

# COIN DEPOSITS FROM ANCIENT SYNAGOGUES IN LATE ANTIQUE PALESTINE

Tine Rassalle

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Approved by:

Jodi Magness

Nathan Elkins

Jennifer Gates-Foster

Evyatar Marienberg

Zlatko Plese

Jürgen Zangenberg

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tine Rassalle: Coin Deposits from Ancient Synagogues in Late Antique Palestine  
(Under the Direction of Jodi Magness)

During archaeological excavations over the last century, fifty-seven separate coin deposits have been found in ancient synagogues from Late Antique Palestine and the Diaspora. This project provides an overview of these deposits, the buildings they were discovered in, and the specific coins they contained. Based on their archaeological contexts and an analysis of the Jewish religious and socio-economic circumstances of Late Antiquity, I argue that there are seven possible reasons for why these deposits were placed inside a synagogue building. This dissertation project gives an overview of these categories and explores the different economic and symbolic functions coins in sacred spaces could have had in ancient Jewish society.

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## ROMAN AND BYZANTINE EMPERORS AND RULERS

### ROMAN REPUBLIC (as they appear in dissertation catalogue)

Antiochus III	222–187 BCE
Ptolemy IV Philopator	221–204 BCE
Ptolemy Apion	150–145 BCE
Alexander Jannaeus	103–76 BCE
Mattathias Antigonus	40–37 BCE
Marcus Ambivulus	9–13 CE

### ROMAN EMPIRE

Augustus	27 BCE–14 CE
Tiberius	14–37 CE
Gaius (Caligula)	37–41
Agrippa I	41–44
Claudius	41–54
(Felix	52–60)
Nero	54–68
Galba	68–69
Otho	69
Vitellius	69
Vespasian	69–79
Titus	79–81
Domitian	81–96
Nerva	96–98
Trajan	98–117
Hadrian(us)	117–138

Antoninus Pius	138–161
Marcus Aurelius	161–180
Lucius Verus	161–169
Commodus	176–192
Pertinax	193
Didius Julianus	193
Septimius Severus	193–211
(Julia Maesa	194?–224)
Caracalla	198–217
Geta	209–212
Macrinus	217–218
Diadumenian(us)	218
Elagabalus	218–222
Severus Alexander	222–235
Maximinus I Thrax	235–238
Gordian I	238
Gordian II	238
Balbinus	238
Pupienus	238
Gordian III	238–244
Philip	244–249
Decius	249–251
Hostilian	251
Trebonianus Gallus	251–253
Volusianus	251–253

Aemilian	253	Licinius II	317–326
Valerian	253–260	Helena	325–330
Gallienus	253–268	Dalmatius	335–337
(Postumus	260–269)	(Hannibalianus	335–337)
Claudius II Gothicus	268–270	Constantine II	337–340
Quintillus	270	Constans I	337–350
Aurelian	270–275	Constantius II	337–361
(Tetricus	271–274)	Vetranio	350
Tacitus	275–276	Magnentius	350–353
Florianus	276	Constantius Gallus	351–354
Probus	276–282	Julian II Apostata	355–363
Carus	282–283	Jovian	363–364
Carinus	283–285	Valentinian I	364–375
Numerian	283–284	Valens	364–378
Diocletian	284–305	Gratian	367–383
Maximian	286–305	Valentinian II	367–383
Constantius I	305–306	Theodosius I	379–395
(Theodora	305–306)	(Flaccilla	379–395)
Galerius	305–311	Magnus Maximus	383–388
Valerius Severus	306–307	(Flavius Victor	383–388)
Maxentius	306–307	Arcadius	395–408
Constantine I	307–337	Honorius	395–423
(the Great)		Theodosius II	402–450
(Fausta	307–326)	Constantine III	407–411
Licinius I	308–324	(Constans II	409–411)
Maximinus II	311–313	(Eudocia	408–450)
Crispus	317–326	Constantius III	421

(Joannes	423–425)	Tiberius II Constantine	578–582
(Galla Placidia	423–437)	Maurice (Tiberius)	582–602
Valentinian III	425–455	Theodosius	590–602
Pulcheria	450–453	Phocas	602–610
Marcian	450–457	Heraclius I	610–641
Petronius Maximus	455	Constantine III	641
Avitus	455–456	Heraklonas	641
Majorian	457–461	Constans II	641–688
Leo I	457–474	Constantine IV	668–685
Libius Severus	461–465	Heraclius II	659–681
Antemius	467–472	Tiberius	659–681
Olybrius	472	Justinian II	685–695
Glycerius	473	Leontios	695–698
Julius Nepos	475–476	Tiberios III Apsimarus	698–705
Romulus	475–476	Justinian II	705–711
Leo II	474	(second reign)	
Zeno	474–491	Tiberius	706–711
Basiliscus	475–476	Philippikos Bardanes	711–713
(Zenonis	475–476)	Anastasios II	713–715
Anastasius I Dicorus	491–518	Theodosius III	715–717
Justin I	518–527		
Justinian I	527–565		
Justin II	565–578		

## COIN CATALOGUE ABBREVIATIONS

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Vol. 1: Pompey to Domitian. (1880)

Vol. 2: Nerva to Antoninus Pius. (1883)

Vol. 3: Marcus Aurelius to Clodius Albinus. (1883)

Vol. 4: Septimius Severus to Maximinus Thrax. (1884)

Vol. 5: Gordian I to Valerian II. (1885)

Vol. 6: Macrianus to Diocletian & Maximianus. (1886)

Vol. 7: Carausius to Constantine & sons. (1888)

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Vol. 2: Vespasian to Domitian (1930)

Vol. 3: Nerva to Hadrian (1936)

Vol. 4: Antonius Pius to Commodus (1940)

Vol. 5: Pertinax to Elagabalus (1950)

Vol. 6: Severus Alexander to Balbinus (1962)

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Vol. 1: Anastasius I to Maurice, 491–602, by Alfred R. Bellinger (1966)

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Problem

In 1968, Italian Franciscan fathers Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda started excavating a large, monumental building on the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee, at a site called Capernaum.<sup>1</sup> Guided by discoveries made at this site some twenty years before, the friars were hoping to fully uncover the remains of a synagogue where Jesus had ministered and healed the man who was possessed by an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21-27). The excavations ran smoothly, and before long, the basilica-shaped synagogue was completely exposed.<sup>2</sup> The building consisted of a main hall and three side aisles with two rows of seven columns running north-south, and a transverse row of two columns in the north. Three door openings in the southern wall gave access into the building and another opening in the northern wall led into a small side room. A last opening in the eastern wall led to a large, colonnaded courtyard with a stone pavement. Inside the building, two tiers of benches ran along the eastern and western walls.

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<sup>1</sup> Corbo and Loffreda published the excavations of Capernaum in a series of articles and books, written between 1968 and 2008. For a full list of publications by the Franciscan Custody, see <https://www.edizioniterrasantait/en/?st2=cafarnao>. See also the bibliography for works written on Capernaum by V. Corbo, S. Loffreda, and A. Spijkerman.

<sup>2</sup> The first preliminary excavations at Capernaum were conducted in 1905 by the Deutsche Orient Gesellschaft, directed by H. Kohl and C. Watzinger (Kohl and Watzinger, 1916, *Antike Synagogen in Galilean*). The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land took over the excavations in 1907 and published their first excavation report mentioning the synagogue in 1922 (Orfali, 1922, *Caphernaüm et ses Ruines*).

Two platforms could also be discerned, flanking the central entrance in the southern wall. The floor of the building was covered in stone slabs of which patches were preserved intermittently. The excavators followed Kohl's and Watzinger's classification and labeled it a typical example of the so-called "Galilean synagogues": basilical in shape (that is, the building is longer than it is wide), with platforms for the Torah shrine and *bemah* (also spelled *bema*, or *bimah*) against the wall facing Jerusalem, and a paved stone floor without mosaics.<sup>3</sup> Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. That is, until the excavators started digging under the floor of the building.

Over the course of the following 12 years, the excavators collected approximately 24 000 coins from under the pavement of the hall and the courtyard of the synagogue, as well as from under the benches inside the building.<sup>4</sup> Most of the coins were small in size, made of bronze, and ranged in date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Some of the coins were found in clusters, but most were dispersed over a larger area, as if somebody had scattered them haphazardly. Five gold coins of the late 7<sup>th</sup> century were also discovered, hidden behind the benches running along the eastern wall.

The excavators were baffled by this discovery: what was going on here? Why were thousands of coins deposited under this building? Were they accidental losses, unintentionally dropped by the builders, or were they placed in the building for a certain purpose? If so, what purpose? How could they explain this phenomenon?

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<sup>3</sup> For a history of "Galilean synagogues" and how they compare to other synagogue types, see chapter 2.1.

<sup>4</sup> It must be noted that not all the pavement was removed during the excavations. The excavators only opened about fourteen trenches inside the main hall and in the eastern courtyard of the building. Thus, it can be assumed that many more coins remain hidden under the building's floor.

Over the course of the following decades, the mystery continued as archaeologists slowly started to find more and more coin deposits tucked away in ancient synagogues. In 1972, thousands of bronze coins were uncovered in the apse area of the synagogue at 'En Gedi, adjacent to the Dead Sea. In 1977, a couple of hundred coins were found hidden in two cooking pots in a side room of the synagogue at Gush Halav in Upper Galilee. In 1978, hundreds of bronze coins were discovered under the pavement just outside the main entrance to the synagogue at 'En Nashut in the Golan Heights. By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a list of over twenty ancient synagogues could be generated in which at least fifty coins had been discovered, either hidden inside the building or buried immediately next to it. It could no longer be said that Capernaum was a unicum. Something larger seemed to be at hand: a phenomenon of hiding coins in synagogue buildings that was inter-regional and occurred over many centuries.

## **1.2 History of scholarship**

An overview of modern scholarship on the interpretation of the Capernaum coins highlights the need for this study. Such an overview can also help us to understand why most scholars are still confused about how to interpret the phenomenon or why they never thought to consider the issue to begin with.

Soon after the discovery of the Capernaum coins was made public, scholars began to speculate about the possible reason behind their burial.<sup>5</sup> Avi-Yonah was one of the first scholars

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<sup>5</sup> Callegher 2016, p. 155: Capernaum was not the first synagogue building in which coin deposits were found (see catalogue), but it was very probably the first for which the archaeological-stratigraphical context was known with precision, and that was immediately reported to the archaeological authorities; hence why scholars were picking it up.

to address the finds in a 1973 article. He proposed that the coins were hidden under the building deliberately in the 5<sup>th</sup> century when, according to him, Galilee was in danger of an attack, and the money needed to be stashed away for safe-keeping. He writes:

“These hoards show that the synagogue officials (for such hoards were mostly not private) were afraid of attack and ruin. To anyone familiar with Jewish history in fifth-century Palestine, such fears were only too well-founded. The fact that the caches were never recovered is clear evidence that all those who knew of their location either perished or were driven away.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, according to Avi-Yonah, the coins were placed under the synagogue decades after the building was constructed: the synagogue officials had taken the money, opened the floor, hid the coins, and put the pavement back. When the village subsequently was attacked, the officials were killed or driven away; either way, they never made their way back to the synagogue and the coins were lost to history.

