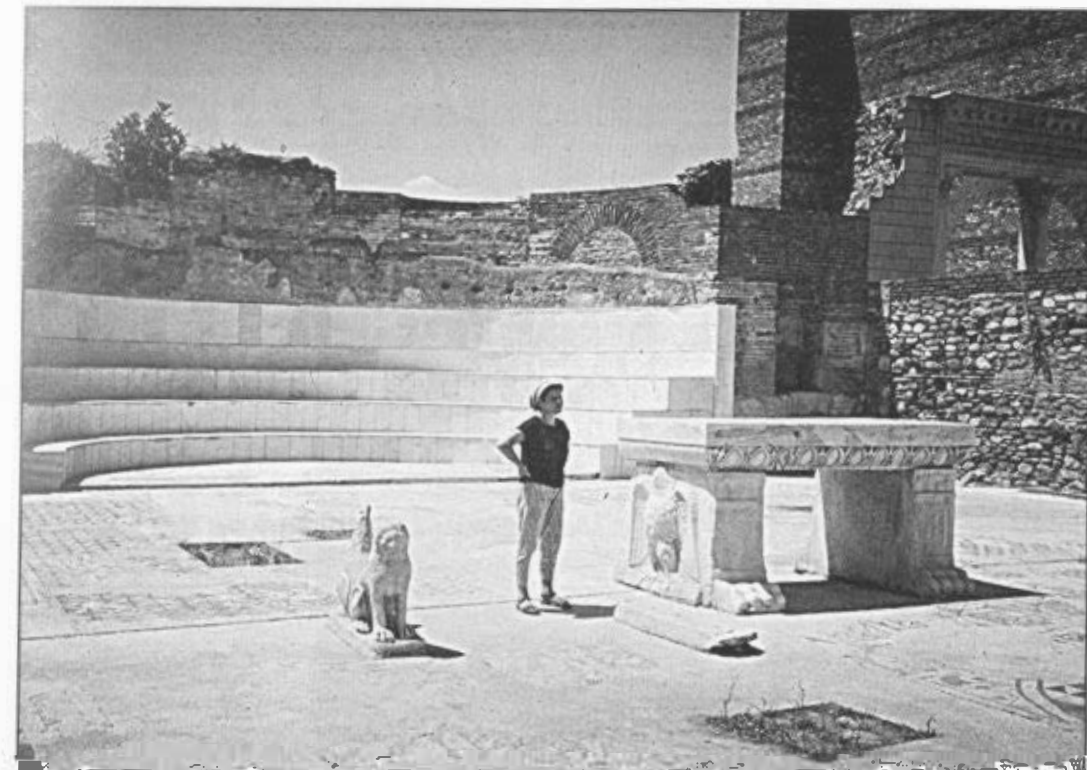
MORNING SERVICES
B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE IN
BALTIMORE, MD.
CONGREGATION B'NAI ISRAEL IS
TYPICAL OF MANY SYNAGOGUES
IN AMERICA TODAY.



SARDIS SYNAGOGUE IN MODERN TURKEY AS IT MIGHT HAVE APPEARED IN ANCIENT TIMES

Ancient Jewish communities also built synagogues wherever they lived. Some ancient synagogues were very large buildings, while others were as small as your living room. The synagogue of Sardis, in what is now Turkey, is the largest synagogue ever discovered. The synagogue was almost as long as a football field, and right next to the "city hall" and the gymnasium. A visitor couldn't miss it while strolling down the streets of Sardis. Next to the synagogue was a row of shops, including a restaurant. Perhaps our visitor mingled with the Jewish and non-Jewish patrons as he ordered breakfast. Later in the day he might have stopped in the courtyard of the synagogue for a drink of water. There he would meet fellow Jews, as well as people of other faiths, all drawing water from the fountain in large jugs.

THE
SYNAGOGUE
IN SARDIS IN
MODERN
TURKEY WAS
THE SIZE OF A
FOOTBALL
FIELD.
IN THE
DISTANCE
YOU CAN SEE
ITS TWO
TOWERS.



LEAH BERMAN
FINE STANDS
NEXT TO A
LARGE TABLE
WHERE THE
TORAH MAY
HAVE BEEN
READ IN THE
SARDIS
SYNAGOGUE.



THERE WERE OVER 100 SYNAGOGUES IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL AND 150 IN OTHER PARTS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD. THIS MAP SHOWS PLACES WHERE SYNAGOGUES EXISTED IN ANCIENT TIMES.



Over 100 synagogues have been excavated by archaeologists in Israel and over 150 existed in other parts of the Roman world! Remains of synagogues have been discovered in Israel, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, Spain, Italy, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, the Ukraine and Bulgaria. Wherever Jews lived, they built synagogues. Archaeologists find remains of another ancient synagogue almost every year!

Sometimes archaeologists are lucky enough to discover a whole synagogue building complete with benches, a Torah ark, perhaps a mosaic floor, wall paintings, menorahs or even plaques with the names of donors. Discoveries of entire buildings are very rare. Usually only a small portion of the synagogue building is discovered. Archaeologists might find only a single rock with a menorah or an inscription carved on a piece of marble that tells them that a synagogue once existed. Some synagogues are known only from ancient writings like the Mishnah and the Talmud.



KING DAVID APPEARS ON THIS SYNAGOGUE FLOOR FROM THE LAND OF ISRAEL. CAN YOU READ HIS NAME, 'דָּוִד' (DAVID)? THIS BEAUTIFUL MOSAIC WAS CELEBRATED ON A MODERN ISRAELI STAMP.



THE SYNAGOGUE OF OSTIA, THE ANCIENT PORT OF ROME, WAS DISCOVERED IN 1961.

The Talmud describes a fabulous synagogue in Alexandria, Egypt. It was destroyed in 117 C.E. No remains of the Alexandrian synagogue have been found, so the description of this building in the Talmud is our only evidence for this synagogue's existence:

Rabbi Judah said: Whoever has never seen the synagogue of Alexandria of Egypt has never seen the great glory of the Jewish people in his entire life....

The synagogue leader stands upon a wooden *bimah* (stage) with flags in his hand.

When one Torah reader begins to read, the synagogue leader would wave flags so the people would answer "amen" after the Torah reader recites each Torah blessing....

The members of the synagogue sat with people who had the same profession. The goldsmiths sat with other goldsmiths, the silversmiths with other silversmiths, the common weavers with other common weavers, the fancy weavers with other fancy weavers, and the blacksmiths with other blacksmiths...

Why did the people sit according to their professions?

So that if someone new came to town he would sit with the members of his profession and they would find him a job.

Even though the synagogue of Alexandria was huge, no one was lost in the crowd. Seated according to their professions, the synagogue members would help newcomers get settled in their new city. Helping other Jews to help themselves was important to the Jews in this ancient Alexandrian synagogue, as it is for modern Jews in our synagogues.



WRAPPING A TORAH SCROLL IN A CONTEMPORARY SYNAGOGUE.

S

ynagogues, ancient and modern, are the center of every Jewish community. In this book you will learn about three ancient synagogues. You will learn how archaeologists discovered them, and what these synagogues meant to their communities. Ancient synagogues, like modern synagogues, were places where Jewish communities came together to pray, to read the Torah, to study, to meet with fellow Jews and to help one another.

A detailed map of the Holy Land, showing the Mediterranean Sea to the west, the Dead Sea to the east, and the Jordan River to the south. Major cities and towns are marked with dots and labeled, including Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, and Amman. The map also shows the locations of the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple Mount, and the Dome of the Rock. A scale bar at the bottom indicates distances in kilometers.

A black and white illustration of an ancient stone archway with a pediment, flanked by columns. A person is walking through the archway, and another person is standing near the entrance. The scene is set in a rocky, hilly landscape.

12

164 B.C.E.	Judah Maccabee captures Jerusalem and rededicates the Temple
20/19 B.C.E.	Herod the Great, King of Judea, begins to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem
66 C.E.	Jewish Revolt against Rome begins.
70 C.E.	Temple of Jerusalem destroyed
74 C.E.	Fall of Masada, end of the Jewish Revolt.
32-135 C.E.	Bar Kokhba Revolt Against Rome
200 C.E.	Mishnah compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince
212 C.E.	Jews become citizens of the Roman Empire
245 C.E.	Dura Europos Synagogue completed.
400 C.E.	Talmud of the Land of Israel completed.
500 C.E.	Babylonian Talmud completed
	Beth Alpha Synagogue built

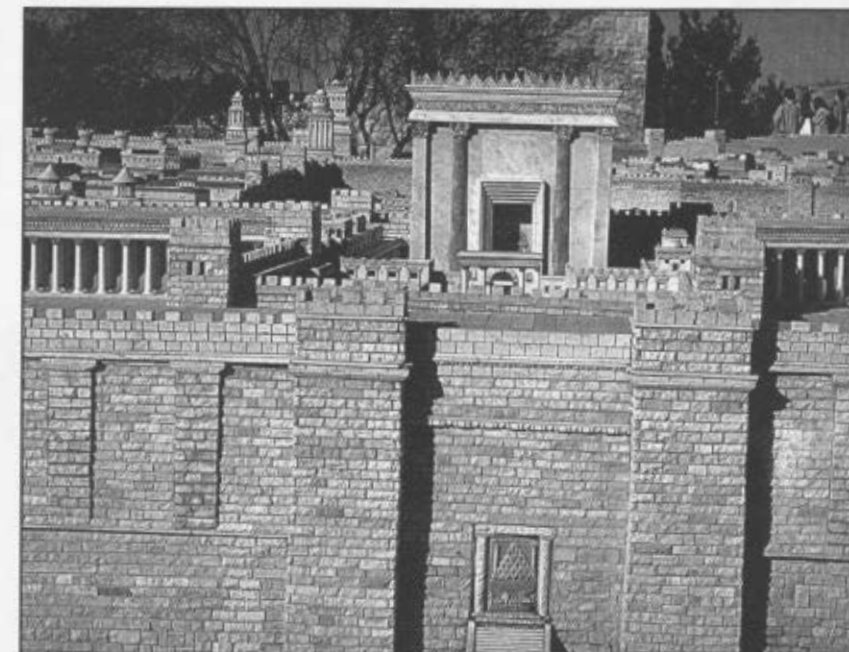
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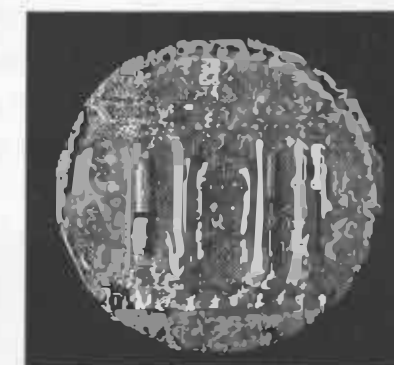
YOU CAN CLIMB OR RIDE THE CABLE CAR TO THE TOP OF MASADA.

The Synagogue of Masada, 66-74 C.E.