This early hypothesis of hiding money inside synagogue buildings to save it from barbarians, thieves, and other disasters found successive proponents and it is still a popular interpretation of synagogue coin deposits. Around the turn of the millennium, for example, a juglet containing fourteen gold coins dated to the reign of Justinian I (527-565 CE) was discovered in the interstices of a wall in the synagogue at Deir ‘Aziz. Knowing that Justinian I had been a great military leader, and that under his reign multiple wars and rebellions were fought, Nili Ahipaz interpreted the deposit as an emergency hoard, hidden by the local people in fear of upcoming war and pillaging.<sup>7</sup> In 2002, Donald Ariel suggested that a possible motivation for hiding coinage in synagogues could have been anxiety about the plague, which

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<sup>6</sup> Avi-Yonah 1973, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Ahipaz 2007, p. 162.

began circulating in Palestine in 541 CE and struck the region hard in mid-542 CE.<sup>8</sup> He writes: “While not all historians view the pandemic in this way, there is no doubt that vis-à-vis hoarding, plagues are excellent explanations for the deposition of hoards, especially small hoards.”<sup>9</sup>

Some scholars, however, contend that the Capernaum synagogue deposits were emergency hoards. To Loffreda, for example, it seems absurd that the heads of the synagogue would make “topsy-turvey a sizeable part of the valuable floor of the prayer room simply to hide hoards of bronze coins of modest value.”<sup>10</sup> Instead, he insists that the coins were deposited simultaneously with the construction of the building and the installation of its floors. His interpretation follows a hypothesis initially proposed by Yoram Kentman and published by Zvi Ilan in 1989. While interpreting the hundreds of coins found under the pavement of the synagogue of Meroth, Ilan writes:

“Jewish law requires that *ma’aser sheni* (the second tithe), approximately 9% of certain crops, be eaten in Jerusalem. It is permissible to transfer (redeem) the value of the crops, carry that coin to Jerusalem, and purchase food and drink, for consumption in the Holy City. In either case, *ma’aser sheni* could only be eaten in Jerusalem while the Temple stood. After the destruction of the Temple in 74 C.E. crops still had to be redeemed before they could be eaten. Jewish law at this time allowed for the symbolic

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<sup>8</sup> Ariel 2002, p. 299. For an overview of the plague and its devastating consequences in the Middle East in the 6th century, see Conrad 1986; Little (ed.) 2006 (especially the contributions by Michael Morony and Hugh Kennedy); and Mordechai *et al.* 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Ariel 2002, p. 299. This hypothesis was also proposed by Ahipaz in her analysis of the Deir ‘Aziz golden coins deposit: “The eastern part of the empire was also struck by a severe plague (541/2 CE) and throughout the 540s and 550s subsequent waves of this pandemic were an important factor in the east’s demographic decline. I believe the Deir ‘Aziz hoard was an emergency hoard, meant to be retrieved when the threat subsided” (Ahipaz 2007, p. 162).

<sup>10</sup> Loffreda 1997, p. 234. He also brings up the fact that it would have been sufficient to make a hole, or at least to only remove one single stone to hide the coins, and that it would have been absurd to scatter the coins over a large area “as grass is sown” if the goal is to recover them one day. Doron Chen also points out that there are no archaeological traces of repairs or relaying of the pavement after initial construction and that “no builder would dig three meters down [to the Stratum B fill where many of the coins were found], as this would undermine the stability of the foundations” (Chen 1986b, p. 135).



redemption of a large amount of crops with coins of little value. While it was impossible to redeem those coins since the Temple no longer existed, the coins retained a holy status and could not be used for any purpose. Jewish law therefore required that they be destroyed. In practice, since ruling authorities forbade the destruction of coins other methods of disposing of the coins had to be found. Perhaps the coins underneath Meroth's floor were *ma'aser sheni* coins which were forbidden for use. They may have been collected elsewhere, over a period of many years and when the synagogue was built, they were brought there. This would explain the exceptionally large number of coins we found."<sup>11</sup>

However, Ilan admits that this hypothesis has its problems when looking at other synagogue deposits and he writes at the end of his paragraph: "Unfortunately, this theory is also problematic, since finds in Chorazin and Rimmon include gold coins, which could not be used to redeem *ma'aser sheni*."<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, Ilan's hypothesis was later adopted by Loffreda who believes that the Capernaum coins indeed were used to redeem the *ma'aser sheni* and were placed under the floor at the time of the laying of the stone pavement.<sup>13</sup>

Not all coins discovered in ancient synagogues, however, were found scattered under the floor, and some synagogue deposits have thus been interpreted differently. In the synagogue at Meroth, for example, a hollowed-out stone was discovered in a side room of the building containing almost 500 coins, half of which were gold. Kindler, who analyzed the coins, interprets the deposit as a treasury; "the community public funds" collected as taxes or charity

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<sup>11</sup> Ilan 1989a, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Ilan 1989a, p. 28. He thus admits that not all synagogue deposits are the same, even though he tries to find one overarching explanation.

<sup>13</sup> Loffreda 1997, p. 234. To be clear, this hypothesis is only proposed by Loffreda for the coins found in level C at Capernaum; the uppermost level of mortar found underneath the floor, which was poured to set the pavement stones and the benches. Hundreds of coins have also been found underneath this layer, in level B (the artificial fill for the podium of the synagogue) and level A (the older house structures found underneath the fill), but he does not link these particular coins to the *ma'aser sheni*.

by the leaders of the community.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation was later applied to the coins hidden in floors and/or walls as well; according to some scholars, these coins are “a result of the efforts to hide and protect communal funds.”<sup>15</sup>

A fourth hypothesis places the deposition of coins in synagogues not during the construction or use of the building, but in its afterlife as a ruin or tourist attraction. Yeivin based this interpretation on the coins found under the floor of the synagogue at Chorazin.<sup>16</sup> Here, in the earth patches between the stone pavement floor of the synagogue, 2000 coins were found dating to the 4<sup>th</sup>- 7th century, including two gold ones. According to Yeivin, these coins could not have been placed during the construction of the floor since he believes the synagogue was rebuilt no later than the 5th century and the coins are dated much later. He also does not believe that the deposit belonged to the use of the building, as he thinks that the synagogue was no longer in use in the 7th century. His hypothesis is that these coins were thrown on the floor over the centuries by Christian and maybe Jewish pilgrims for good luck after the building had gone out of use as a synagogue.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kindler 1986.

<sup>15</sup> Stern 2021, p. 242.

<sup>16</sup> Yeivin 1987, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> This hypothesis never caught on and seems very doubtful. First, we have no reason to believe Christians would visit Jewish synagogues in antiquity after they went out of use, while also dropping coins for blessings or to bring good luck. Second, the date of the Capernaum synagogue has been debated over the last decades and it is now assumed the building still functioned in the 7th century, making the pilgrim-theory obsolete (Magnes 2001a).

Finally, some scholars have proposed that the synagogue coins were deliberately placed in or under the building as blessings for the building or its users. This theory was first proposed by Zvi Ilan, who wrote in 1989:

“They [the coins] might have been placed there to bring the building and its congregants’ blessings and good fortune, a tradition which persists in similar forms (tossing coins into fountains) to this day. The saying of the Jewish sages, “Blessings only reside in things hidden from sight,” might be relevant in this regard.”<sup>18</sup>

Although Ilan never mentioned the words “foundation deposit,” this is the nomenclature that proponents of this theory started to use following the publication of his article. Foundation or building deposits are groups of objects placed in the foundation of a building during construction, forming an integral part of the structure of the building but having neither a decorative nor structural function; their purpose lays in the symbolic world.<sup>19</sup> Foundation deposits are commonly found in the understructure of religious and secular communal buildings around the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean world, reflecting a popular practice among many cultures.<sup>20</sup> According to some scholars, the same phenomenon existed in Late Antique Judaism. Regardless of the validity of this interpretation, the streams of scholarship

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<sup>18</sup> Ilan 1989a, pp. 27–28. He thus makes a distinction between the phenomenon *either* being the storage of *ma’aser sheni* money *or* the use of coins to bless the building. To be fair, he never called this “blessing money” a foundation deposit; this idea was only assumed and picked up by others.

<sup>19</sup> Definition by Ellis 1968, p. 1, who wrote the first comprehensive work on foundation deposits.

<sup>20</sup> And in many other cultures around the world. Deposits of weapons and precious artifacts, and skeletons of humans and animals have, for example, also been found buried under structures in Celtic, Germanic, and Indo-European settlements all over Europe. Here, however, I limit myself to comparisons of the ancient Mediterranean world, chronologically and geographically closest to Late Roman and Byzantine Palestine. Research in this region has been conducted by, for example, Ellis 1968; Weinstein 1973; El-Adly 1981; Bunimowitz and Zimhoni 1993; Gitin and Golani 2001; Weikart 2002; Mansel 2003; Sauer 2004; Sakr 2005; DePietro 2012; Tsouparopoulou 2014; Hunt 2016; Masson 2017. See chapter 5 for a thorough analysis.

which promoted it became firmly entrenched in subsequent historiography. Ilan's original theory found many advocates among prominent numismatists like Donald Ariel, Stanislao Loffreda, Ermanno Arslan, and Gabriela Bijovsky.<sup>21</sup> They too believe that the coins found under the floors of ancient synagogue buildings were intended to ensure good luck and prosperity, a phenomenon they call "Jewish foundation deposits." Eventually, a ritual reason for the Capernaum coins was proposed as well. In 2011, Ermanno Arslan published an analysis of the coins from trench L812 at Capernaum, in which he writes:

"A reason for the continuous presence of *nummi* in the synagogue could be the traditional use of the smallest coins, the symbolic demonetization of which was more accepted during ritual services. This means that the faithful would bring a *nummus* to the synagogue rather than other denominations, even when lower numbers of *nummi* were in circulation. This would be similar to the so-called 'Charon's *obol*' placed inside graves. For a long period of time in the Western Roman Empire, the *as*, rather than a smaller denomination, or a coin of a different metal, was used for this purpose."<sup>22</sup>

Finally, we cannot finish our overview of previous scholarship on synagogue coin deposits without mentioning the article that was recently published by Nili Ahipaz and Uzi Leibner.<sup>23</sup> This article is a summary of Ahipaz's MA thesis and discusses floor deposits in ancient synagogues, using the synagogue at Deir 'Aziz as a case-study. Focusing on only one specific group of deposits, scattered coins of low value found beneath the floors of ancient synagogues (and one

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<sup>21</sup> Ariel 1980, pp. 59–62; 1987, p. 148; 1991, pp. 74–80; Loffreda 1997; Arslan 1997, pp. 291–292; Bijovsky 2012a, pp. 90–97. Zvi Ma'oz was the first to propose that the coins found in ancient synagogues in the Golan Heights were placed there to "serve as protection against demons." (Ma'oz 1999, pp. 147–148; 2017, pp. 110–111).

<sup>22</sup> Arslan 2011, pp. 152–153. Admittedly, he only mentions a "ritual service" as the purpose of the coins, without providing more details about the kind of ritual, nor mentioning the words "foundation deposit".

<sup>23</sup> Ahipaz and Leibner 2021 (Hebrew). This article is an extension of her article on *genizot* published by the Hecht Museum of Haifa in 2013. Nili shared this new article with me as soon as it came out and I am grateful for her collaboration and friendship.

church), Ahipaz and Leibner conclude that the function of these deposits can be found in the magical realm; a practice aimed at the protection of the synagogue.<sup>24</sup>

To summarize this overview, six major hypotheses for synagogue coin deposits have been proposed, debated, and argued since the 1968 Capernaum discovery, either to explain the phenomenon as a whole or to try to ascertain the function of individual deposits: emergency hoards, tithing money, the community treasury, pilgrim donations, foundation deposits, and magical deposits.

Despite these theories available, only few archaeologists dare to offer a comprehensive explanation or interpretation for their excavated synagogue coins in their final excavation reports. In general, archaeologists have approached this phenomenon in one of two ways when publishing coin deposits from ancient synagogues. On the one hand, there are the scholars who mention the coin deposits but do not offer any explanation for why they were brought into the building. For example, Amos Kloner and Tessa Mindel published an article in 1981 on two coin deposits from the western room of the synagogue at Horvat Rimmon. The coins were found in pottery jars, buried in fill on top of the floor level of the room. Despite providing a detailed analysis of each coin, their interpretation of the deposit as a whole is limited to: “Their location within the same Locus and at a similar depth, and the fact that both hoards span the same period [...], indicates that they probably were buried contemporaneously. As no floor or living level that could be attributed to the period of the coins has been identified, it appears that

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<sup>24</sup> Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 229. The article shares many examples and insights with my research and I am happy to see that the phenomenon is receiving scholarly attention once more. Hopefully, our mutual projects will put this phenomenon in the spotlight again.

Locus 33 served as a dump, in which the hoards were buried.”<sup>25</sup> No further explanation is given for who placed the hoards there and why. Sometimes the description is even shorter. In an overview of the small finds and coins from the synagogue at Ma’on Nirim, Levy Yitzhak Rahmani states: “There were 81 coins found in the synagogue area, including 71 in the debris above the pavement, between the foundation stones, or below the pavement level.”<sup>26</sup> An analysis of nine coins is subsequently provided, but no effort is made to connect the coins to a specific locus or context, nor is there any attempt to interpret the coin finds from this building. And in the final publication report on the synagogue at Horvat Sumaqa, Shimon Dar writes: “Sixty-four coins were found in various excavated areas of the synagogue and fifty were positively identified. ... There were thirty 5<sup>th</sup>-, six 6<sup>th</sup>-, and one 7<sup>th</sup>-century coins. The last group were found collectively in between the cracks of the paving stones in the narthex of the synagogue.”<sup>27</sup> No further interpretation is offered.