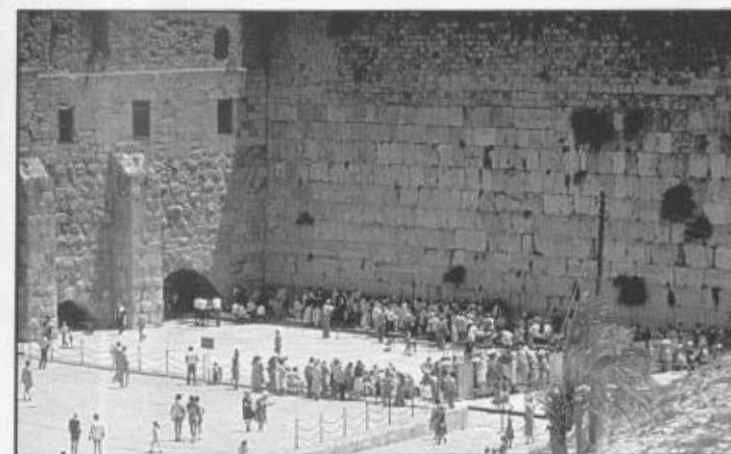
The war against Rome had turned into a national catastrophe. Word had just reached Masada that the holy Temple of Jerusalem had been burned to the ground by the Roman army, its walls smashed. The Temple had been central to the religious lives of ancient Jews. Three times a year many thousands of Jews came to visit the holy Temple: on Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. Even those who lived far away sent presents to the Temple, to the house of God. The Jews of Masada, like all Jews, were in shock and mourning when they learned of the Temple's destruction.



THE HOLY TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM, AS IT MAY HAVE LOOKED.



THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE ON AN ANCIENT JEWISH COIN.



THE WESTERN WALL. FOR ALMOST TWO THOUSAND YEARS THIS WAS THE ONLY REMNANT OF THE HOLY TEMPLE THAT COULD STILL BE SEEN. TODAY ITS PLAZA SERVES AS A HUGE SYNAGOGUE. JEWS COME FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD TO PRAY AT THE WESTERN WALL.



A MEDAL MINTED BY THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL TO COMMEMORATE THE JEWS OF MASADA.



THIS IS A ROMAN COIN CELEBRATING THE ROMAN VICTORY OVER THE JEWS.



During the war, women, children and men had fled to this mountain top to escape the Roman army. The Jews converted the beautiful halls that King Herod the Great had built on Masada a century earlier into living quarters. They ate foods like fig cakes and olives and were careful not to waste water.



THE ARCH OF TITUS. A GREAT PARADE WAS HELD IN ROME TO HONOR TITUS, THE GENERAL WHO WON THE JEWISH WAR AND DESTROYED THE TEMPLE. THE VICTORY WAS COMMEMORATED WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ARCH OF TITUS IN THE ROMAN FORUM. ANCIENT JEWS CALLED HIM "TITUS, THE EVIL ONE."



THIS SCULPTURE INSIDE THE ARCH OF TITUS SHOWS THE GREAT MENORAH OF THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE BEING TAKEN AS BOOTY TO ROME.



THE MENORAH OF THE ARCH OF TITUS IS THE SYMBOL OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL. NOTICE THAT THE MENORAH IN THIS PICTURE IS LIT. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IT IS LIT?

The Jewish commanders strengthened the walls of the fortress and prepared weapons for the inevitable Roman attack. They could see the Romans setting up camps at the base of the mountain. It would be very difficult for the Roman army to get to the top of Masada. The siege was to last for eight long years.



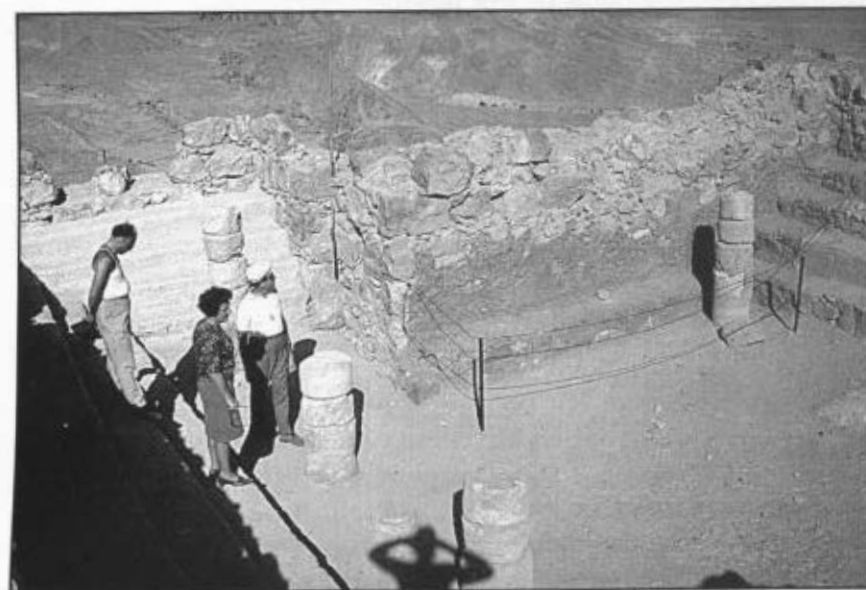
THE ROMAN ARMY PREPARED THEIR ATTACK OF MASADA FROM CAMPS LIKE THIS ONE.

The Jews of Masada were religious people. Most had Biblical names, like Eleazar, Shimon and Yehuda. They built a synagogue for themselves on the northern side of the mountain. It was a small room built into the wall that protected Masada. Benches were built along the walls of the room so that the people could sit comfortably when they came to the synagogue.

THIS SHARD IS FROM A POT THAT HELD MAROR, THE SAME BITTER HERBS THAT YOU EAT EACH YEAR AT THE PASSOVER SEDER.



THE MASADA SYNAGOGUE (EXTERIOR).



MODERN VISITORS TO THE MASADA SYNAGOGUE.



POTSHARDS LIKE THIS ONE WERE DISCOVERED ON MASADA WITH THE NAMES OF JEWS WHO LIVED HERE DURING THE JEWISH REVOLT OF 66-74 C.E. THE NAME ON THE SHARD IS SHIMON. WHAT IS YOUR HEBREW NAME?



EACH YEAR MANY HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS VOLUNTEER TO HELP ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN ISRAEL. SOME EVEN BECOME ARCHAEOLOGISTS.

The Jews of Masada sat on the benches of their synagogue to study the Torah and other sacred books. We don't know what services were like for the Jews of Masada. A first century historian named Philo tells us how other Jews called Essenes acted in their synagogues.

According to Philo, the Essenes sat in rows, eager to hear the Torah reading. The younger members sat on the lower benches, and the older ones up above. One person would then take a scroll of the Torah and read it so that everyone could hear. A learned member of the community would then explain the hard parts. Perhaps this is what Masada Jews did too.



THE INTERIOR OF THE MASADA SYNAGOGUE.

On the wall opposite the door of the synagogue, the Masada Jews built a small chamber, no bigger than a walk-in closet. There the Torah and other holy books were stored. When a book became too tattered to use, it was buried in the ground under the chamber. Archaeologists found parts of the books of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel there. These are among the earliest biblical manuscripts ever discovered! How can scrolls survive in a cave for 2,000 years?



THIS SCROLL OF THE BIBLE IS ALMOST 2,000 YEARS OLD! IT IS ONE OF THE EARLIEST EVER DISCOVERED. OUR TORAH SCROLLS TODAY ARE WRITTEN CAREFULLY ON PARCHMENT IN THE SAME MANNER AS THIS ANCIENT SCROLL.

They survived because the humidity is very low in the desert. Organic materials like scrolls written on parchment can survive for thousands of years.

The small pieces of Bible manuscripts found on Masada were written in Hebrew. They look like our modern Torah scrolls. Like our Torah scrolls, these Bible manuscripts were written by hand on parchment by a well trained scribe. The letters and words are clearly visible.



ANCIENT SCROLLS WERE DISCOVERED IN OTHER PLACES NEAR THE DEAD SEA BESIDES MASADA. THE MOST FAMOUS WERE DISCOVERED AT QUMRAN, AND ARE CALLED THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS. THESE ANCIENT TEXTS INCLUDE THE ENTIRE BOOK OF THE BIBLICAL PROPHET ISAIAH. THE DISCOVERY OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS WAS COMMEMORATED ON THE ISRAELI MONEY SHOWN HERE.



THE MASADA SYNAGOGUE.

The Jews might also have met in the synagogue to discuss the coming Roman siege of Masada. The Romans worked diligently to build a ramp along the steep northern side of the mountain fortress. Once the 300 foot ramp was completed, a tower was set on top of it. From the tower, the Romans could throw stones and ram long beams of wood into the walls of Masada. When the great walls didn't fall, the Roman commander ordered his men to set fire to them. All that night Romans guarded the mountain, making sure that the inhabitants of Masada could not escape. The Jews of Masada had no intention of leaving the mountain. An ancient Jewish historian, Josephus Flavius, recreates a speech that the leader Eleazar ben Yair, might have given as the walls were in flames:

My loyal followers, long ago we resolved to serve neither the Romans nor anyone else but only God. We must not choose slavery now! For we were the first of all to revolt, and shall be the last to break off the struggle. Let our possessions and the whole fortress go up in flames: it will be a bitter blow to the Romans to find our persons beyond their reach and nothing left for them to loot.

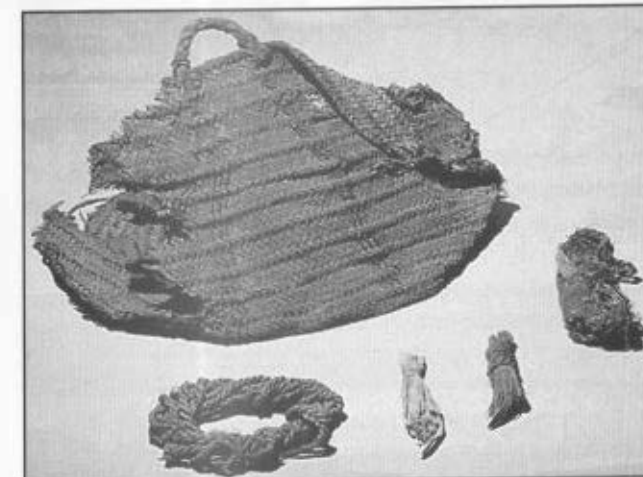


A HEAP OF ROMAN MISSILES SHOT BY THE ROMANS INTO THE JEWISH FORTIFICATIONS ON MASADA.

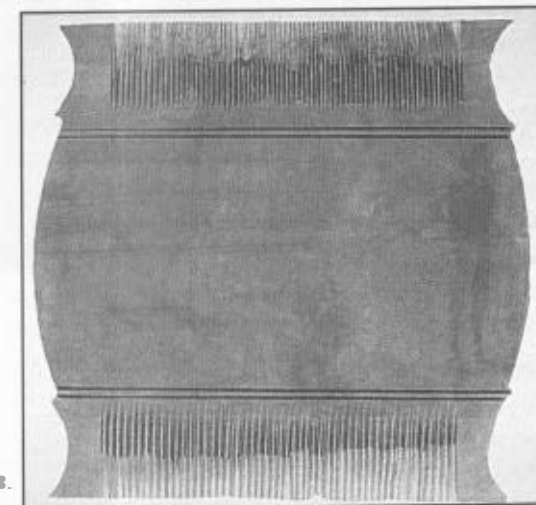
At first light, the Romans expected a fight from the inhabitants of Masada. When they entered the fortress, they were shocked to find dead bodies. Masada had finally fallen, the Jewish Revolt was over. The Jews of Masada were wrong to kill themselves. The Torah teaches that it is better to live as a slave than to die a hero.