On the other hand, there are the scholars who approach the phenomenon as if the question has already been answered and a longer discussion is no longer needed. Regarding the copious coins found in the synagogue at Bar’am, Mordechai Aviam writes: “The large numbers of coins (around seventy) unearthed in the excavated area suggests the *same known* custom of throwing coins in the fill or under the pavers in ancient synagogues.”<sup>28</sup> Analyzing over 705 coins found under the floor of the synagogue of Dabiyye, Donald Ariel states: “Over two-fifths of the

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<sup>25</sup> Kloner and Mindel 1981, p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> Rahmani 1960, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Dar 1999, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Aviam 2001, p. 169, italics are mine.

coins from Dabiyye were part of *what may be called* a foundation deposit.”<sup>29</sup> And discussing the two hoards found at ‘En Nashut in the late 70s, Zvi Ma’oz explains: “Since both groups are copper coins of the smallest denominations, they were not hoards buried for retrieval, but *votive offerings*, possibly with some magical significance.”<sup>30</sup>

In other words, despite theoretical efforts to try to explain coin deposits found in ancient synagogues, archaeologists are still reluctant to connect their own finds to a specific theory and explore why and how their coin assemblage ended up at their site. Furthermore, fifty years after the discovery of the Capernaum coins and with the addition of over twenty newly excavated synagogue buildings with coin deposits, it has now become clear that we are actually dealing with different kinds of deposits — some found scattered, other in clusters, or in containers — found in a variety of contexts — some found spread out under the floor, others grouped inside the *bemah*, behind in benches, or in hidden compartments in the floor or walls. The question is thus if one overarching theory can really explain all this variety, or if we need to explore multiple functional categories. And if so, where and how do we start?

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<sup>29</sup> Ariel 1991, p. 74, italics are mine.

<sup>30</sup> Ma’oz 1979, italics are mine. The same approach has in fact also been taken by some numismatists when discovering coin deposits in other contexts in Palestine/Israel. After the excavations of the Byzantine *cardo* surrounding the Western Wall in Jerusalem and the discovery of a coin deposit below a mosaic sidewalk, Bijovsky writes “Two other palm-tree Vandalic *nummi* appear in the small deposit of 51 *minimi* found in the bedding of a mosaic floor preserved in the eastern sidewalk (L4253; Nos. 151, 152). This was a well-known practice, wherein groups of coins were deliberately buried for good luck or votive reasons when a building was erected or repaired.” (Bijovsky 2019, p. 169). Is this an interpretation based on synagogue deposits now being projected onto other sites by Bijovsky?

### 1.3 The Present Study

No interpretation of a phenomenon can be proposed without in-depth knowledge of all the information at hand, or “stating the facts.” Before interpreting, we must examine. The different interpretations raised by scholars in the past were proposed without knowledge or analysis of the full chronological or spatial context of the phenomenon, as well as without discussion of the cultural background of Judaism in Late Antiquity. This study fills this lacuna.

This project will for the first time offer a complete overview of all synagogue coin deposits found in Late Antique Palestine<sup>31</sup> and two diaspora communities, with architectural information on each synagogue building, contextual and archaeological information on each deposit, and descriptive and interpretative information on each coin found within the deposits. The twenty-two synagogue buildings from Palestine that have been included in this survey are: Bar’am, Beth Alpha, Beth She’arim, Caesarea, Capernaum, Dabiyye, Deir ‘Aziz, ‘En Gedi, ‘En Nashut, Gush Halav, Hammath Tiberias, Horvat Kanaf (Khirbet Kanaf, Mazra’at Kanef), Horvat Kur, Horvat Rimmon, Korazin (Chorazin, Korazim), Ma'oz Hayyim, Meroth (Khirbet Marus), Qasrin (Qazrin), Rehob (Rehov, H. Parwa), H. Shema’ (Khirbet Shem’a), Horvat Sumaqa, and

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<sup>31</sup> The designation for the region of Palestine/Israel covered in this dissertation is not easy (see Spigel 2008), especially considering the modern English names for Israel and Palestine/Palestinian territories, as well as the Jewish name, “Land of Israel,” “Eretz Yisrael” or the more general term Holy Land. On a map from the first century CE, this region is known as Judea, Galilee, and Gaulanitis. In the second century CE, as a consequence of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, the name of the region was changed to Syria-Palaestina. In 390 CE, the administration of the region changed again and Syria-Palaestina was split into several administrative units by the Byzantine rulers: Palaestina Prima, Palaestina Secunda, and Palaestina Tertia. The area from the Negev to Caesarea and Shechem was part of Palaestina Prima (or Palaestina I), and the area of the Galilee, the Bet She’an Valley and parts of the Golan were part of Palaestina Secunda (or Palaestina II). In 636 CE, both regions were conquered by the Muslims and from then on, the official name of the region was Jund Filastin. Throughout this dissertation, synagogues from this entire region and different time periods are studied. While synagogues of the pre-70 CE period in this region are referred to by different scholars as either being in Palestine, Judea, or Galilee, it is common to refer to the region in the post-70 CE period as Palestine. Thus, whenever I write “Palestine,” I am talking about the region that covers modern Israel, the Palestinian territories, the most western parts of Jordan (known as Transjordan, which was annexed by the state of Israel after the Six-Day War of 1968), and the most southern parts of Syria and Lebanon.



Wadi Hamam (Weradim), and the two diaspora synagogues are Ostia and Sardis. In total, archaeologists have discovered 57 separate coin deposits in these buildings.<sup>32</sup>

Given the lack of information and insecurity of interpretation of these deposits, as described above, the first goal of this project must be to compile all known deposits into one corpus. This corpus will need to follow standard organization for all finds and includes written descriptions as well as images in order to be able to allow comparisons and offer the scholarly community a comprehensive, most up-to-date database on all synagogue coin deposits known at this time (2021). The corpus can be found as an appendix to this dissertation.

The second goal of this study is to interpret these 57 deposits and group them together in purposeful categories based on specific observations and characteristics. Each coin deposit had a certain function, and it is my hypothesis that there were at least seven different reasons for why coins were placed inside synagogue buildings: accidental losses, votive offerings or *genizot*, charity hoards or *tzedakah*, treasuries, emergency hoards, post-destruction offerings, and magico-religious deposits connected to tithing money. This goal fulfills the desideratum for a better understanding of the purpose(s) of synagogue coin deposits in Late Antiquity.

My last goal is to place the different categories in their specific historical context of Late Antique Judaism. By evaluating the primary sources, researching the cultural background of ancient Judaism, and examining parallel examples of coin deposits found in neighboring

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<sup>32</sup> As is known in 2021. During my research, I went through hundreds of excavation reports and I believe I was able to track down every single ancient synagogue building in which a coin deposit has been found. Of course, there might be other deposits that have not (yet) been published. See also chapter 3.2.3.

regions, I will explore the different roles coins and coin deposits could have played within the synagogues of Palestine and the diaspora.

My aim with this project is to set future discussions of these synagogue deposits and their interpretation on a firmer foot by providing detailed information about these coins, many of which have until now gone unpublished. My hope is that archaeologists encountering new deposits in ancient synagogues will be able to more easily determine the specific function(s) of their deposit based on the characteristics that I lay out. I am also hoping that this project will spark new conversations about the socio-economic and religious role of coinage in Late Antique Judaism in general.

Because this data-set of 24 buildings, 57 deposits, and 44,254 (10,549 legible) coins is so large, and images so abundant, the full project is also presented as a (downloadable) digital database and website, which can be found at [www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com](http://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com). Besides being a depository of images, plans, and graphs, all the textual parts of this projects have also been copied and placed on the website.

The dissertation in written form is here structured as the following:

Chapter Two provides a general overview of synagogue buildings in Late Antique Palestine and their role as public institutions in the Jewish community. This chapter includes an historical overview of the synagogue as an architectural unit and its specific components, and an examination of the functions, leadership, and organization of synagogues in the Late Roman and Byzantine period.<sup>33</sup> Special attention will be given to methodological challenges: the

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<sup>33</sup> This part of the dissertation might be redundant to scholars already familiar with ancient synagogue buildings, but provides an introduction to those new to the field.

difficulty in recognizing a synagogue in the archaeological record, and the difficulty of dating the construction of a synagogue building.

Chapter Three describes numismatics as an archaeological field. Here, I begin with a brief historical overview of the role of numismatics in archaeology, followed by a methodological subchapter on how to read and analyze coins.<sup>34</sup> Two more problems will be identified and discussed: the difficulty of interpreting coins, and the lack of publications and availability of materials for our study. Last, I outline the different groups, categories, and terminology for analyzing synagogue coin deposits.

Chapters Four and Five are my attempt to re-evaluate the synagogue coin deposits from Late Antiquity. When discussing the phenomenon of “ancient synagogue hoards”, most scholars only mean the coins found scattered under the floor (“foundation deposits”). However, I believe that there are multiple phenomena going on at the same time, and that we cannot form one overarching theory that would explain all coin deposits. Thus, based on specific qualifications that I will lay out, I have established seven different interpretative categories based on sociohistorical, halakhic, and numismatic research conducted on the Late Roman and Byzantine Jewish landscape. Chapter Four contains an in-depth overview of the first six categories while Chapter Five is entirely dedicated to the final category, coin deposits connected to magico-religious practices, seeing that this is the theory that contains the floor deposits that have been most discussed in scholarly works. In these chapters, I will explore each

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<sup>34</sup> This part of the dissertation may be redundant to numismatists and scholars already familiar with ancient coins. However, since this project will be available as an open-access resource to the general public, I found it important to provide as much information as possible to those new to the field, as I consider myself a public humanist and believe it is critical to share not just the output of a project, but every essential step along the way.

possible category in-depth, lay out the specific characteristics a deposit needs to have to belong to this category, and ultimately, will organize all known coin deposits under one of the seven options. Finally, some statistical analyses will be applied to each category in order to explore the specific attributes of the coins found within each group. Ultimately, I hope that these chapters will put the research on the “ancient synagogue coin deposits” phenomenon on much firmer ground and will spark a new debate on the issue among archaeologists, historians, and numismatists.

Chapter Six offers a conclusion to the entire project.

The appendix contains the coin deposit corpus on which this project is based, also called the catalogue. It discusses in detail the twenty-four synagogue buildings in which one or multiple coin deposits have been found and is meant to be read next to the website ([www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com](http://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com)). The catalogue is compiled from hundreds of individual field reports, hoard lists, websites, archival materials, and personal communications, and canvasses all the corpora and studies of the published and unpublished synagogue coin deposits. The website then provides further itemized information on each deposit and individual coin, as well as photographs, maps, plans, and other archival material to better understand the context of the deposits. Tables and graphs accompany the written material and give synopses of the excavated coin assemblages.

### 1.3.1 Compiling and re-assessing old collections

In 2001, Raz Kletter and Alon De-Groot pointed out that no fewer than 2,200 excavations were carried out in the State of Israel between the period of 1989 and 1998, and the number of projects conducted annually is constantly rising. Yet, final publication reports are lagging far

behind, running at only about the 20 per cent level.<sup>35</sup> It is easy to understand why we dig so much but publish so little: as archaeologists, we love to be “in the dirt”. The thrill of new discoveries, the media attention, the academic funds that become available when something “happens”, it is often these reasons that attract us to the field in the first place (pun intended). However, the paperwork that comes out of excavations can often be overwhelming. For every week of digging, there are months’ worth of notes, maps, photographs, and database entries to go through. Writing can be painstakingly slow and boring; instead of sitting behind a desk evaluating our finds, we would much rather go back to the site and continue digging. For this reason, many excavations remain unpublished forever. Finds that were excavated are stored in a storage unit, a depot, or a basement and slowly become forgotten (John Cherry calls this “the crisis of confidence” in archaeology).<sup>36</sup> However, there is value in going back to these old collections and re-asses them. In recent studies, scholars like Julia King and Barbara Voss have pleaded for the study of material housed in warehouses across the globe as an alternative mode of research.<sup>37</sup> As Morag Kersel has pointed out, the goal of archaeology is to create new knowledge about the human past.<sup>38</sup> Going back to old collections, re-interpreting them based on new archaeological insights, comparing collections that have been found in different regions and at different times with each other; all of this can yield new information about the past.