SANDALS.



BASKETS.



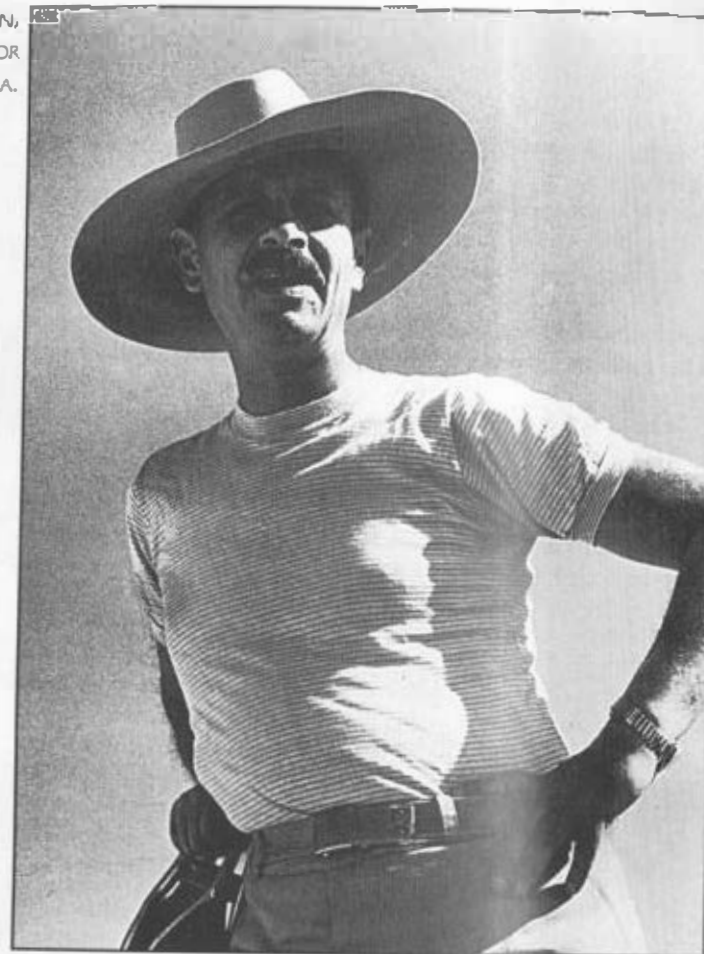
COMB.

Masada was excavated in the early 1960's by Professor Yigael Yadin, the great archaeologist and Israeli army general. Yadin and hundreds of volunteers uncovered the ruins of Masada and found Herod's palace, a large bath house, storehouses, and a *mikveh* (ritual bath). They also found mosaics, wall paintings, cooking utensils, reed baskets, arrows, sandals, jewelry, coins, combs, oil lamps, and perfume bottles. Ancient scrolls were found in and near to the synagogue. Professor Yadin was the first person to read these holy books in almost 2000 years.



COINS.

YIGAL YADIN,
THE EXCAVATOR
OF MASADA.



THESE STAMPS WERE ISSUED BY THE STATE OF ISRAEL TO COMMEMORATE YADIN'S EXCAVATIONS ON MASADA.



The Dura Europos Synagogue, 245 C.E.

In the centuries after the Great Jewish Revolt of 66-74 C.E. synagogues prospered throughout the Roman world. Famous rabbis and teachers taught in synagogues as far apart as Iraq, Israel, Greece and Rome. In the synagogue of Stobi, in Macedonia (ancient Greece), a Jew named Polycharmos gave a room of his house to be used as a synagogue. He called the synagogue a "holy place." In another synagogue, at Sardis in Turkey, a Jew named Socrates (the same name as the ancient Greek philosopher, who wasn't Jewish) donated a seven branched menorah to a synagogue. Synagogues were seldom built by one person. The entire Jewish community was responsible for building and maintaining its synagogue. Often we find a single pillar or a mosaic floor with the names of the donors written on them for all to see. This tradition of honoring those who donate to the Jewish community with plaques continues today.

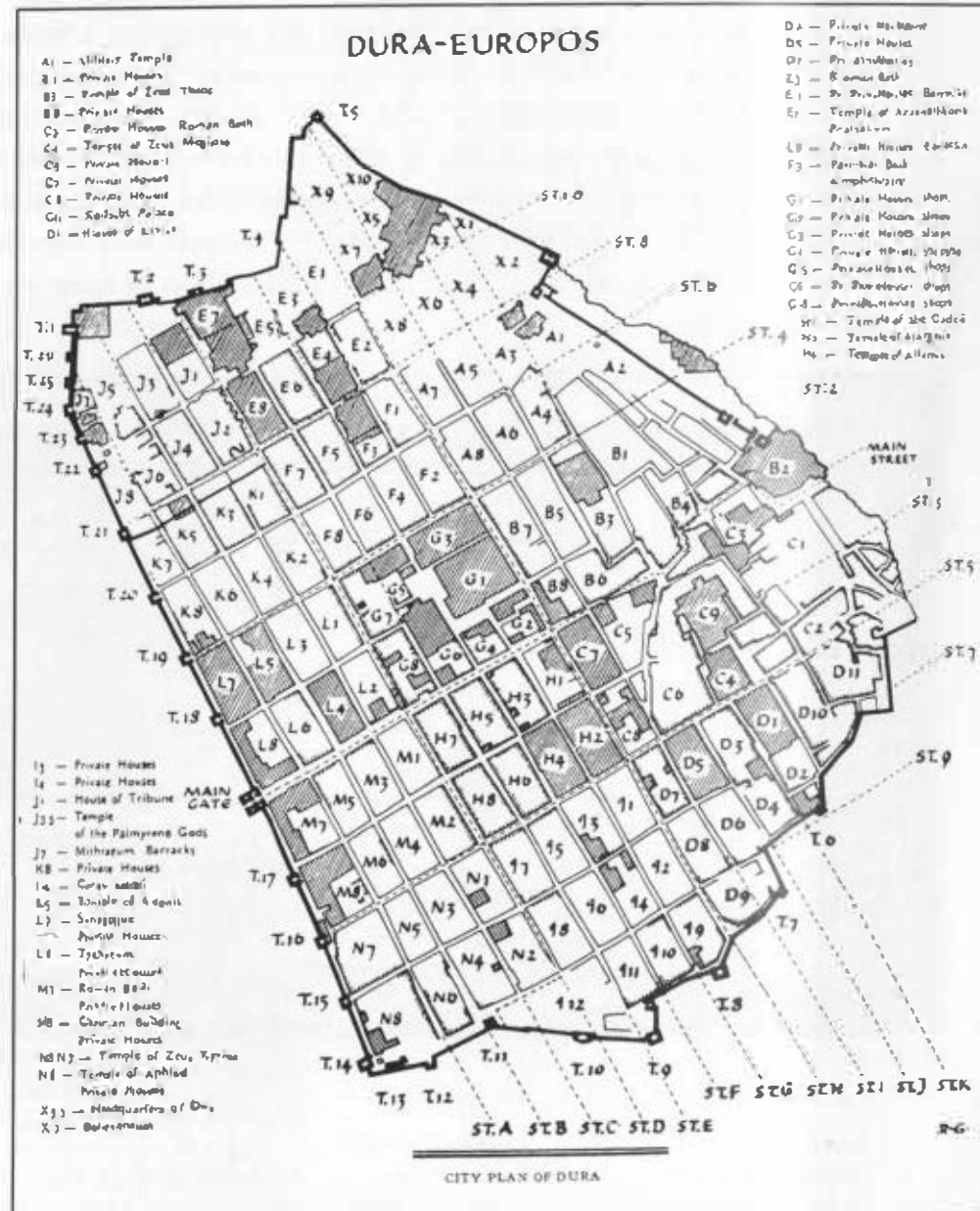


THIS IS THE EARLIEST SYNAGOGUE PLAQUE IN ISRAEL. IT TELLS HOW A GREEK-SPEAKING JEW NAMED THEODOTOS DONATED A SYNAGOGUE IN JERUSALEM DURING THE FIRST CENTURY C.E. THE INSCRIPTION IS WRITTEN IN GREEK. IT READS:

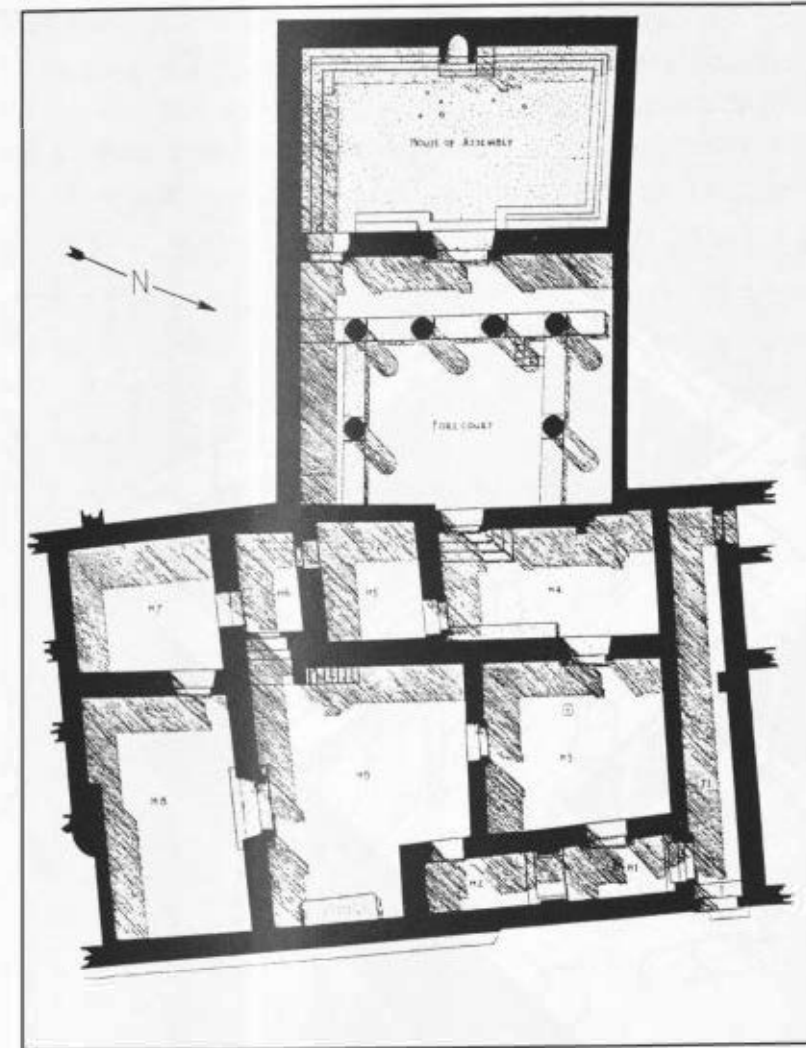
THEODOTOS, SON OF VETENOS THE PRIEST AND A SYNAGOGUE LEADER, SON OF A SYNAGOGUE LEADER AND GRANDSON OF A SYNAGOGUE LEADER, BUILT THE SYNAGOGUE FOR THE READING OF THE TORAH AND STUDYING OF THE COMMANDMENTS, AND AS A HOSTEL WITH CHAMBERS AND WATER INSTALLATIONS TO PROVIDE FOR THE NEEDS OF VISITORS FROM ABROAD, WHICH HIS FATHERS, THE ELDERS AND SIMONIDES FOUNDED.