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<sup>35</sup> Kletter and De-Groot, 2001. See also Cherry 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Cherry 2011, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> King 2008; Voss 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Kersel 2015.

This is exactly what this project does: it brings together all published and unpublished synagogue coins from the storage rooms and places them together in a digital environment, making examination and comparison possible. This project is thus what might be called an “archival collection excavation report”.

The reasons for why all coin deposits from Late Antique synagogues have never been analyzed, published, and compared as a whole before are many: first, many of the deposits presented here never reached a final publication. As we will see in the catalogue, many sites were never fully published (and probably never will be, since many excavators have now passed away) and even when synagogue excavations were published, a detailed overview of the coins is lacking. The coins were simply stored (in most cases at the IAA in Jerusalem) and then forgotten.

A second reason for why it took so long is that most of the coins found in ancient synagogue deposits are of very small value; the majority are bronze *nummi* or *minimi*.<sup>39</sup> Historically, numismatists were not very interested in these coins: they are hard to decipher (especially compared to gold and silver coins that can often still look newly minted after thousands of years), often heavily corroded, and thus not very attractive for study. Their analyses and identifications were long ignored. This only recently changed thanks to the

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<sup>39</sup> *Nummi* and *minimi* are terms of modern numismatic parlance referring to the physical appearance of small, low value bronze coins in the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Minimi* can also include worn and illegible earlier coins that remained in circulation for long periods, poorly manufactured local imitations, and pieces of metal that hardly could be called coins. These coins circulated as “token” money: a number of coins together made up a larger weight, without taking into account the weight of each single coin. Often, they would be weighed together in a purse. It is therefore no surprise that large quantities of *minimi* are found at almost every site in Palestine (Bijovsky 1998 p. 84; 2012, p. 3).

ground-breaking work of Gabriela Bijovsky, who was able to define and identify a whole new range of low-value coins.<sup>40</sup> Thus, a study like this has only recently become possible.

Finally, this project also required availability and knowledge of multiple software programs in order to process the data and generate meaningful observations. One thus had to wait until the technology was ready before a project like this could be undertaken.

### 1.3.2 The database and website project

For this undertaking, a digital database of all sites, deposits, and coins was created in Microsoft Excel, under the guidance of Will Bosley from the University of North Carolina Digital Innovation Lab. Maps, analyses, graphs, and tables were then made in Tableau, an interactive data visualization program, under the guidance of Lori Bruckner from the UNC University Library. The advantage of utilizing these programs is that they can handle the storage and retrieval of large amounts of information without loss of quality or data redundancy (so-called “big data”). It also makes it easier and much faster to recover data, apply queries, and visualize patterns within the data assemblage. The graphic representation of the data – whether geographical information shown on maps, temporal data shown on timelines, interpersonal relationships shown as connected graphs, etc. – allows users to comprehend the information quickly and helps them to manipulate and analyze the data according to their own questions.

The most difficult task when creating any database is determining its types, categories, and entries.<sup>41</sup> These parameters are generally determined by the objectives of the research

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<sup>40</sup> Bijovsky 2012.

<sup>41</sup> For examples of other coin databases and their methodologies, see Iosif 2016, p. 265. Currently, some of the best-known online coin databases include the UK Government’s Portable Antiquities Scheme (<https://finds.org.uk/>), Coin hoards of the Roman Republic *Online* (<http://numismatics.org/chrr/>), the online

itself: what are the questions one needs to ask to get the answers one seeks? For my database, five layers of information were created, each “zooming” deeper into the research material. As Microsoft Excel is widely accessible, free of charge to students, and easy to navigate, I chose to build the foundation of my database with this tool. Thus, each layer of information was assigned its own spreadsheet in which I created tables. The first layer is labeled “country.” Here I entered the countries in which synagogue deposits have been found. As my research focuses on modern Israel/Palestine, this forms the bulk of my list; the two other countries are Italy and Turkey. The second layer is the “site.” Here the name of the site where the synagogue building was found is given, together with its longitude and latitude coordinates. This enables Tableau to place the sites on a self-generated map. The third layer is the “building” layer. In this layer, I made a different row for each building phase of each synagogue in which a deposit has been found. For example, we know that the synagogue of Horvat Rimmon had three distinct phases. For each phase, I noted its construction date<sup>42</sup> and a brief description of the lay-out of the building in that phase. This is necessary to connect a certain deposit to a certain phase of the building. For the building as a whole, I noted its date of discovery, the archaeologist(s) who excavated it, and as complete as possible list of bibliographical notes.<sup>43</sup> The fourth layer is the “deposit.” Sometimes multiple deposits were discovered in the same synagogue building and

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database of the American Numismatic Society (ANS) (<http://numismatics.org/search/>), and the Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire Project ([http://oxrep.classics.ox.ac.uk/coin\\_hoards\\_of\\_the\\_roman\\_empire\\_project](http://oxrep.classics.ox.ac.uk/coin_hoards_of_the_roman_empire_project)).

<sup>42</sup> As assessed by me, see chapter 2.4.

<sup>43</sup> This type of organization is similar to the The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website, a site whose goal it is to display the world of synagogues from the Land of Israel for the scholar, student, and layperson: <https://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/>.



needed to be differentiated. I noted the exact find spot of each deposit within the building, both in a long description (“Deposit found under the floor in the north-eastern corner of the courtyard of the synagogue of Capernaum”) and a short one (“floor”). The short description allows Tableau to generate groups of deposits found in similar contexts across all buildings. I also noted whether the specific context had received any kind of archaeological legend in the publications (for example, “Area 12; Trench XII; L812”). Then I recorded in what year the deposit was discovered with a full description of the deposit and its context. I endeavored to provide as complete a description as possible, as deposits sometimes have been published in a fragmented manner in different excavation reports. My goal was to, for the first time, bring together all the information we have on each deposit and its archaeological context. I mostly based these descriptions on the published material, but I also contacted as many excavators as possible to discuss their finds and acquire additional, hitherto unpublished information. When archival materials were available to me, I explored these too.<sup>44</sup> I also noted if the deposit was found in a container and if so, in what kind of container, and if the deposit was retrievable (as, for example, in a hollowed-out floor stone), or not (for example, when it was plastered into the foundation of benches). Last, I noted how many coins were found in the deposit and where they are stored now.

My last layer is my most elaborate one: the “artifacts” layer. This is where I zoom in on each individual coin found in a deposit. I organized this layer in the following way: each coin

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<sup>44</sup> For example, for excavations carried out in Israel before 1948 (then known as Palestine, governed by the British Mandate), I used the online Scientific Archives 1919-1948 within the Israel Antiquities Archives (<http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/>).

found in a synagogue deposit received a unique ID number. In total, I have information on 10548 coins. I organized the coins according to their deposit and gave each coin a specific number in their deposit (for example, "Coin from under the floor outside the threshold of the synagogue of 'En Nashut (Locus 109): No. 1"). This will make it easier to refer to individual coins in future literature. If a coin is stored at the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), I also connected it to its IAA identification number. When a coin had received a different number in the publication report, I also noted that. Then, I provided a complete description of the coin, according to accepted standards. For each specimen, I indicated the emperor under whose reign it was minted, the date of minting, the denomination (if known and different from AE1, AE2, AE3, or AE4),<sup>45</sup> the size and weight, and axis of the coin die, the material from which it was made, the minting place, and a description of the obverse and reverse sides split into inscription and image. These descriptions are coin specific and denote how much of the inscription and/or image could be read (for example, [GLOR-IA EX]ERC-ITVS, Two soldiers leaning on spears; between them one military standard. In exergue: illegible). If the coin shows other specific characteristics like graffiti or an overstrike,<sup>46</sup> this is noted in the "Remarks" column. Here, I also noted the IAA photograph number if one exists.<sup>47</sup> Last, I wrote down the coin catalogue parallel; that is, the specific catalogue book(s) in which this coin type can be found, the page, and the number. In the catalogue here provided, I also added a table for each

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<sup>45</sup> See chapter 3.2.

<sup>46</sup> See chapter 3.2.

<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, the IAA charges per photo requested. Because of the large number of coins in my database, it was not possible to include pictures of all the coins provided. Interested readers can contact the IAA and request prints.

deposit that illustrates the date range of the hoard as a whole, the emperor(s), and the minting place(s). These tables form small, easy-to-understand overviews of the deposits and help the viewer visualize the abstract data.<sup>48</sup>

On the website [www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com](http://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com), which accompanies this written catalogue, each building, deposit, and sometimes coin has been illustrated with the appropriate maps, plans, drawings, photographs, or other archival materials that could be found.<sup>49</sup> In each case, I have attempted to add at least one map of the location of the synagogue building within the town or city, a plan of the building that indicates the exact findspot(s) of the deposit, drawings of the building or certain important elements of it, and photographs of the building, coin deposits, and/or specific coins. Most of these images have been scanned from publications (for which permission has been granted)<sup>50</sup> with a minimum resolution of 300 pixels but cannot be downloaded by third party users. In this regard the material is available for visitors to view but cannot be freely republished without permission from the excavators. Most of the images in this study have been published before (although they have never been brought together in one study), but some are new, and were provided to me either by the original excavators or were found at the archives of the IAA. What can be downloaded, though, are the spreadsheets

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<sup>48</sup> All data entry is prone to human error. I have tried to be as careful as possible when copying information but nonetheless, mistakes will have been made. I take full responsibility for incorrect information.

<sup>49</sup> The website was made by Melissa Stewart from the UNC Arts and Sciences Information Center, using Reclaim Hosting and Wordpress. I could not have done this project without her help and I am grateful for her labor and support.

<sup>50</sup> Not all publishers granted me (online) publication of their images. For example, the Israel Exploration Society, which published excavation reports on multiple synagogues in this project, did not give me publication permission. These images are thus missing from the website.

with detailed overview of the analyzed coins per deposit. Scholars who are thus interested in the details of each specific coin can download my spreadsheets for free.

Compiling the database and building the website took over two years. I hope it will offer scholars who are interested in the field all the material they will need to investigate the synagogue coin deposit phenomenon further, without having to go through this process of tracking down the individual artifacts ever again.

## CHAPTER 2 THE SYNAGOGUE BUILDING

### **2.1 The ancient synagogue and its components**

Over the past century or so, synagogue archaeology has become an increasingly important source for the study of ancient Judaism(s).<sup>51</sup> To understand the synagogue coin deposits in their specific cultural and architectural contexts, it is first important to understand the design and function of these buildings.<sup>52</sup>

For a long time, reconstructions of ancient Jewish life were predominantly based on written sources like Josephus, the New Testament, and Rabbinic works from Late Antiquity. The discovery of dozens of ancient synagogues by archaeologists over the last century, however, drastically changed previous assumptions.<sup>53</sup> Scholarship had to adapt its methodologies by taking into account the discoveries from the field as well as the written sources. As a result, we now know considerably more about ancient Judaism in Palestine than a century ago, and the study of ancient synagogues has become a distinct subfield of research.

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<sup>51</sup> Recently, some scholars have been stepping away from talking about one unified, monolithic Judaism during its formative centuries, instead referring to many kinds of Judaisms. This term then includes the “Judaism” of Palestine, Babylonia, Alexandria, the Samaritan regions, and many other Diaspora communities, but also the “Judaism” of orthodox Jews, Rabbis, and liberal Jews.

<sup>52</sup> Werlin 2015, p. 3. Some of the most general, in-depth works on the study of ancient synagogues are: Gutmann 1975, Urman and Flesher 1995, Fine 1996b, Olsson and Zetterholm 2003, Levine 2000, Hachlili 2013.

<sup>53</sup> See Ben David 2021 for list of all excavated and unexcavated synagogues from Israel/Palestine as are known to us in 2021.