One of the most beautiful synagogues ever discovered by archaeologists was found in Syria, on a hill overlooking the Euphrates River. It was uncovered in Dura Europos, a small Roman city located in a green farming region. Today hardly anyone lives there and this region looks like a desert. In ancient times Dura Europos was a border city between two rival empires, the Romans and the Persians. This area was a source of strife between these two mighty empires as each fought to control the area near the Euphrates

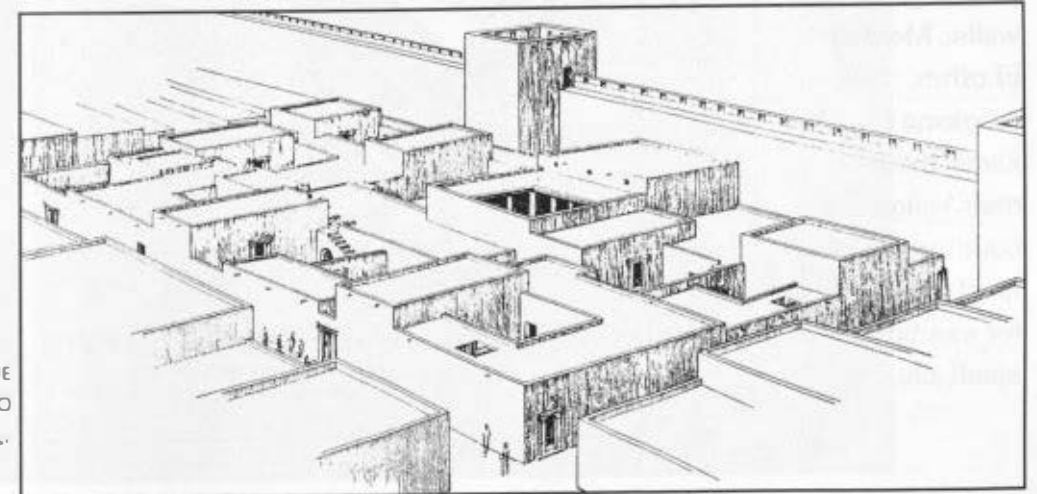
River. Dura Europos was a rich community, profiting from trade between Persia and Rome. Followers of many different religions settled in this prosperous border city. These included believers in the many Roman and Persian gods, as well as Christians and Jews.



DURA EUPOPOS WAS COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY A WALL. THE SYNAGOGUE WAS NEXT TO THE WALL OF THIS LARGE AND MULTICULTURAL BORDER CITY. THE SYNAGOGUE IS IN AREA L7. CAN YOU FIND IT?



THE SYNAGOGUE OF DURA EUPOPOS HAD MANY ROOMS. SOME OF THEM MAY HAVE BEEN A HOSTEL FOR GUESTS FROM DISTANT LANDS.

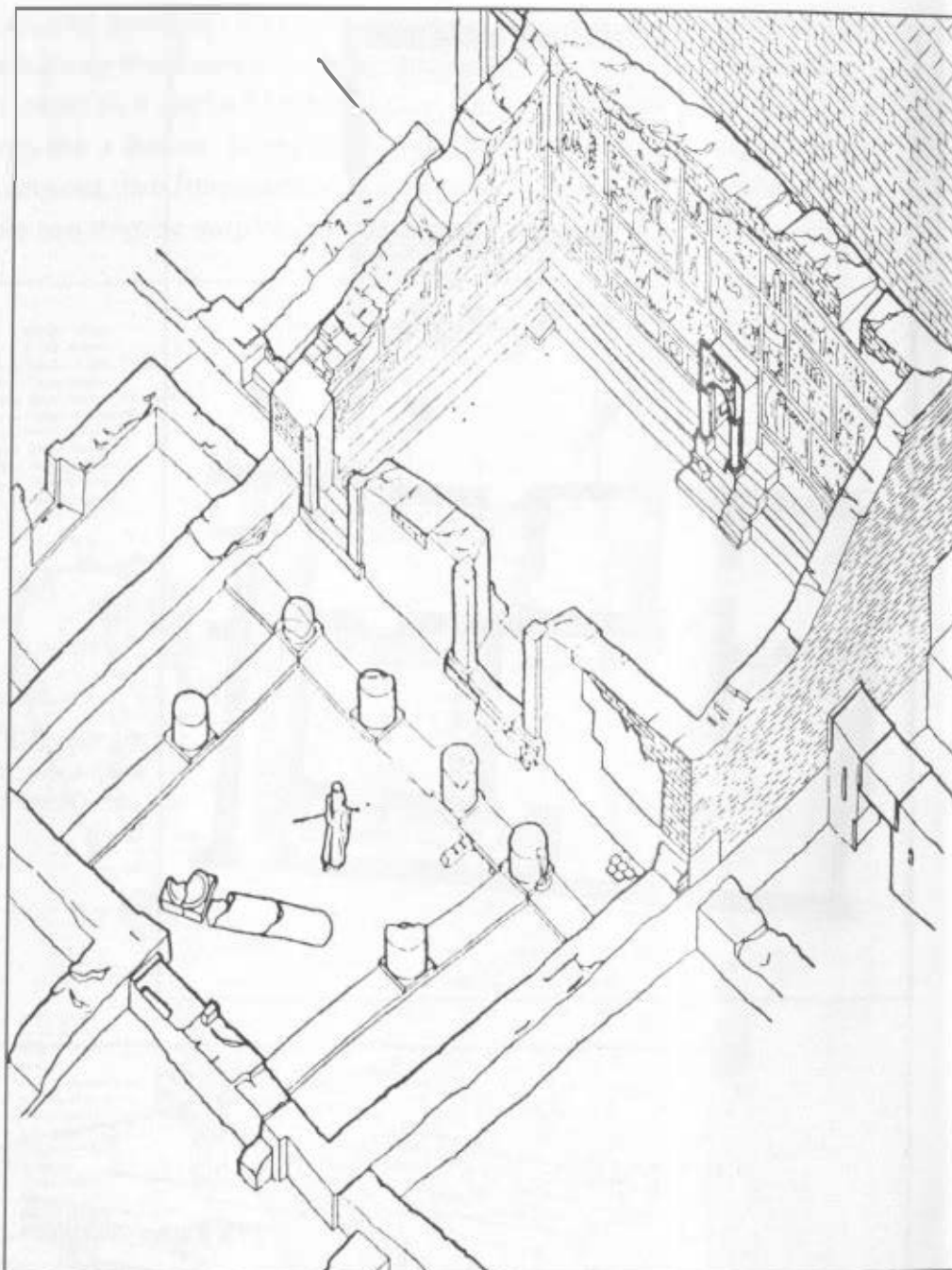


THE SYNAGOGUE WAS BUILT NEXT TO THE CITY WALL.

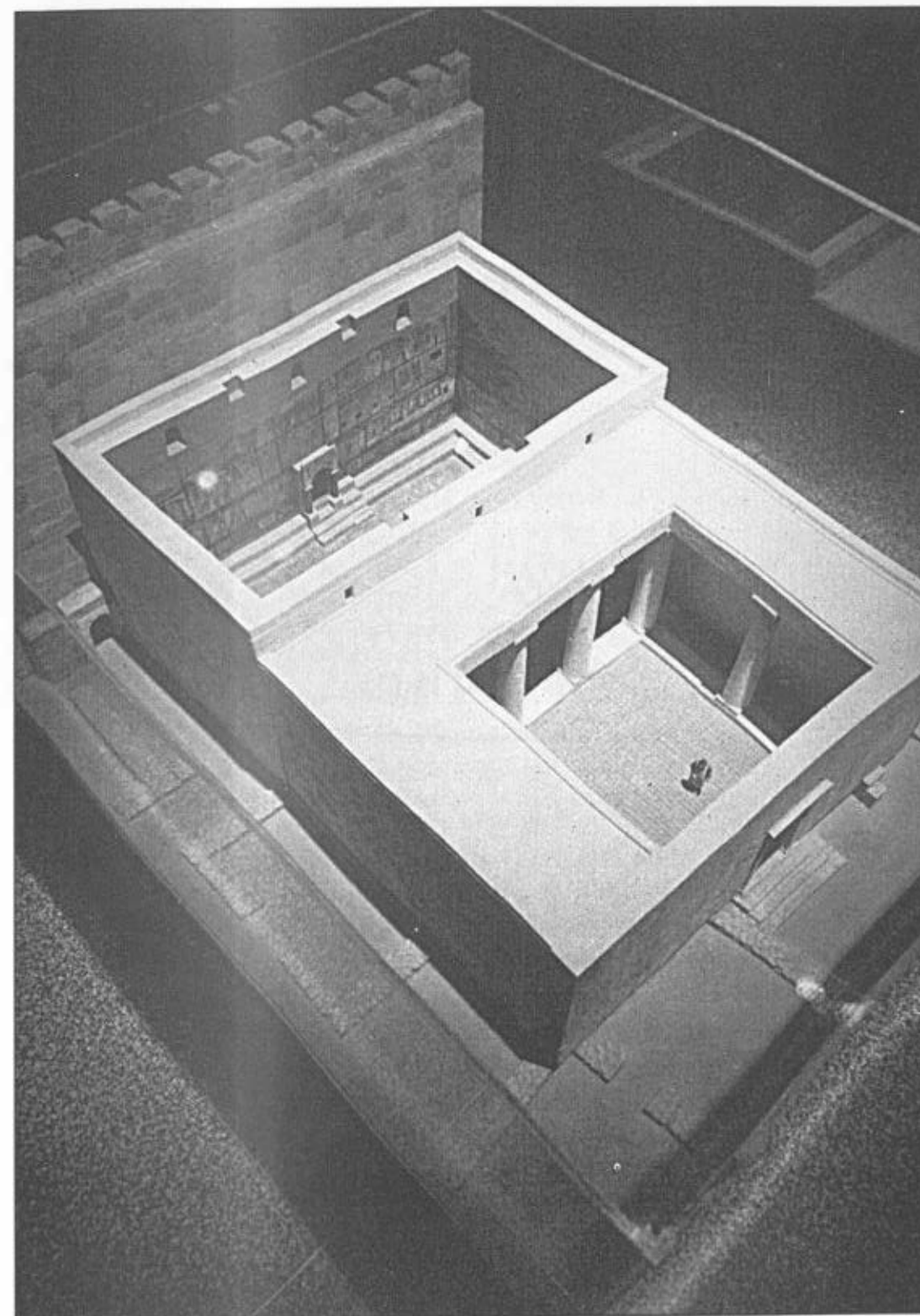
One of the first things the Jews of Dura Europos did was to establish a synagogue. They renovated a large private house near the northern wall of the city.

The Jewish community grew and became wealthy. The sanctuary of the synagogue was enlarged by the growing community, and artists were commissioned to create beautiful paintings on its walls. Members of other religions did the same thing in their religious buildings. The local Christians,

for example, bought a house down the street from the synagogue and constructed a small church.



THIS IS WHAT THE ARCHAEOLOGISTS FOUND WHEN THEY EXCAVATED THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE



THIS MODEL OF THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE IS AT THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM IN NEW YORK CITY.