The first ancient synagogue systematically excavated in Israel/Palestine was discovered by accident during irrigation works in 1928 by members of Kibbutz Beth Alpha, on the northern slopes of the Gilboa mountains in Lower Galilee.<sup>54</sup> Excavations began in 1929 under the direction of Eleazar Lipa Sukenik, who uncovered the remains of a two-story basilical complex with colorful mosaic floor panels and an apse on its south-western side.<sup>55</sup> Impressed by his findings, Sukenik went on to write his Master's thesis on the topic of ancient synagogues and published the first book on this subject. The field of ancient synagogues studies was born.<sup>56</sup> Among the first generation of Israeli archaeologists, Eleazar Sukenik and his student Michael Avi-Yonah structured the field of synagogue studies by advancing a typology for the chronological development of the ancient synagogue.<sup>57</sup> According to their typology, the earliest synagogues built after 70 CE were of the "Galilean type," characterized by a basilical layout (that is, a rectangular structure with a hall extending from end to end, usually flanked by side aisles set off by colonnades), an orientation of the building towards Jerusalem (that is, they have their most important area within the building placed against the wall that is closest to Jerusalem), triportal facades (three door openings in the Jerusalem oriented wall), and

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<sup>54</sup> Avigad 197, p. 710. Before this excavation, early explorations of synagogues in Israel were more "architectural explorations," since the main focus was on collecting and drawing architectural elements rather than excavating the building using stratigraphic techniques (Aviam 2019, pp. 292–293).

<sup>55</sup> Sukenik 1975. The two-stories reconstruction is based on the discovery of an extra layer of plaster found only in a U-shaped pattern above the aisles and the portico, but not in other areas. It seems like this extra layer of plaster was from a second story floor in these parts of the building (Sukenik 1932, pp. 17–18).

<sup>56</sup> Sukenik 1934. Aviam pushes the beginning date of Synagogue Studies to a bit later, with the first comprehensive study on synagogues written by Avigad in the late 1960s.

<sup>57</sup> Sukenik 1934; Avigad 1967; Avi-Yonah 1973; 1978; Meyers 1980a; Groh 1998; Levine 2000, pp. 319–324; Magness 2001a, 2001b; Aviam 2019 pp. 294–295; Leibner 2020.

flagstone pavements. These “Galilean-type” synagogues (or what Avi-Yonah called “early synagogues”) were thought to have been constructed in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, dated largely on the basis of Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger’s surveys in 1905 and 1906.<sup>58</sup> Succeeding these buildings were the so-called “broadhouse synagogues” (or what Avi-Yonah called “transitional-type”): buildings that were wider than long, with their door opening on the short side. These buildings had the first examples of mosaic floors. They were dated to between the 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and exhibit features of both early and late types. The latest synagogues were the “Byzantine-type” (or what Avi-Yonah called the “late synagogues”), dating to the 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. These synagogues have basilical layouts like the Galilean type, but often possess a forecourt or atrium, a narthex (a porch at the front of the building), an apse in the Jerusalem-oriented wall, and frequently a chancel screen in front of the apse, setting this area apart from the rest of the hall, similar to churches of that same period.<sup>59</sup> The mosaic pavements of the Byzantine-type synagogues tend to be more lavishly decorated than their predecessors, with depictions of biblical scenes, the zodiac cycle, or Torah shrines and Temple utensils.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> This German team surveyed Galilee at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and discovered the remains of the synagogues at Capernaum, Arbel, Horvat ‘Ammudim, Bar’am, Meiron, Nabratein, Gush Ḥalav, Korazin, ed-Dikkeh, Umm el-Qanatir, and Horvat Sumaqa (Kohl and Watzinger 1916). They suggested a late 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century date for the buildings based mainly on certain architectural features and their similarities to Roman temples in Syria. More specifically, the “Syrian gable,” a pediment with its base curved into an arch, which is found among certain Galilean synagogues also appears on Antonine and Severan period temples in Syria.

<sup>59</sup> Avi-Yonah 1978, p. 1132. For an in-depth analysis of the function of chancel screens in ancient synagogues, see Branham 1992; Habas 2000.

<sup>60</sup> For numerous examples, see Hachlili 2013, pp. 285–434 and bibliography mentioned. This characteristic, however, is no longer considered typical of the late synagogues, as synagogues with lavish mosaic floors, like the one at Hammath Tiberias, have now been dated much earlier (see catalogue).

However, as more and more synagogues were uncovered, this synagogue typology proved to be questionable. More advanced excavation techniques and refined dating methods allowed archaeologists to avoid using architectural features or historical events to date synagogue buildings and instead utilize stratigraphic considerations and associated finds to determine when a building was constructed.<sup>61</sup> Nowadays it is no longer the standard practice in synagogue studies to date structures on the basis of building type alone: different layouts seem to have been used throughout the first to seventh centuries, without a linear evolution.<sup>62</sup> The building's architectural layout and features were influenced not only by the date of its construction but by other factors such as the local topography, how much space was available within the city or village, the building materials available, the skills of the local craftsman, the esthetic taste of the people ordering the construction, and the amount of money that could be spent on the building. Today we know that no two synagogue buildings are identical in shape, size, or design, despite the fact that they could have been built close to one another chronologically and geographically.<sup>63</sup> It is evident that each community adopted and adapted elements according to its own needs and preferences, giving considerable freedom for local communities.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Some of the scholars that brought up the problem of dating buildings on their artistic elements are Gal 1995; Schwartz 2001; Milson 2001; and most importantly Magness 2001a; 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Aviam 2019, pp. 295–297. Although Avi-Yonah at first was skeptical about the revised dating of the Capernaum synagogue based on the pottery and coins found below the building instead of its architectural features, he eventually admitted this to be a better approach to dating the building (Avi-Yonah 1973, pp. 40–42; 1981).

<sup>63</sup> Probably because Judaism never recognized a single authority or unified legislative body to govern them, in contrast to Christianity (which would explain the more uniform church building).

<sup>64</sup> Despite the uniqueness of each synagogue building, some scholars still divide them into regional or typological groups. Recently, Aviam has divided the Galilean synagogues up into two groups: The Mountainous Galilee Group and the Northern Valleys Group, each with its specific characteristics (Aviam 2019). Magness divides them into



Nonetheless, despite their variety, certain common traits are typical of the Late Antique synagogues. These features are important for understanding the contexts of the coin deposits found within these buildings and will be explored here.<sup>65</sup>

The first common element is location. Jewish communities had certain preferences for the positioning of their synagogue buildings vis-à-vis the rest of the village. The preferred locations were the center of the village,<sup>66</sup> the highest point of the village,<sup>67</sup> or close to other communal buildings.<sup>68</sup> The building needed to be seen and easily accessible: a desire for a prominent, locally determined spot within the settlement can be observed in almost all cases.

A second element is the monumentality of the building. The synagogue was often the largest building in the village, dominating the dwellings around it. While the houses of the village were mostly built of uncut fieldstones, the synagogue was usually constructed of massive, carefully hewn rectangular stones or ashlar.<sup>69</sup> Often a different building material than

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four groups: Galilean-Type Synagogues, Transitional Synagogues, Byzantine Synagogues, and Late Ancient Synagogues (Magnez 2021).

<sup>65</sup> Levine 2000, p. 314. In the following fifty pages of his book, Levine goes into great detail describing the separate parts of the ancient synagogue. My summary here is based predominantly on his research. See also Milson 2001, 2007. I need to point out here that I am not including the Samaritan synagogues in this overview, which sometimes looked very different from the “Jewish synagogues” (for example, their orientation was directed towards mount Gerizim). Since no examples of coin deposits have been found in the circa 10 Samaritan examples found in Israel/Palestine, they have not been included in this study. See Pummer 1999, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> For example, at Capernaum, Eshtemoa, Korazin, Susiya, and Merot.

<sup>67</sup> For example, at Horvat Kur, Meiron, and Khirbet Kanaf. When no natural hill was available, the synagogue could have been placed on top of an artificial platform like at Capernaum, Susiya, and Korazin.

<sup>68</sup> For example, at Sardis, Korazin, and H. Shema’.

<sup>69</sup> With some exceptions, like the Horvat Shema’ synagogue, which is built of roughly hewn fieldstones, or when an existing housing or community complex was transformed into a synagogue, like at Dura-Europos, Sardis, and every other Diaspora synagogue found until now.

the houses around it was used, like the basalt synagogue between limestone houses at Horvat Kur, or the white limestone synagogue in the middle of grey basalt houses at Capernaum. Some synagogues had two stories with a roof supported by piers or columns. Frequently, the synagogue was the only building in the village which had a pitched roof covered by roof tiles.<sup>70</sup> In many instances, the synagogue complex contained multiple spaces, with side halls and courtyards around the main hall.<sup>71</sup> All these elements made the synagogue a distinctive building within the village landscape, taking up considerable space in the most coveted spot in town. People would have been able to detect and recognize the building from afar as it towered above the private dwellings.

A third element is orientation. As previously mentioned, synagogues in antiquity were almost universally “directed” towards Jerusalem. The specific part of the building that was oriented, however, could vary. In some synagogues, it was the external direction of the building that was oriented, be it the façade, the main entrance to the building, or the courtyard. In other synagogues, it was the internal direction, as indicated by the placement of the columns, the benches, the *bimah*, or the Torah shrine that was constructed against the wall closest to Jerusalem. The emphasis on a Jerusalem orientation was even greater in synagogues with a basilical plan that incorporated a niche or apse along the wall facing Jerusalem, and an

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<sup>70</sup> Thousands of roof tile fragments have been discovered in association with some synagogues, as for example, at Horvat Kur, Wadi Hamam, and Qasrin.

<sup>71</sup> The function of the different side rooms is still debated. Some of the rooms could have been used as classrooms or a *beth midrash*, or as storage rooms for the synagogue utensils (Levine 2000, pp. 316–319; Urman 1995a). We will see that side rooms are often the location of coin deposits.

entrance, atrium, and narthex on the opposite side (see below).<sup>72</sup> Architecturally, these plans guided synagogue attendees to face a specific direction: the direction in which the Temple once stood.

An atrium or courtyard was often an integral part of the synagogue complex. The courtyard could be in front of the building,<sup>73</sup> or on the side,<sup>74</sup> probably depending on how much space was available in the settlement. The courtyard was used for gatherings, but could also have been used for other purposes such as a class room or market place.<sup>75</sup> Sometimes a fountain or water basin was constructed in the middle, which allowed visitors to the synagogue to wash their hands and feet.<sup>76</sup> The courtyard could have a beaten earth floor but was often paved with stone blocks or mosaics and thus formed an integral part of the synagogue. In some cases, the courtyard was enclosed by walls, separating it from the rest of the settlement.<sup>77</sup>

Most synagogues had impressive façades with multiple entrances (often three: a large middle entrance and two smaller entrances to the sides that opened to the side aisles) and

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<sup>72</sup> Levine 2000, pp. 197–199; 237; 326–330. The inclusion of a niche or apse to the main hall to host the Torah shrine in later synagogue buildings can be seen as an imitation of Christian churches and their location of the altar (Habas 2000; Milson 2007, pp. 84-105; Meyers 2010; Rutgers 2010; Tervahauta 2021).

<sup>73</sup> For example, at Beth Alpha, Beth She'an, Ma'oz Hayim, Rehob, Na'aran, Gerasa, Hammath Gader, Ma'on-Nirim, Sardis, and Dura-Europos.

<sup>74</sup> For example, at Capernaum and Susiya.

<sup>75</sup> Levine 2000, pp. 330–334. *Y. Megillah* 3 talks about the “town square” being used for public prayer.

<sup>76</sup> This washing could have been part of the purifying ritual before entering the synagogue building. See Levine 2000, pp. 333–334. Sometimes, as in Ostia, coins have also been found in these drains: were they deliberately thrown into the fountain, ending up in the drainage system?

<sup>77</sup> For example, at Capernaum and Eshtemoa.

decorative elements.<sup>78</sup> The door openings generally consisted of a stone lintel resting on two doorposts. The lintels show great variation in decoration, with carved geometric, floral, and animal designs, or inscriptions.<sup>79</sup> Entrances normally had impressive thresholds cut from a single block of stone. Grooves in the thresholds indicate the direction in which the wooden doors opened. A gable, often a Syrian gable (a pediment with its base carved into an arch), surmounted the entire façade or part of it.<sup>80</sup> The synagogue façade not only served as an entrance but also demarcated the boundary between the settlement and synagogue spaces. It was the barrier between the holy and the profane.<sup>81</sup>

An important feature of the ancient synagogue was the floor. As far as we know, no post-70 CE synagogue had a beaten earth floor. Instead, the floors were paved with flagstones (flat, rectangular cut stone slabs), layers of plaster, or mosaics (made of small, cut stone cubes called *tesserae*).<sup>82</sup> Most famous are the colorful, richly decorated mosaic floors, which in recent

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<sup>78</sup> Although synagogues in the Golan resemble the Galilean ones in layout, they usually only have one doorway in the main façade instead of three.