[illegible]

THIS HOUSE WAS BUILT
IN THE YEAR FIVE HUNDRED FIFTY AND SIX, WHICH IS YEAR THREE OF PHILLIP
CAESAR DURING THE ELDERSHIP OF SAMUEL
THE PRIEST SON OF YEDAYA THE LEADER.
THE FOLLOWING WERE PATRONS OF THIS WORK:
ABRAM THE TREASURER, SAMUEL, SON OF SAFRA, ARSHAKH THE CONVERT,
IN THE YEAR ONE AND FIFTY THEY ESTABLISHED...
...THE BLESSING FROM THE HEAVENS
AND ALL IN...TOILED AND WORKED
PEACE TO THEM AND TO THEIR WIVES AND THEIR SONS ALL.

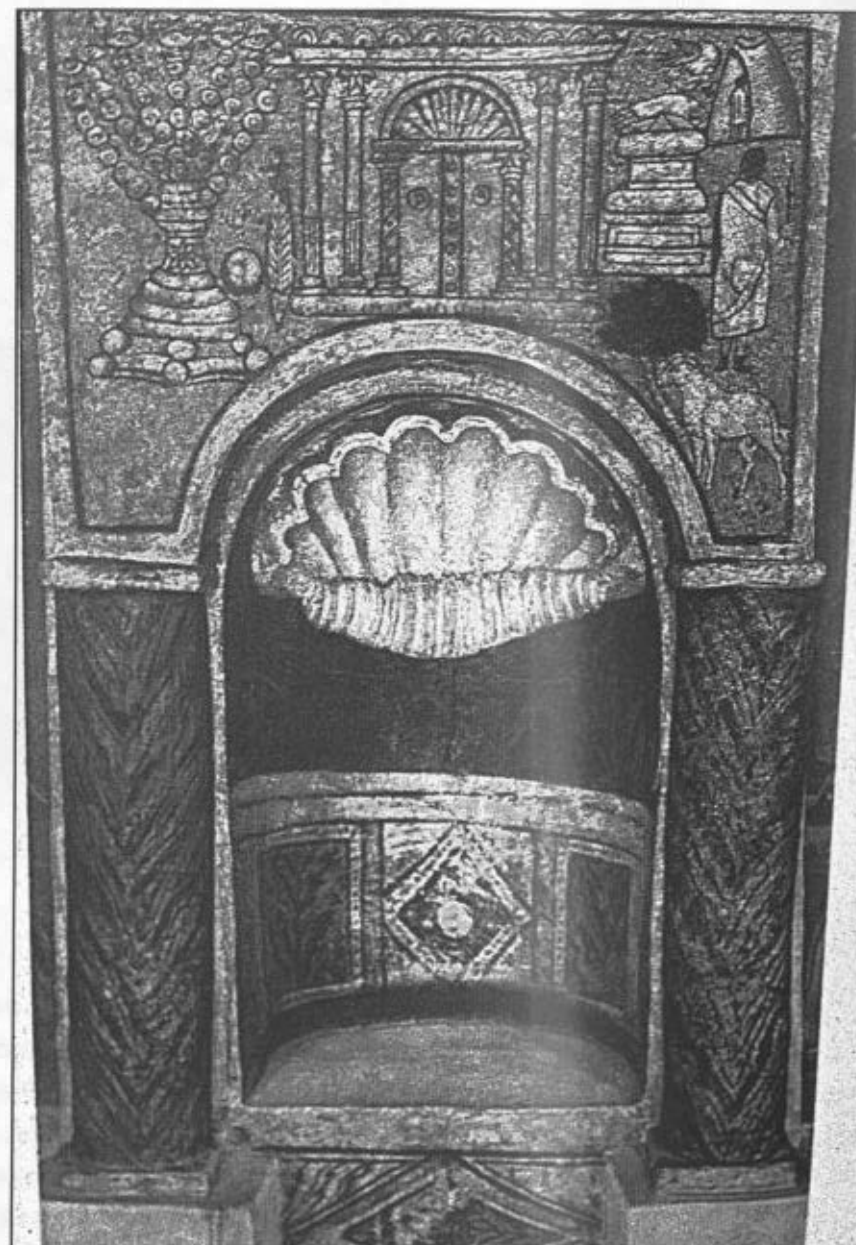
30

A black and white photograph of a large, ancient stone wall covered in numerous rectangular panels of carved reliefs. The panels depict various figures, including deities and humans, in different poses and settings. A prominent, ornate arched doorway is visible in the lower center of the wall.

Worshippers entering the synagogue of Dura Europos were surrounded by wall paintings of brilliant colors. Dark reds, royal blues and deep greens all mixed on its walls. The room had very few windows, and was lit by tall metal lamps. Each lamp held numerous small lamps that burned olive oil. The flickering wicks of the lamps and the pure olive oil gave the room a golden glow. Faces looked out from the paintings on the walls, their large eyes capturing the glance of all who entered. Each of the four walls of the sanctuary were painted with images of ancient holy men and women: the heroes of the Bible. Abraham, Moses, the Daughter of Pharaoh, King David, Esther and Mordecai were all there. The massive Torah ark stood at the center of the western wall.

The Torah ark was the most important part of the synagogue. As in our synagogues, the ark was built on the wall facing Jerusalem. The holy scrolls of the Torah were stored in the large ark, covered with a curtain. Above the Torah scrolls, the artists of Dura Europos painted a picture of the Jerusalem Temple. Although the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., the Jews of Dura, like other Jews, prayed that God would rebuild it quickly.

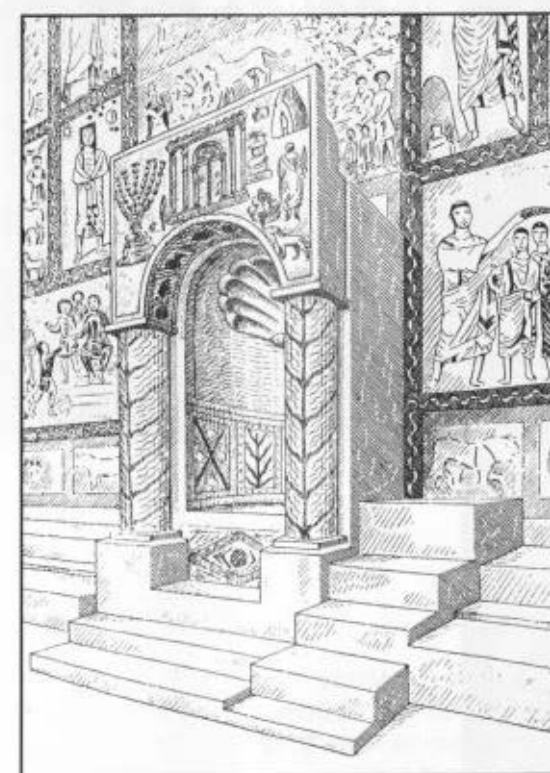
To the left of the Temple picture is a seven branched menorah, and to the right of the Temple is an image of Abraham binding Isaac. The Dura Europos Torah ark was donated by a man named Uzi. An inscription on the front of the ark says "I, Uzi, donated the Torah ark."



THE TORAH ARK OF THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE. THE TORAH SCROLL WAS KEPT IN THE NICHE IN THE CENTER.



THIS DRAWING OF THE BINDING OF ISAAC WAS FOUND ON THE TORAH ARK.



DRAWING OF THE DURA TORAH ARK.

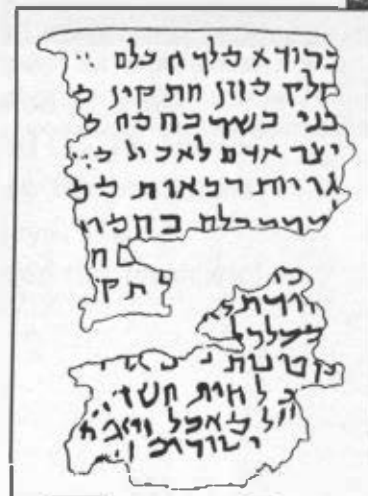


DR. STEVEN FINE POINTS OUT DETAILS OF THE TORAH ARK IN YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM'S HALF SCALE MODEL OF THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE.

Above the Torah ark is an image of Moses holding a Torah scroll open for all to see. If you look closely at the scroll you will see the letters of the Torah showing through the back of the parchment. If you look at the Torah scroll in your own synagogue, you might see the letters from the back as well. A small piece of papyrus written on in Hebrew was also found near the synagogue. Its letters are the same form as those in a Torah scroll. One scholar thinks that the words in this parchment are part of *Birkat ha-Mazon*, the Grace after Meals.



MOSES HOLDING AN OPEN TORAH SCROLL



THIS ANCIENT MANUSCRIPT OF *BIRKAT HA-MAZON*, THE GRACE AFTER MEALS, WAS DISCOVERED NEAR THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE. YOU CAN READ THE WORDS *ברוך* AND *מלך* "BLESSED" AND "KING" IN THE FIRST LINE.



NOTICE HOW MOSES' CLOTHING IN THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE PAINTINGS ARE VERY SIMILAR TO THOSE WORN BY THE ROMAN MEN IN THESE PICTURES.

Moses in our painting is dressed in a *chiton* (pronounced *kī-ton*), a typical type of clothing worn during the Roman period that looks to us a lot like a toga. He is dressed in the same way that the people of Dura Europos might have dressed when they came to the synagogue. For them, Moses was the most important teacher who had ever lived. By dressing Moses like a member of the community and not in clothing from Biblical times, the Jews of Dura Europos invite him and his teachings into their world and their lives.



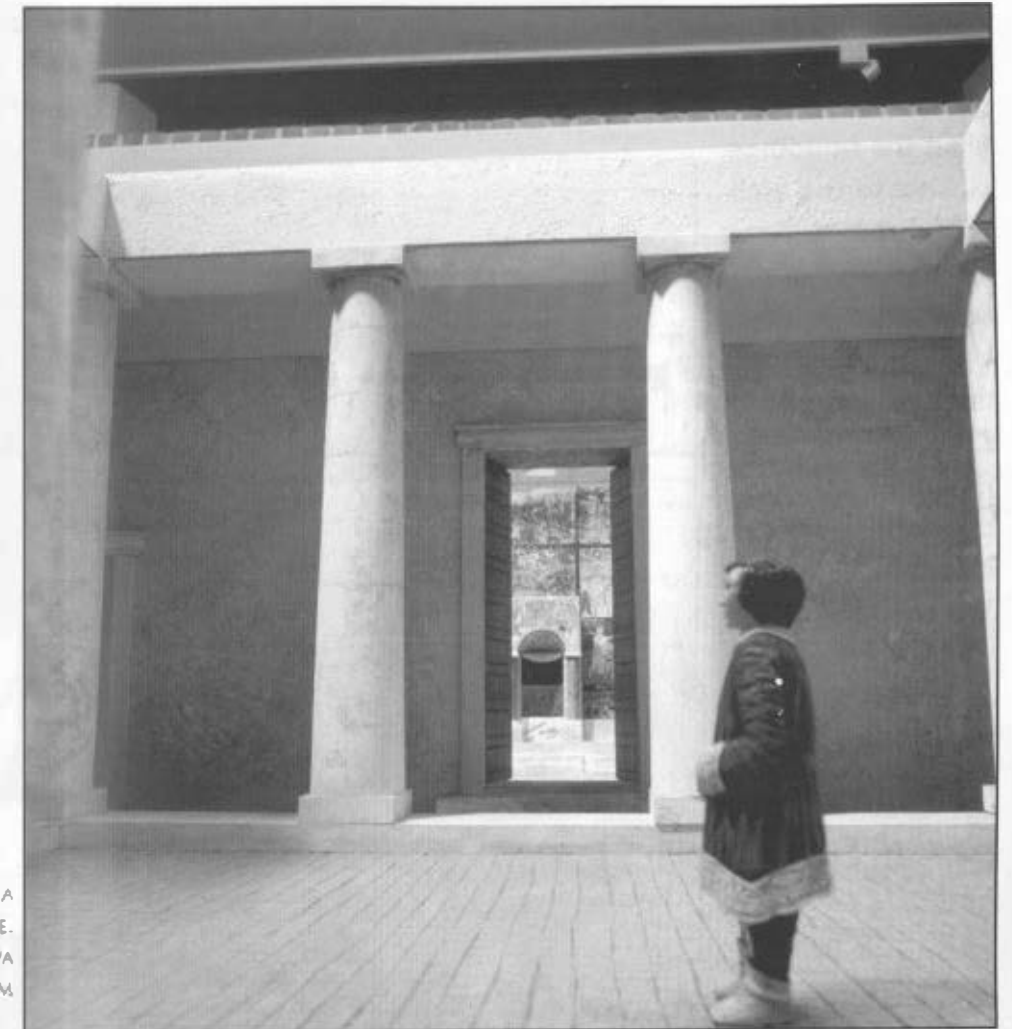
The paintings of the Dura Europos synagogue are organized in the same way that we draw comic strips today. Each picture is in its own frame, one following the next. Many different biblical stories appear on the walls. Near the Torah ark is the baby Moses being pulled out of the Nile River, and close by (illustrated above) is Moses leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt.



THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL CROSSING THE RED SEA, WITH MOSES LEADING THEM. THIS WAS THE FIRST PAINTING FROM THE SYNAGOGUE THAT WAS DISCOVERED BY ARCHAEOLOGISTS.



The picture to your left is from the Book of Esther. Men in Roman clothing cheer Mordecai on as he is being led through the streets of Shushan by the evil Haman! The story of Mordecai and Esther was very important to the Jews of Dura Europos. The Esther story took place in the land of the Persians, just east of Dura Europos.

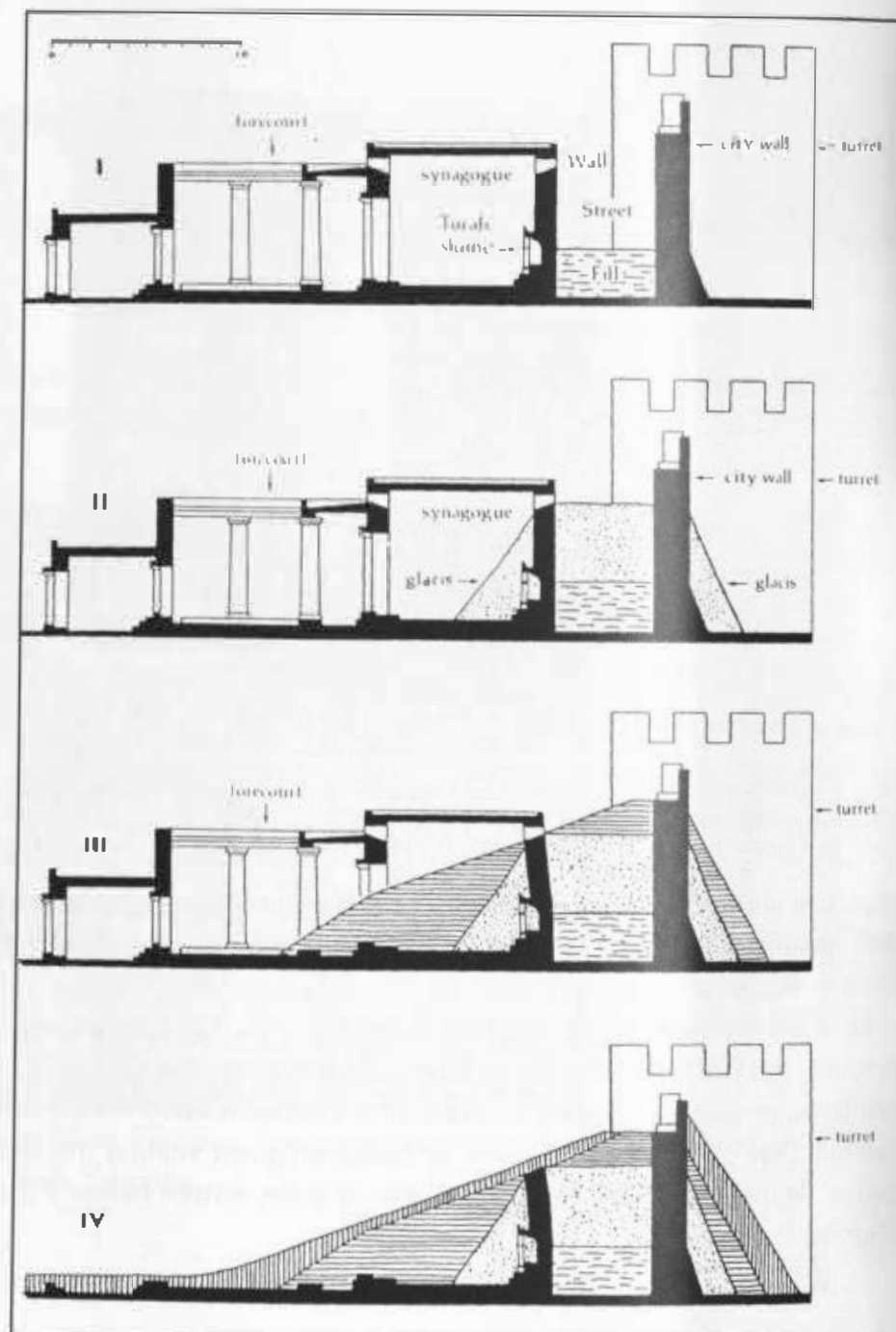


A VISITOR TO THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE. MODEL AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM.

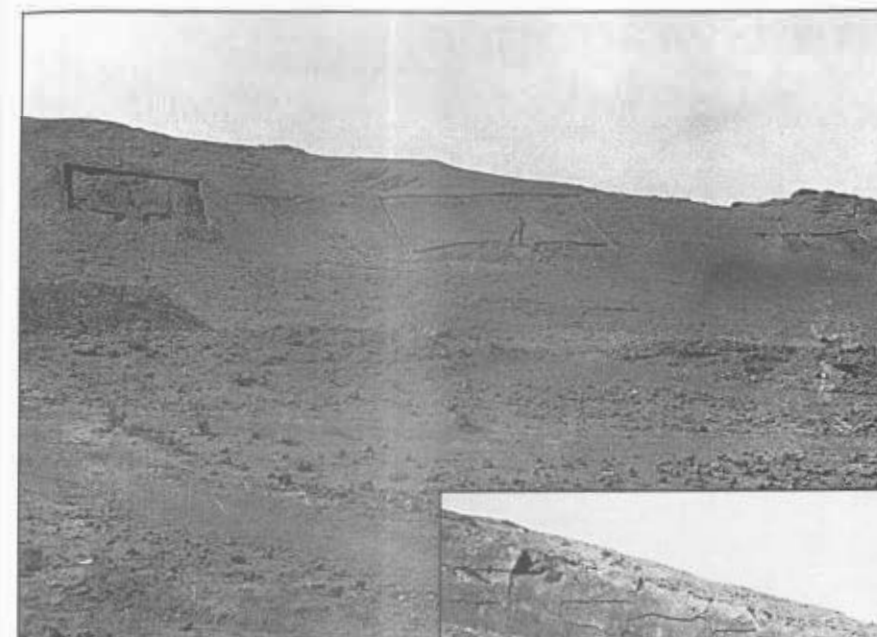
Important visitors who came to the Dura Europos synagogue sometimes scratched their impressions onto the paintings. While today, we would be arrested for destroying great works of art, scratching impressions onto paintings was a compliment to the artist in the ancient world. The graffiti on the Dura Europos synagogue walls often list the date, the name of the visitor, and a comment on the quality of the synagogue paintings. In one inscription we hear of a Persian named Yazdanpese the scribe (lets call him "Yaz" for short) who was an honored guest visiting the Dura Europos synagogue. At the end of his tour, these words were written below the picture of Mordecai's horse:

...When Yazdanperse the scribe came to this house and this picture was looked at...praise was made.

The synagogue of Dura Europos met a sad end. In 256 C.E. the Persian army attacked Dura Europos. The synagogue, as well as the church and the temples of other religions, were built next to the city wall. In order to defend the city, the Roman army filled the buildings closest to the wall with dirt to strengthen their defenses. Unfortunately for the people of Dura, the Persians broke through and destroyed the city. The synagogue was buried underground for almost 1700 years, until American and French archaeologists discovered it under a huge mound of dirt in 1932.



DRAWING OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY



SITE OF THE DURA EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE BEFORE EXCAVATION. THE RECTANGLE TO THE RIGHT AT THE TOP OF THE HILL IS THE SYNAGOGUE.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE SYNAGOGUE WALL PAINTINGS.



The archaeologists were astounded to find the synagogue. Archaeologist Clark Hopkins described the discovery as being "like a page from the Arabian Nights. Aladdin's lamp had been rubbed, and suddenly from the dry, brown desert had appeared paintings, not just one nor a panel nor a wall, but a whole building, scene after scene... in a way never dreamed of before."

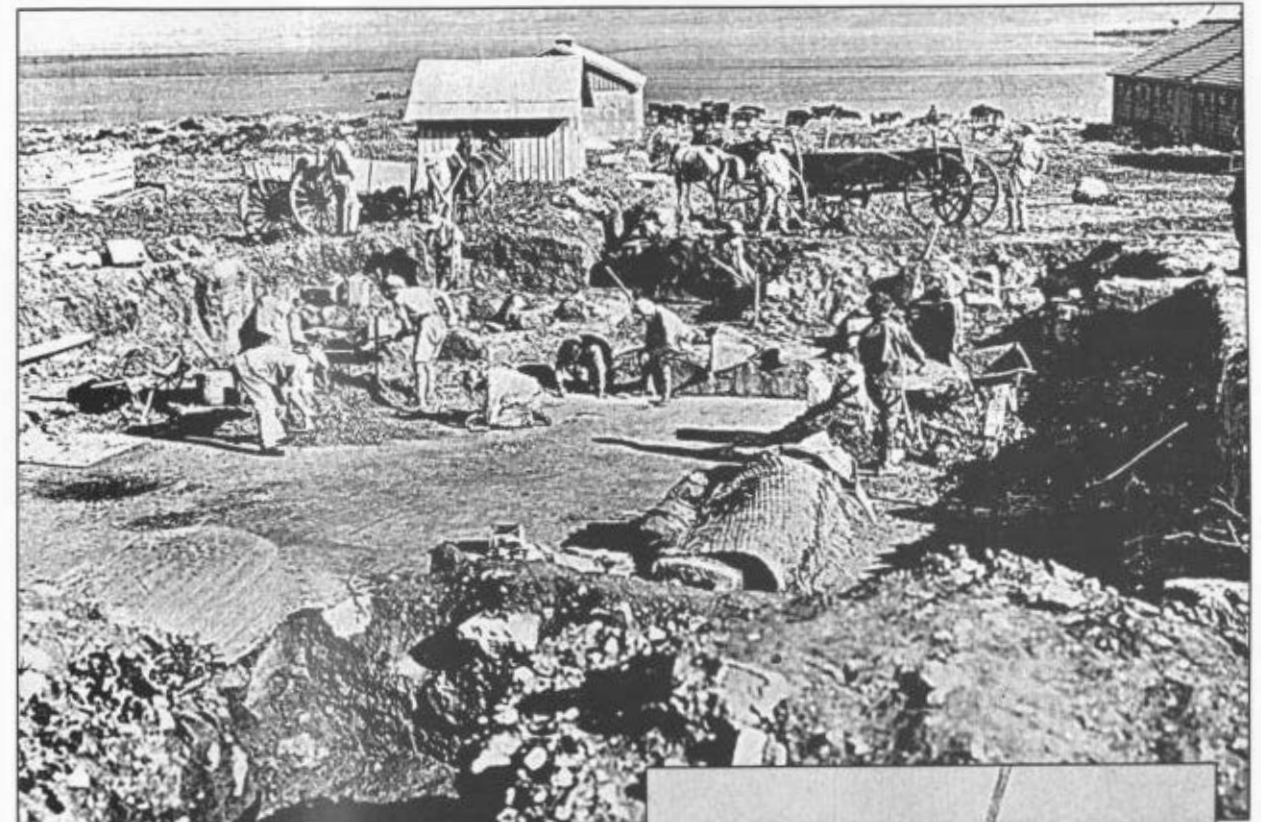
THE SYNAGOGUE OF DURA EUROPOS DURING EXCAVATION.

The Beth Alpha Synagogue, 6th Century C.E.



SITE OF BETH ALPHA SYNAGOGUE IN THE JEZREEL VALLEY IN NORTHERN ISRAEL

The year is 1928. The place is Kibbutz Beth Alpha, a village in the Jezreel valley of northern Israel. Members of this new kibbutz were digging an irrigation ditch to water their crops. To their surprise, the kibbutzniks uncovered a small part of a beautifully colored mosaic floor. Looking closely at their discovery, they could make out signs of the zodiac and Hebrew inscriptions. A messenger was sent to Jerusalem to contact the renowned Professor of Jewish Archaeology, Eliezer L. Sukenik. He told Dr. Sukenik about the mosaic and its inscriptions. Sukenik knew immediately that it was the floor of an ancient synagogue, and within a week the excited archaeologist left for the Galilee to excavate it.



EXCAVATING THE BETH ALPHA SYNAGOGUE.

Professor Sukenik recruited volunteers from the kibbutz to help dig up Beth Alpha's buried treasure. The kibbutzniks were eager to participate in the excavation of an ancient synagogue! Professor Sukenik recalls their excitement: "This was the place where their ancestors had lived and died fifteen hundred or two thousand years before. Their history had been uncovered, and they could see it with their own eyes."



PHOTOGRAPHING THE MOSAIC FLOOR OF BETH ALPHA SYNAGOGUE.

The kibbutzniks, lead by Sukenik, worked quickly to uncover the mosaic. The mosaic was all that remained of a large and beautiful synagogue. Sukenik hurried back to Jerusalem to bring a photographer. He also brought his eleven year old son, Yigael, to help him with the excavation. News of the Beth Alpha synagogue spread quickly throughout the Land of Israel, and around the world. The news even reached America.



PROFESSOR SUKENIK AND HIS TEAM OF EXCAVATORS. SUKENIK IS THE MAN WITH THE HAT AND THE MOUSTACHE IN THE SECOND ROW.



THIS MODEL OF THE BETH ALPHA SYNAGOGUE CAN BE SEEN AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM IN NEW YORK CITY.

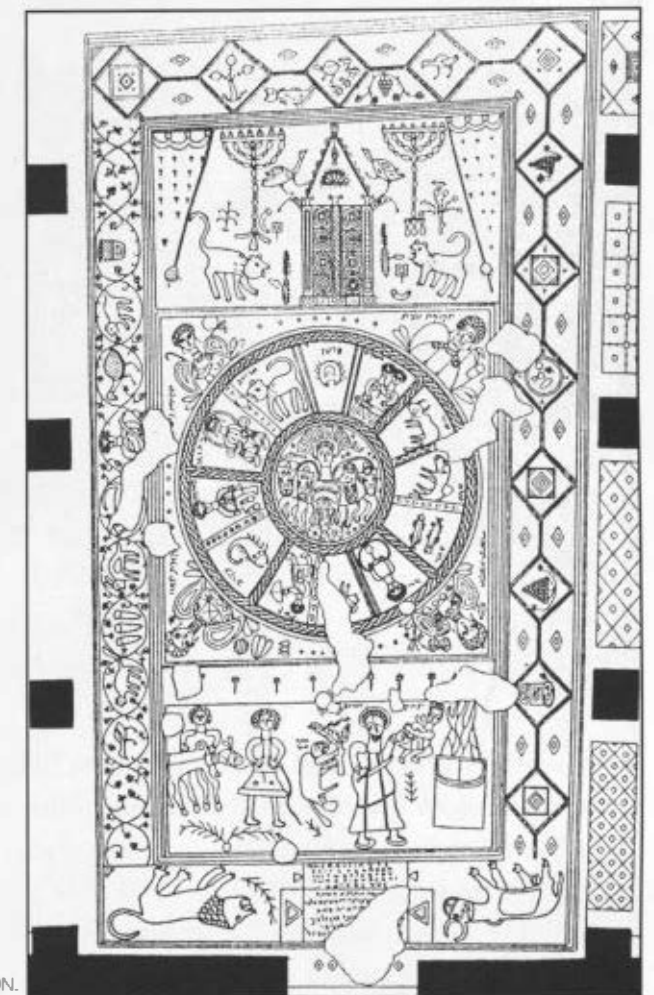


A GREEK INSCRIPTION BLESSING MARIANOS AND HIS SON HANINA FOR MAKING THIS BEAUTIFUL MOSAIC.

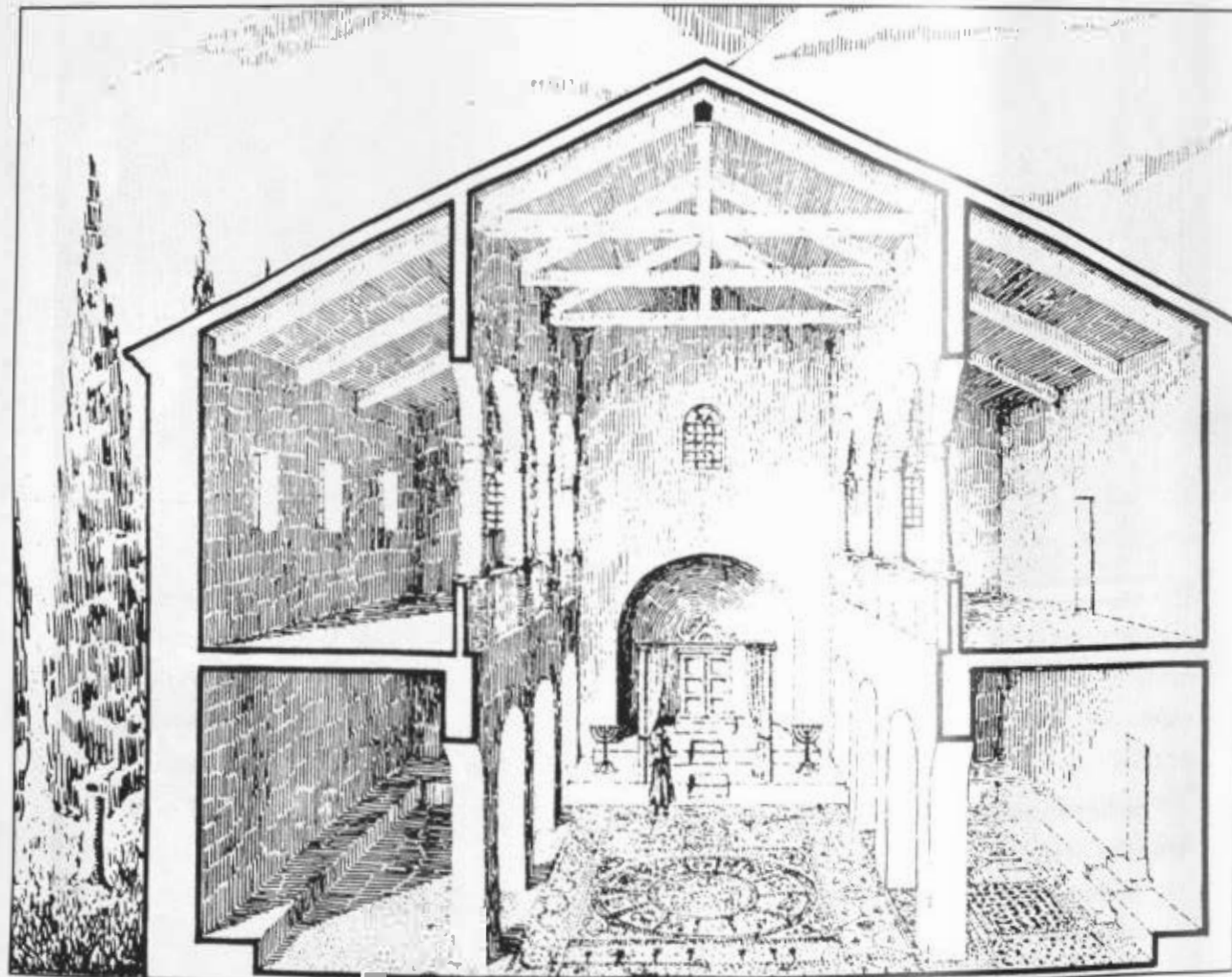
DRAWING OF THE ENTIRE FLOOR AFTER EXCAVATION.