<sup>79</sup> For example, the lintel at Qiryat Sefer was decorated with a rosette in a triangle, the lintel at Gush Halav had an eagle carved on its underside, a lintel at Meroth had a Hebrew inscription, and the Bar'am small synagogue lintel had an Aramaic inscription.

<sup>80</sup> See Hachlili 2013, pp. 126–127 for examples. Many synagogues had entrances from different directions but not all door openings were always surrounded by decorated lintels and façades; it is unknown if this indicates that these entrances were not seen as equally important, or if different entrances were used for different reasons (At Horvat Kur and Wadi Hammam, for example, water basins were found close to only one of the entrances: does this indicate the need for some form of ritual handwashing before using this particular entrance?).

<sup>81</sup> Thresholds are important liminal spaces. See also Fine 1996, pp. 21–47; 1997.

<sup>82</sup> As we will see, this is important for our coin deposits: coins found under the floor of the synagogue were not retrievable without breaking up the floor.

decades have been the subject of many studies.<sup>83</sup> The mosaics usually depict geometric motives, floral designs, and animals, and a significant group of synagogues have mosaic floors divided into several panels with zodiac cycles,<sup>84</sup> biblical scenes,<sup>85</sup> and Jewish symbols like the Torah shrine (Aron Kodesh, or Holy ark), menorah, *lulav*, *ethrog*, shofar and incense shovels.<sup>86</sup> Often, inscriptions in Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic accompany the images,<sup>87</sup> or they mention donors,<sup>88</sup> biblical instructions,<sup>89</sup> or the names of the artists who laid the mosaic.<sup>90</sup> Synagogue floors usually show signs of repairs, with patches of mosaics filled up with new mosaics or mortar, or several layers of plaster poured on top of each other over time, indicating that the buildings were used for extended periods.<sup>91</sup> These repairs can make it difficult to date a synagogue (see subchapter 2.4).

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<sup>83</sup> For example Kitzinger 1965; Naveh 1978; Ovadiah 1987; Hachlili 2009; Talgam 2014 and dozens of articles on the floors of individual synagogue buildings.

<sup>84</sup> For example at Huqoq, Beth Alpha, Hammat Tiberias, Na'aran, Susiya, and Sepphoris.

<sup>85</sup> For example, the Binding of Isaac at Beth Alpha and Sepphoris, Daniel in the Lion's Den at Susiya and Na'aran, and the Ark of Noah and building of the tower of Babel at Huqoq.

<sup>86</sup> For example at Sepphoris, Beth Alpha, Hammat Tiberias, Na'aran, Beth She'an A, Susiya, and others.

<sup>87</sup> Two separate books have been published dealing with the Greek inscriptions (Roth-Gerson 1987) and the Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions (Naveh 1987) in synagogues.

<sup>88</sup> For example at Hammath Gader, Na'aran, Horvat Kur, Beth Alpha, 'En Gedi, Susiya, Sepphoris, and others.

<sup>89</sup> For example at 'En Gedi, Tiberias North, Rehob, and others.

<sup>90</sup> For example at Beth Alpha, and Beth She'an A and B.

<sup>91</sup> At Horvat Kur, evidence of at least four different plaster floors on top of each other was found.

Most synagogue halls had benches lining one, two, three, or all four of their inner walls. Sometimes these benches had multiple tiers, providing more space to sit.<sup>92</sup> The benches were constructed out of stone and the lowest tier was often plastered onto the floor (that is, the benches were constructed before the final floor layer was put in place). In many cases, the benches were plastered too. It is assumed that people sat on pillows on top of the benches as the benches are mostly built very low to the ground. Sometimes, additional galleries (a “second floor”) provided additional seating. Preserved stone staircases<sup>93</sup> or concentrations of large nails (for the wooden support)<sup>94</sup> indicate the locations of these galleries.

A special sort of seating place was the Seat of Moses, or *Cathedra d’ Moshe*. This seat has been found in several synagogues (Horvat Kur, Korazin,<sup>95</sup> Hammath Tiberias A, ‘En Gedi, and Delos<sup>96</sup>), and it was a detached stone chair, often carved from a single block of stone.<sup>97</sup> The seat could be decorated with geometrical elements and inscriptions (Korazin), or left undecorated (Horvat Kur, Hammath Tiberias). The purpose of the seat is unclear but presumably an important official sat on it during services. Opinions differ however as to who

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<sup>92</sup> Hachlili 2013, pp. 149-151. For an in-depth analysis of seating capacities in ancient synagogues, see Spigel 2012a. For a discussion of seating areas or seating galleries for women, see Duncan 2012; Spigel 2012b; Zangenberg 2019a.

<sup>93</sup> For example at Khirbet Shema’ and perhaps Capernaum and Horvat Kur.

<sup>94</sup> For example at Horvat Kur.

<sup>95</sup> This seat was found 200m away from the synagogue but is now reconstructed inside the hall.

<sup>96</sup> However, there is no definite evidence that building GD 80 at Delos actually was a synagogue. If this interpretation is indeed incorrect, then we do not have an example of an (immovable) Seat of Moses here. See Schindler 2012, Trümper 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Rahmani 1990; Hachlili 2013, pp. 217–220; Levine 2000, pp. 347–351.

that official was: a judge, a synagogue leader, an important donor, or an invited guest.<sup>98</sup> The couple of instances where the seat was found *in situ* indicate that it was placed in a prominent spot in the building, such as next to the *bimah* or Torah shrine or by the entrance.<sup>99</sup>

Columns to support the roof are an essential element in most public buildings and are found in almost all excavated synagogues. The typical synagogue had two rows of four to six columns, dividing the space into a nave and two side aisles. Sometimes additional columns connected the two rows on one side, forming a Π-shape. The columns often had stone-carved capitals with Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian inspired decorations, sometimes placed on stone bases.<sup>100</sup> Occasionally the corner columns were heart-shaped.<sup>101</sup> The columns stood on a stylobate or a continuous row of stone blocks that supported the weight of the roofing system.

One of the most important components of the ancient synagogue was the Torah shrine: the ark resembling a chest, or the cupboard containing the Torah scrolls, placed on a stone or wooden platform.<sup>102</sup> The ark is listed in the Mishnah's enumeration of the degrees of sanctity as holier than the synagogue building, but not as holy as the cloth covering the Torah scrolls

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<sup>98</sup> An inscription from Phocaea in western Asia Minor, dated to the third century CE, mentions a woman, Tation, who is credited with constructing both the synagogue building and the enclosure of the courtyard in front of it with her own money. In gratitude for her benefaction, the synagogue honored her with a golden crown and the "προεδρία," or the privilege of sitting at the front of the synagogue in a seat of honor (Brooten 1982, pp. 143–144).

<sup>99</sup> It is interesting that the only Seat of Moses found *in situ* in Israel/Palestine was discovered in the synagogue at Horvat Kur, which contained multiple coin deposits, but no coins under the seat.

<sup>100</sup> For an overview of different capitals and column bases found in synagogues, see Hachlili 2013, pp. 102–105 and pp. 142–149.

<sup>101</sup> For example, at Arbel, Bar'am, H. 'Ammudim, Capernaum, Gush Halav, Meiron, and Wadi Hamam.

<sup>102</sup> For a most recent summary of Torah shrines found in ancient synagogues, see Tervahauta 2021.

themselves.<sup>103</sup> In Jewish art, the shrine (*'aron qodesh*) is often depicted as a chest with legs and two open doors, presumably all of wood. Separate shelves inside the cupboard held the Torah scrolls.<sup>104</sup> The platform on which the ark stood could be reached by wooden or stone steps, many of which have been found *in situ*.<sup>105</sup> Often on top of the platform were two to four smaller columns or pilasters bearing a decorated lintel, arch, or (Syrian) gable, forming an *aedicula*. Pieces of all these elements have been discovered and indicate that the aedicula was decorated with carved geometric patterns,<sup>106</sup> lions,<sup>107</sup> rosettes,<sup>108</sup> or a conch.<sup>109</sup> Hanging from the arch or gable may have been a *parokhet* or curtain and an Eternal Light or *ner tamid*.<sup>110</sup> The Torah shrine was almost always built against the wall closest to Jerusalem (that is, against the south wall in synagogues in the Galilee and the Golan but against the north wall in synagogues

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<sup>103</sup> Levine 2000, p. 351. See *m. Megillah* 3:1; *b. Megillah* 26b.

<sup>104</sup> Meyers 1997: Meyers believes that some Torah shrines were too small and shallow to hold all Torah scrolls needed for year-round worship (for example, at Dura-Europos). In that case, another room would have been used as a repository for the scrolls not in use. The scrolls could be switched out every week when needed for the service.

<sup>105</sup> For example, at Um el-Qanatir, Sardis, Dura-Europos, 'En Gedi, and others. It should be noted that some authors refer to this platform as a *bemah*. However, the Torah shrine and the *bemah* are two separate elements of the synagogue (see below) and should be studied separately.

<sup>106</sup> For example, at Um el-Qanatir, Korazin.

<sup>107</sup> For example, at Horvat Kur, Nabratein, Korazin, 'En Nashut.

<sup>108</sup> For example, at Horvat Kur, Um el-Qanatir, Korazin.

<sup>109</sup> For example, at Um el-Qanatir, Korazin.

<sup>110</sup> Safrai 1989; Levine 2000, pp. 356–360.



in Judea).<sup>111</sup> The emphasis on the Torah shrine and the Jerusalem orientation symbolized the sanctity of the place and acted as a reminder of the Temple.<sup>112</sup>

After the late 3<sup>rd</sup>-early 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Torah shrine was often located in an apse – a semicircular or rectangular niche in the wall. Scholars believe that synagogues started to incorporate apses imitating Christian church architecture.<sup>113</sup> While in churches the apse was built in the east wall, in synagogues the apse was always placed in the wall closest to Jerusalem, with the forecourt and entrance to the building on its other side. Remains of iron nails found in apses indicate that wooden furniture must have stood here during the building's use: most likely these are the remains of wooden Torah shrines, dividing screens, or cupboards.

The last important element of the ancient synagogue was the *bemah* (or *bima*). This was an elevated wooden or stone platform from which the Torah was read. The *bemah* and the Torah aedicula could have been placed on the same platform, but in most instances, they were separate architectural features.<sup>114</sup> In some synagogues, the *bemah* was built in front of the apse or niche that contained the Torah shrine, in other cases, the *bemah* and Torah shrine stood on both sides of the central entrance of the building. Besides functioning as a podium for

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<sup>111</sup> This enabled prayer towards Jerusalem, a custom that is also mentioned in Biblical literature, see for example 2 Chron 6:20-21; Dan 6:10-11.

<sup>112</sup> Hachlili 2000, p. 2. For an overview of how the synagogue slowly became a sacred space and symbolic replacement for the Jerusalem temple, see Fine 1997.

<sup>113</sup> See for example Milson 2007; Tervahauta 2021.

<sup>114</sup> For example, at Korazin, Meroth, and Capernaum.

the orator, the *bemah* could have had other functions, such as supporting a menorah or serving as a podium for the priestly benedictions.<sup>115</sup>

## 2.2 Synagogue functions, leadership, and organization

Although scholars may never know exactly when synagogues first appeared in Palestine and the broader Mediterranean<sup>116</sup> and literary<sup>117</sup> evidence suggests that by the first century CE synagogues were common throughout the region.<sup>118</sup> Not only does this evidence indicate they were prevalent in the Jewish landscape, but they appear to have been important public institutions in most communities.<sup>119</sup> By Late Antiquity, worship was only one of the many activities that took place within these buildings.<sup>120</sup> In addition to being the location

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<sup>115</sup> One of the expressions used for this ritual was *aliya la-dukhan* or “ascending the podium”, implying there was a platform on which the priest stood to give the blessings. On the use of the *bemah* for priestly benedictions, see Safrai 1989.