The mosaic that Professor Sukenik and the kibbutz members discovered was the floor of a building that existed during the 6th century C.E. We know how old it is because an inscription in the mosaic says that "this mosaic was laid in the sixth year... of the reign of Justin the king." This Roman ruler reigned between 518 and 527 C.E. The mosaic floor was made of many small stones, in numerous colors. Marianos and his son Hanina were the artisans who made the synagogue mosaic. An inscription in the floor tells us so:

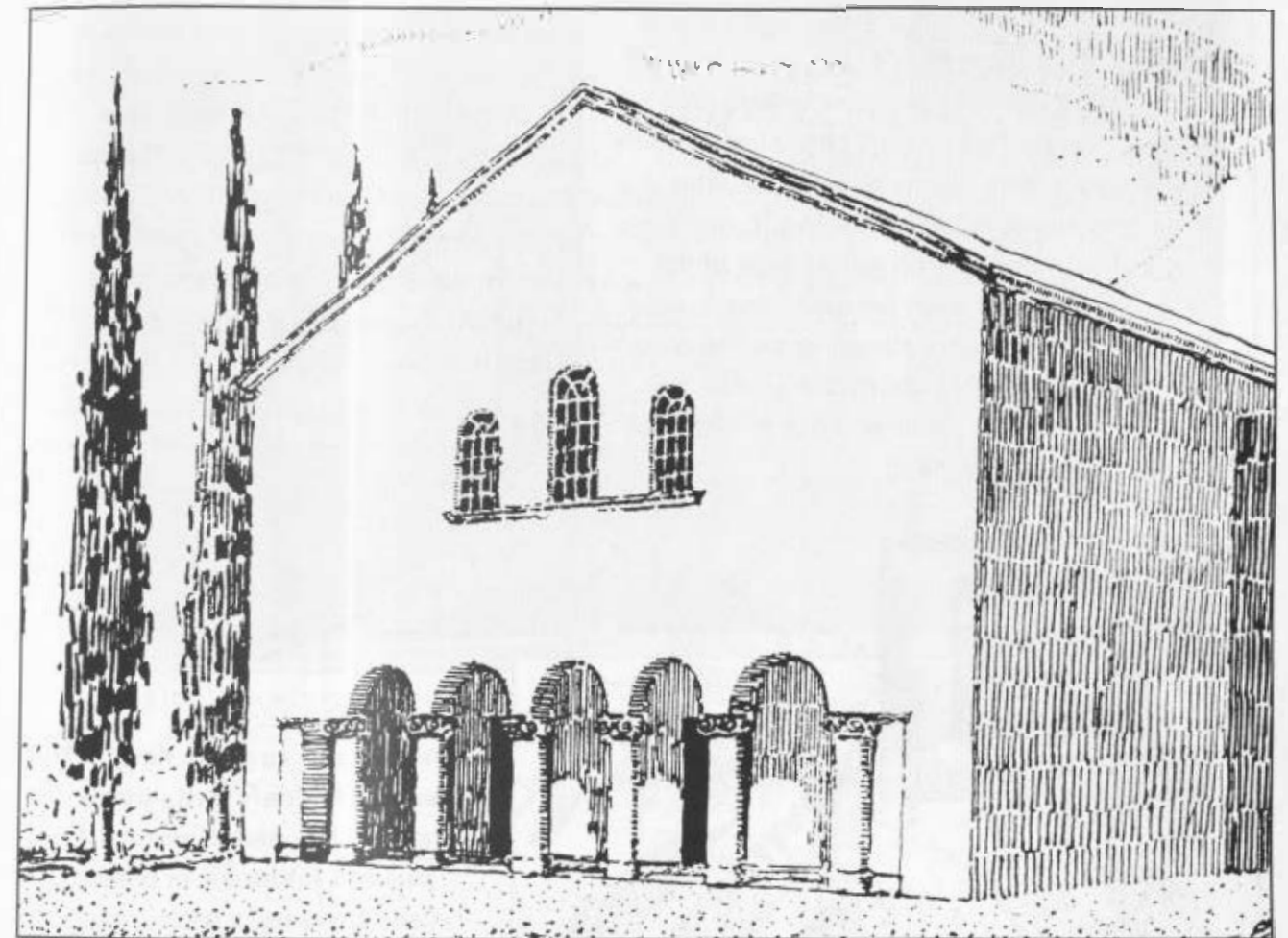
Remembered for good the artisans who made this work: Marianos and Hanina his son.



The synagogue construction involved all of the families of Beth Alpha. Some donated columns, and others gave stones for the mosaic. The mosaic inscription says that "all the people of the town" helped pay for the mosaic. Some people donated their time, dragging and lifting heavy stones and applying plaster to the walls. Marianos, Hanina and the other workers of Beth Alpha completed the synagogue building before Rosh ha-Shanah. There was great celebration, and all of the townspeople looked forward to beginning the new year in their new synagogue. While walking to the old synagogue on Shabbat, the people usually chattered about the latest Roman law or the cost of vegetables in the market place of Beth Shean. Today the people spoke only of the new synagogue building.



DRAWING OF THE INTERIOR. THE SYNAGOGUE OF BETH ALPHA AS IT ORIGINALLY LOOKED



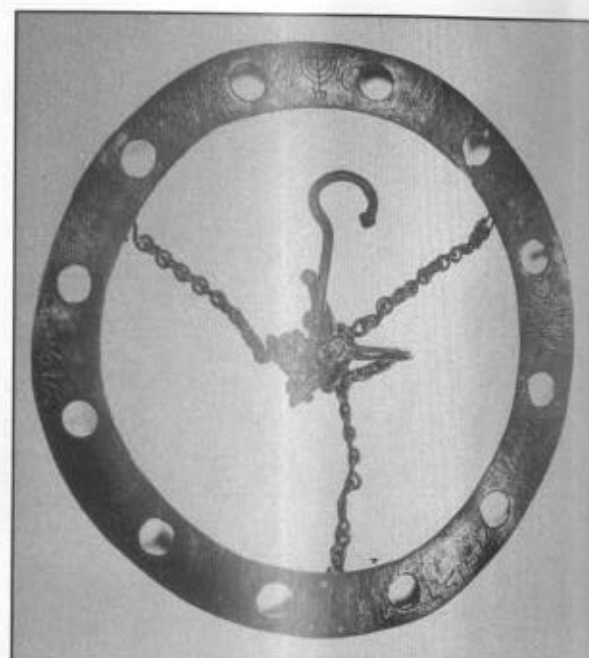
DRAWING OF THE EXTERIOR. THE SYNAGOGUE OF BETH ALPHA AS IT ORIGINALLY LOOKED

The congregants lowered their voices when they entered the courtyard of the synagogue. Each took off his shoes, and filled a pottery flask with water. "Marianos, your mosaic is a masterpiece," whispered one of the community leaders, as he spilled the water over his hands and feet. The famous Rabbi Tanhum had even come from the academy of Beth Shean to give the Torah sermon! This was a momentous day! Marianos and Hanina were filled with pride as they walked into the sanctuary and saw the synagogue filled with the people of Beth Alpha.

Hanina had been in the sanctuary many times over the years of construction. Today it was different. The warm glow of the olive oil burning in lamps hanging from the ceiling was golden. Hanina had dreamt of seeing the curtain hanging from the Torah ark. His aunt and uncle had spent months weaving it, and here it was! The menorahs on either side of the Torah ark that had been bought from Joshua the metal worker were standing on the bima. Only last night Rabbi Abun, the scribe, finished a new Torah scroll and put it in the ark. Today it was all finished!



A SYNAGOGUE MENORAH FROM TIBERIAS



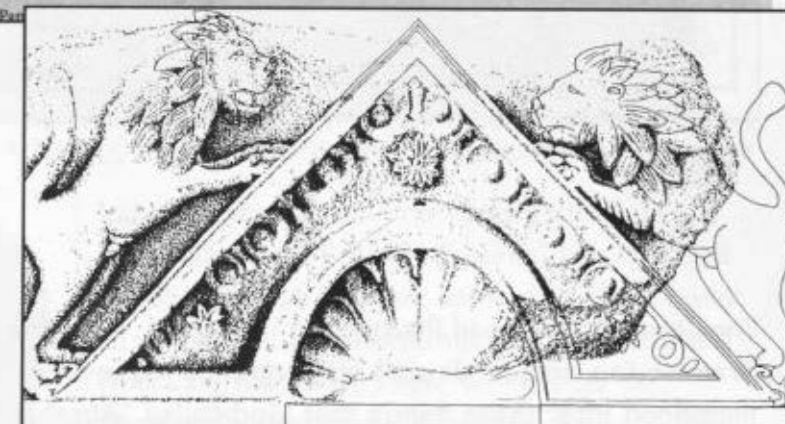
THIS BRONZE LAMP WAS DONATED TO A SYNAGOGUE IN THE GALILEE.

"RABBI ABUN, MAY HE REST HONORABLY" IS THE INSCRIPTION ON THIS TOMBSTONE. IN CHOOSING THE NAMES FOR THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN HANINA'S WORLD WE CHOSE ACTUAL NAMES OF PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN ANCIENT TIMES.



BETH ALPHA TORAH ARK MOSAIC.

The Torah ark was opened and the scroll that Rabbi Abun had written was taken out. It was wrapped in beautiful red and brown woven cloths with bells hanging from their edges. The Torah was put down on a table, and everyone sat down. Hanina had come to the synagogue very early that Rosh haShanah morning to place his mat right next to the picture of Abraham that Marianos had set in the mosaic. It was a large picture, showing everything that happens in Genesis, Chapter 22, the "Binding of Isaac." This was Hanina's favorite story in the whole Torah! It was the Torah reading for Rosh ha-Shanah!



NABRATIN TORAH ARK. THIS IS THE TOP OF A TORAH ARK THAT WAS DISCOVERED IN A SYNAGOGUE IN THE GALILEE BY ARCHAEOLOGISTS CAROL AND ERIC MEYERS.



THE STORY OF THE BINDING OF ISAAC

The Torah reader read the portion in Hebrew, then the translator retold the story in Aramaic (an ancient Jewish language) so that everyone could understand it: "And it happened after these things that God called "Abraham, Abraham," and Abraham said "Here I am." Hanina listened to every word. As the reader called out the name of Abraham, Hanina's finger unconsciously followed the outline of Abraham's head on "his" mosaic.

Finally, it was time to put the Torah scroll back in the ark. The Torah reader opened Rabbi Abun's scroll and held it high for all to see. The men and the women looked at its holy letters and bowed low to the ground as the prayer leader announced "This is the Torah that Moses set before the Children of Israel."



STUDENTS PRAYING AT THE BETH TRILCH COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOL IN BALTIMORE, MD.



A CHILD BLOWING A SHOFAR

Later in the prayers, the *shofar*, (the ram's horn) was blown. Rabbi Tanhum, the honored guest from Beth Shean, sat in a chair of honor to speak. He started slowly, teaching that the Ram's horn that we blow reminds us of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac.

Now Hanina understood why Marianos had been so careful to make the horn of the ram in the Binding of Isaac picture look like a shofar! The prayers over, Marianos and Hanina slowly walked home. They were sad to leave "their synagogue." Even still, Hanina was hungry. It was time for lunch!



THE ZODIAC MOSAIC
FROM BETH ALPHA
APPEARED ON THESE
ISRAELI STAMPS

The excavation completed, Professor Sukenik prepared to tell the world about the Beth Alpha synagogue. Jews and non-Jews came from all over the Land of Israel to see the mosaic. A building was erected over it by the kibbutz members to protect their treasure. Sukenik traveled to Berlin in Germany and even to America to teach about this marvelous find. His son Yigael was proud too. He became an archaeologist, like his dad. In fact, it was Yigael who discovered the synagogue of Masada!

Discovering Modern Synagogues

The archaeological discovery of ancient synagogues gives us exciting clues about how Jews lived long ago. Many of the things that were done in ancient synagogues are still part of synagogue life today. This connection over thousands of years gives modern Jews a link to their past, to the world of our ancient Rabbis. Studying ancient synagogues can help you understand modern synagogues.

Discover the ancient roots of a modern synagogue in your own community. Explore a synagogue near your home using the following questionnaire. As you walk through the sanctuary and other rooms of the synagogue, try to discover connections between this synagogue and the ancient synagogues you have read about. A teacher, rabbi or a knowledgeable member of the community will be able to help you.

1. What is the name and address of the synagogue. What does the name of the synagogue mean?

2. In large cities in the land of Israel there were many ancient synagogues, and in smaller places there was only one. The same is true today. Is there more than one synagogue in your town? If so, list their names:

3. The leader of the Dura Europos synagogue was Samuel. What is the name of the rabbi of your synagogue?