<sup>116</sup> The archaeological evidence consists of a handful of synagogue buildings dated to the first century CE, including Gamla (which might even have been erected already in late 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE (Levine 2000, p. 54)), Herodium, Masada, and Magdala. Other buildings that may have been synagogues in the first century CE include Capernaum, Qiryat Sefer, Horvat ‘Ethri, and Jericho. Although there is no building associated with it, the Theodotus inscription provides evidence for a first-century synagogue complex in Jerusalem (see footnote 145). See, for example, Grabbe 1995; Kee and Cohick 1999; Levine 2004; Runesson, Binder and Olsson 2007, pp. 20–78; pp. 7–26; Hachlili 2013, pp. 23–54.

<sup>117</sup> Literary evidence is found in Philo (*Good Person*, 80-83), Josephus (*Life* 277-295, *J.W.* 2.128-132, 2.285-305, 4.406-409, *Ant.* 19:300-305, *Ag. Ap.* 1.209-211, 2.10-11), and the New Testament. See Runesson, Binder and Olsson 2007, pp. 79-117; Rocca 2011.

<sup>118</sup> For a variety of theories about the origin of the synagogue institute, see Flesher 1995; Binder 1999; Levine 2000, pp. 19–41; Runesson 2001; Olsson and Zetterholm 2003; Catto 2007; Hachlili 2013, pp. 6–21. It is important for our historical overview to understand that synagogues have been around since before 70 CE, as we will see that their relationship to the Temple is important for our understanding of some of the coin deposit categories. However, since no coin deposits have been found in the pre-70 synagogues known to us, we will not be discussing them here in detail.

<sup>119</sup> Levine 1987, p. 7: “By the middle of the first century of this era, the synagogue represented the central Jewish institution in any given community.”

<sup>120</sup> This overview is partly based on Safrai 1995; Binder 1999, pp. 389–450; Spigel 2008, pp. 1–6.

for regular Sabbath meetings where scripture was read, homilies were given, and prayers may have been recited,<sup>121</sup> synagogues were also used for study<sup>122</sup> and communal meals,<sup>123</sup> as hostels,<sup>124</sup> as a place for legal proceedings and the carrying out of punishments,<sup>125</sup> for political gatherings,<sup>126</sup> and possibly as a place to collect and distribute charity,<sup>127</sup> to perform magical rituals,<sup>128</sup> or even as private property for “own purposes.”<sup>129</sup>

To better understand who had access to the ancient synagogue building and who could have been involved in the deposition of coins within it, it is important to provide an overview of the associated religious, administrative, and political figures.

With the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and cessation of the sacrificial cult in 70 CE, Jewish religious practices underwent significant changes.<sup>130</sup> The synagogue took over some

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<sup>121</sup> New Testament (Mark 1:21-29, 3:1-5; Acts 15:21), Josephus (*J.W.* 2.285-305, *Ag. Ap.* 1.209-211, 2.175), and Philo (*Prob.* 80-83; *Leg.* 156).

<sup>122</sup> Josephus (*Ant.* 16.43), New Testament (Mark 1:21, 6:2).

<sup>123</sup> Josephus (*Ant.* 14.214-216, 16.164). See for many more references, Ottenheijm and Pater 2021.

<sup>124</sup> Roth-Gerson 1987, p. 76. Reading and instruction in the Torah, communal meals, and using the synagogue space as a hostel is also known from the Theodotus inscription (see footnote 145).

<sup>125</sup> New Testament (Mark 13:11, Matthew 23:34, Acts 22:19). See also Ryan 2021.

<sup>126</sup> New Testament (John 15:20), Josephus (*Life* 2.276-289).

<sup>127</sup> New Testament (Matthew 6:2), see chapter 5.

<sup>128</sup> Mock 2003. According to some, this could have included the *Sotah*-ritual: a trial by ordeal administered to the wife whose husband suspected her of adultery but who had no witnesses to make a formal case (however, see Rosen-Zvi 2012, who believes the practice was never actually performed and was pure textual). Other healings rituals performed in the synagogue, however, are described in the New Testament and Rabbinic literature (see chapter 5).

<sup>129</sup> Miller 1999, p. 56; See *y. Megillah* 3:73d, which contains the story of the sale of the synagogue of the Alexandrians in Jerusalem to a rabbi who intended to use it “for his own purposes.”

<sup>130</sup> In contrast to earlier synagogue scholarship (Clark 1994; Flesher 1995; Kee 1990; White 1990b), in which the year 70 was seen as a turning point for synagogue life, more recent scholarship has shown that the reality was far

of the significance of the Temple as the new “meeting place with God,” and worship and prayer became some of the primary functions of this building.<sup>131</sup> However, although synagogues were clearly places of religious practice, there was no central authority in control of them during the first centuries CE. Whereas it was once thought that synagogue procedures would have been under rabbinic authority, scholarship from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shown that rabbinic influence and control over synagogues in Late Antiquity was limited. Instead, most scholars now agree that synagogue practices were under local leadership.<sup>132</sup> Thus, to understand why and by whom coin deposits were placed inside these buildings, we need to expand our search beyond the rabbinic realm and explore who else was involved in synagogue practices.

The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 brought a sharp decline to the priestly political and religious hegemony. It has generally been assumed that in the post-70 era, the priesthood became a vestige of its former self, a kind of honorary caste among the Jews,

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more nuanced than that (Schwartz and Weiss 2012; Runesson and Cirafesi 2021). However, although the fall of Jerusalem might not have had an immediate impact on the synagogue as an institution, it is clear that certain kinds of development indeed took place from the pre-70 period to Late Antiquity, partially because of the loss of the Temple, but also because of other socio-historical factors, such as the rise of Christianity, and the emerging rabbinic movement.

<sup>131</sup> Steven Fine calls this the “ever-increasing sanctification” of the synagogue (Fine 1996a).

<sup>132</sup> E.R. Goodenough was the first to suggest that rabbinic sources do not reflect the Jewish religion as found in the excavated synagogues. His solution was a theory that suggested a dichotomy between a rabbinic Judaism and a more common Hellenistic-mystical Judaism, as expressed in the archaeological evidence (Goodenough 1953-1968). Goodenough’s dichotomy, however, was too simplistic and therefore largely has been rejected by scholars (Smith 1975; Fine 2005, pp. 36–43). However, what remains from Goodenough’s theory is the idea that rabbis were not a monolithic group whose writings reflect an accurate image of ancient Judaism in Palestine. Recently, scholars have been looking into the possible power the rabbis had on what went on inside the synagogue, as well as the influences of priests, the Patriarchate, the archisynagogos, donors, and other important figures in ancient society (for example, Levine 1989, pp. 99–195, 1992, 2000, pp. 35–58 and 412–500, 2012, pp. 428–434; Zavahy 1990; Binder 1999, pp. 343–388; Cohen S.J.D. 1999a and 1999b; Miller 1999; Swartz 1999; Irshai 2003; Grey 2011; Leibner 2016; Ryan 2021, pp. 144–148).

enjoying no real standing or authority.<sup>133</sup> Lately, however, this picture of an eclipsed priestly class has undergone serious reevaluation.<sup>134</sup> Some scholars argue that literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence indicates that priests continued to be influential after the First Jewish Revolt, retaining much of their status and contributing to Jewish social, religious, and political dynamics in Palestine for centuries after the year 70.<sup>135</sup> Priestly involvement in synagogues could have been expressed in several ways, including priests who might have served as benefactors or synagogue officials, or had a role in synagogue liturgy. The first two categories have little to do with priestly lineage per se, and the role of a priest as benefactor or synagogue leader was probably acquired for other reasons (social standing in the community, personality, family ties, wealth, or wisdom).<sup>136</sup> One of the strongest pieces of evidence in favor of post-70 priestly involvement in synagogue liturgy, however, is the recognition in rabbinic literature that such was the case.<sup>137</sup> Consistent references to priests in synagogue readings, prayers, blessings, and other ritual activities seem to reflect a tacit (and likely reluctant) acknowledgement that priests retained a high profile in public worship in the second century and beyond.<sup>138</sup> *Mishnah Megillah* may allude to a central role played by priests in the synagogue liturgy: “Whoever

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<sup>133</sup> Levine 2000, p. 519–529; Grey 2021, no. 11.

<sup>134</sup> For considerations of this issue, see Goodman 1983, p. 99; Fine 1999; Swartz 1999; Irshai 2003; but especially Grey 2011; 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Cohen S.A. 1990, pp. 158–163; Levine 1993, pp. 670–673; Grey 2011.

<sup>136</sup> Levine 2000, pp. 520–521.

<sup>137</sup> Grey 2011, pp. 203–206.

<sup>138</sup> Thus, this adds to the idea of the increasing “sanctification” of the synagogue, taking over roles that the Temple used to have (Fine 1996).

reads the prophetic passages also leads in the recitation of the *Shema*, leads in the *Amidah*, and raises his hand [as part of the priestly blessing].”<sup>139</sup> To give the priestly blessing, the priest may have ascended the *bemah* inside the synagogue building, facing the congregation and with his back towards Jerusalem. Nevertheless, besides the involvement of priests during liturgy there is very little evidence connecting priests to other activities that took place in the synagogue. We do, however, possess attestations for other officials alongside rabbis and priests.

The *archisynagogue* or *archisynagogos* (ἀρχισυναγωγός) is the most commonly mentioned figure associated with the synagogue and its daily operations, both in Palestine and the Diaspora.<sup>140</sup> Scholarly opinion regarding this office has fluctuated over the past century. The dominant view maintains that this office was primarily, if not exclusively, spiritual and religious.<sup>141</sup> However, some scholars have pointed out that the epigraphic evidence focuses on the archisynagogue as a benefactor, one who contributed to the construction of the facility or its repair and restoration.<sup>142</sup> Only recently has the pendulum swung back, with epigraphic

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<sup>139</sup> *m. Megillah* 4, 5 as translated by Levine 2000, p. 526.

<sup>140</sup> Brooten 1982, pp. 15-18; Binder 1999, pp. 348–352; Levine 2000, p. 415. For an overview of title bearer inscriptions found in synagogues, see Duncan 2012, pp. 15–17. The word “ἀρχισυναγωγός, archisynagogos” is Greek and appears mostly in early (0-300 CE) and Christian written sources. It was probably synonym for the Hebrew “ראש הַכְּנֶסֶת, Rosh haKnesset,” which mostly appears in later Rabbinic texts (e.g. *m. Yoma* 7:1). In the Babylonian Talmud, however, the word is translated as “פרנס, parnas” (*b. Ketubot* 8b).

<sup>141</sup> Juster 1914, pp. 450–453; La Piana 1927, pp. 359-360; Krauss 1966, pp. 114-121. This was mainly based on information from the New Testament (Mark 5:22, 35, 36, 38; Luke 8:49, 13:14; Acts 13:15, 18:8, 18:17), which highlights the religious role of the archisynagogue, and this is also the thrust of the relevant rabbinic (*m. Yoma* 7:1; *m. Sotah* 7: 7-8) and patristic (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 137,2; Epiphanius *Panarion* 30, 11, 1; Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom* 15) sources.

<sup>142</sup> Leon 1960, pp. 171–172; Linder 1987, pp. 137. For women as possible archisynagogoi, see Brooten 1982; 2000 and Duncan 2012.

evidence contributing decisively to an understanding of this office.<sup>143</sup> According to Rajak and Noy, the archisynagogue was primarily a patron and benefactor whose title was honorary in nature.<sup>144</sup> It was bestowed by Jewish communities only on those individuals who helped maintain and enhance the physical and material aspects of the synagogue. There is, however, a fourth alternative, whereby the archisynagogue often assumed not only religious and financial roles but also communal, political, and administrative ones.<sup>145</sup> This more inclusive idea of the office recognizes the need to consider all the primary sources, even those that appear to be polemical and historically problematic. According to this view, the archisynagogue, or its later Hebrew (Palestinian?) equivalent *Rosh HaKnesset*, was closely connected to the daily operations of the synagogue as an institution, including the financial aspects, as well as involved with the spiritual activities.

A different powerful office was that of the *patriarch* or *nasi* (אֲשִׁיבֵן). The status and authority of the patriarch in Late Antiquity is a subject that has attracted much scholarly

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<sup>143</sup> Levine 2000, pp. 415-427.

<sup>144</sup> Rajak and Noy 1993, pp. 75–93. This interpretation is based exclusively on epigraphic data, dismissing the literary material as tendentious and historically unreliable.

<sup>145</sup> Levine 2000, p. 416; Ryan 2021, pp. 144–145. The title is probably most famously known from the Theodotos inscription, an inscription in Greek, found in Jerusalem in 1913 and dated to the first century CE. It commemorates the dedication of a synagogue building which presumably stood somewhere nearby. Although no remains survive of the building, the inscription provides valuable information about early synagogues. It reads as follows: “Theodotus, son of Vettanos, a priest and an archisynagogos, grandson of an archisynagogos, built the synagogue for the reading of Torah and for teaching the commandments; furthermore, the hostel, and the rooms, and the water installation for lodging needy strangers. Its foundation stone was laid by his ancestors, the elders, and Simonides.” (CIJ II 1404; see also Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, 2008, pp. 52–54). In how far these characteristics can still be applied to Late Antiquity, however, is hard to say.

attention over the last couple of decades.<sup>146</sup> Opinions have ranged from those seeing the office as something crucial to the Roman Empire, affecting Jewish communities everywhere, to those who have minimized its importance, seeing it as a marginal institution. What we can say is that the rabbis applied the title to both the president of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish tribunal in antiquity) and the appointed political head of the people by the Roman government.<sup>147</sup> The texts relating specifically to the relationship between the Patriarchate and the synagogue are intriguing. Although few in number, they point to the seemingly significant role of this office in synagogues, at least in certain times and places.<sup>148</sup> The clearest attestations of a major role played by the patriarch are the decrees from the Theodosian Code, dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>149</sup> These decrees place the patriarch in Jewish communities at the same level as bishops in Christian centers. Moreover, a decree from 415 CE states that “henceforth he shall cause no synagogues to be founded, and if there are any in deserted places, he shall see to it that they are destroyed, if it can be done without sedition,” giving the patriarch a pivotal role in the construction of synagogue buildings.<sup>150</sup> The “right” to build synagogues may be interpreted as some sort of formal grant issued by the nasi to local communities, but perhaps without any real fiscal or administrative responsibilities or authority. Thus, the nasi held a public office

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<sup>146</sup> Mantel 1961, pp. 1–53, 175–253; Levine, 1966, pp. 1–32; 1979, pp. 649–88; Cohen J. 1976, pp. 1–29 Goodman, 1983, pp. 111–118; 1992, pp. 127–139; Rosenfeld, 1988, pp. 239–257; Levine 1999, pp. 77–88; Schwartz 1999, pp. 208–222.

<sup>147</sup> On the Sanhedrin and its connection to the rabbis and patriarchs, see Flatto 2020.

<sup>148</sup> Levine 1999, pp. 77–88 and 2000, p. 455.

<sup>149</sup> Linder 1987, pp. 54–90; Levine 2000, pp. 461–463.

<sup>150</sup> Levine 2000, p. 81.



above the individual community level and was probably not involved in the daily operations of the synagogue.

Other officials involved with synagogue practices include the *archon* (ἄρχων), a person who might have functioned as a community leader or as head of a synagogue board.<sup>151</sup> At times, the archon is mentioned in inscriptions as an official functioning alongside the archisynagogue, other times, one and the same person held both titles.<sup>152</sup> Several passages in the New Testament appear to use the terms synonymously as well: Mark and Luke-Acts use the title “archisynagogue” (e.g. Mark 5:35-38; Luke 8:49), but Luke uses the term “archon of the synagogue” (Luke 8:41). Matthew refers to Jairus simply as “archon” (Matthew 9:18), while Mark calls him an “archisynagogue” (Mark 5:22). One explanation may be that in smaller communities these various positions were combined, whereas in the cities they designated distinct positions,<sup>153</sup> another may be that New Testament writers often did not use “official” titles, but rather described certain functions (to make things clearer to their non-Jewish followers?). In any case, the archon probably dealt with the secular businesses of the synagogue, such as financial agreements, but we do not possess a description of his duties.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Schürer 1879, pp. 18–20; Juster 1914, pp. 444–446; Frey 1930–1931; Binder 1999, pp. 344–348; Ryan 2021, pp. 144–145.

<sup>152</sup> Lifschitz 1967, p. 33.

<sup>153</sup> Levine 2000, p. 428.

<sup>154</sup> The written evidence on the office is spotty and uncertain. Besides the New Testament references, we have mentioning of the position in 47 catacomb inscriptions from Rome, a possible text from John Chrysostom (*De Solstitia et De aequinoctia*), and a handful of dedicatory inscriptions from around Greece and Asia Minor (Leon 1960, p. 176; Levine 2000, pp. 427–428).

Other inscriptions, mostly from Rome, mention a *pater synagogues* or *pater synagogos*, an honorific title denoting a major patron and benefactor of the community, which was also used in pagan contexts.<sup>155</sup> Yet despite the consensus that this was a position of honor, a number of sources suggest this may not always have been the case. The Stobi inscription, which mentions the *pater synagogues* Claudius Tiberius Polycharmos, conveys the impression that this individual played a crucial and pivotal role in synagogue affairs. Although the inscription never states this explicitly, both its gist and tone seem to point to Claudius' deep involvement in local synagogue life.<sup>156</sup> The most important source attesting to the role of the *pater* in synagogue affairs, however, is the Theodosian Code, found in Jerusalem. This decree from 330 CE includes the following rule: "We order that the priests, archisynagogues, fathers of synagogues, and the others who serve in synagogues shall be free from all corporal liturgy."<sup>157</sup> The mention of "fathers of synagogues" alongside other functionaries such as priests and archisynagogues seems to indicate a position of responsibility.

Elders or *presbyters* (πρεσβύτεροι) also played an important role in some synagogues. However, the use of the term in inscriptions seems to be concentrated mainly in Asia Minor and southern Italy.<sup>158</sup> It is all but absent from Rome and Egypt, and appears only infrequently in

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<sup>155</sup> Juster 1914, pp. 448–449; Leon 1960, pp. 186–188; Linder 1987, p. 137; Burtchaell 1992, pp. 249–250; Levine 2000, pp. 429–431. There was also a *Mater Synagoges*, but the primary sources for this title are even more rare, mentioned only in three Greek and three Latin inscriptions from Italy (Levine 2000, pp. 431–432).

<sup>156</sup> White, 1990a, p. 71.

<sup>157</sup> Linder 1987, p. 135.

<sup>158</sup> See for a reference to the thirty inscriptions, found from Spain to Syria, Levine 2000, pp. 432–434.

North Africa, Syria, and Palestine.<sup>159</sup> The function of this office is unknown: Was it administrative, financial, religious-liturgical, or all three? The definition of this title may have differed from place to place. It has often been assumed that the council of presbyters was the chief governing board of a community or congregation, from which archons were then selected to run daily affairs.<sup>160</sup> In any case, the term “πρεσβύτεροι, presbyteroi” means “old men”, i.e. a congregational or family related collective governing group in addition to the single leading figure.

Another title – *grammateus* – has generally been understood in a secretarial vein, as were similar titles in a Greco-Roman context.<sup>161</sup> Possible tasks might have included responsibility for keeping records of official meetings and decisions, handling correspondence, managing the archives, compiling synagogue membership lists, and serving as a notary.<sup>162</sup> In Egyptian papyri, a *grammateus* is a person who is versed in writing and reading, is able to set up documents, and administers archives. In synagogues, these people were important as they were able to read Scripture, knew how to interpret laws and regulations, and could draft documents like divorce letters.

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<sup>159</sup> Here it appears more prominently in biblical and post-biblical literature as the Hebrew “זָקֵן, *zaqen*” (Levine 2000, p. 432).

<sup>160</sup> Baron 1942, vol 1, p. 99.

<sup>161</sup> Juster 1914, pp. 447–448; Baron 1942, pp. 102–103; Leon 1960, pp. 183–186; Burtchaell 1992, pp. 251–253; Binder 1999, pp. 363–368.

<sup>162</sup> Levine 2000, p. 434: practically all our evidence comes from Roman catacomb inscriptions.

The office of *phrontistes* appears to have been administrative in nature, referring to one who manages or oversees some sort of facility.<sup>163</sup> Perhaps the best indication of the possible roles of this official is found in two inscriptions from Aegina, in Greece.<sup>164</sup> Although the noun *phrontistes* is not used there, its verbal form is invoked twice. The first reference is to the archisynagogue Theodoros, who served (*phrontisas*) the synagogue for four years and built the structure from its foundations. In the second inscription, Theodoros the Younger oversaw (*phrontizon*) the laying of a mosaic floor in the synagogue. Both men thus seemed to have been responsible for (part of) the construction of the synagogue building.<sup>165</sup> In how far this profession, however, also existed in Palestine is unknown.

The most prominent functionary in the Palestinian synagogue was the *hazzan*.<sup>166</sup> This seems to have been a multifaceted position, ranked below the sage and schoolteacher (see below).<sup>167</sup> As for his function, by the early third century CE, we can read about the active role of the *hazzan* in public prayer (*t. Megillah* 3:21; *y. Berakhot* 9, 1, 12d; *y. Berakhot* 5, 3, 9c) as well as in morning rituals (*Tractate Soferim* 19:9). Besides his specific liturgical functions, he was also

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<sup>163</sup> Lifschitz 1967, Nos. 36, 37, 66; Levine 2000, p. 434.

<sup>164</sup> Lifschitz, 1967, Nos. 1-2.

<sup>165</sup> Which could be important to understand who was responsible for some of our coin deposits, see chapter 5.

<sup>166</sup> At least as reflected by the rabbinic literature. See Levine 2000, pp. 435-42; Runesson *et al.* 2008, nos. 23-25, 86). The position might have been equivalent to the νεωκόρος of Hellenistic temples or the Greek designation ὑπηρέτης, which is mentioned in relation to the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4:20 (Runesson and Cirafesi 2021, p. 51).

<sup>167</sup> *M. Sotah* 9:15; *b. Sotah* 49a-b.

charged with making the public announcements in the synagogue.<sup>168</sup> Last, he was responsible for blowing the trumpet from a high roof of the town to usher in Sabbath and festivals (*m. Sukkah* 5:5; *y. Shabbat* 14, 1, 16a), sometimes he was a schoolteacher (*m. Shabbat* 1:3), and he might have been responsible for collecting outstanding pledges (*Leviticus Rabbah* 16:5). The hazzan seems to have been closely connected to the daily operations of the synagogue and his office grew in importance throughout the centuries.

The last administrative title linked to synagogues is the schoolteacher or *melamed tinokot* (“the teacher of the young”). Schoolteachers are mentioned in rabbinic literature as an essential component of the communal network (e.g., *b. Sanhedrin* 17b; *b. Taanit* 24a).<sup>169</sup> Generally speaking, they conducted their lessons in the synagogue. In places where the teacher was a communal employee, as in Palestine, an attempt was made to enhance their status: hiring and retaining good teachers was high on the agendas of many communities.<sup>170</sup> The obligation to pay taxes to cover the teacher’s tuition is repeatedly mentioned in Palestinian rabbinic sources. According to one tradition, the payment of taxes for such purposes is even more important than giving to charity. Thus, money needed to be collected from the community to support these officials. This task could have been performed by a tax collector, who may or may not have been the same person as the local charity supervisor. In this regard, tax collectors or charity supervisors can also be linked to synagogue leadership.

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<sup>168</sup> See Levine 2000, p. 441. The stories about the hazzan include announcing charity donations and announcing a stolen object, which might give a clue to our understanding on who was responsible for the money collecting in synagogues (see chapter 4).

<sup>169</sup> Aberbach 1982, pp. 33–92.

<sup>170</sup> *y. Sanhedrin* 19, 9, 23d; *b. Shabbat* 56a; *b. Sanhedrin* 17b. See Levine 2000, pp. 442–443; Heszer 2001.

As we previously stated, to better understand who had access to the ancient synagogue building and who could have been responsible for, or involved in the placement of coins within these buildings, it was important to take a look at the different synagogue functionaries. However, as the reader might have realized, trying to tease out who might have been responsible for what specific functions related to the synagogue is difficult. One complication is that our primary sources come from all over the Roman empire and deal with a time period of over 700 years: clearly, different officials will have existed in different parts of the world and in different time periods. If, for example, the function of the phrontistes did not exist in Palestine, then this person could not have been responsible for placing coin deposits in the Palestinian synagogues. It also does not help that secondary authors often use different English words to translate the same Greek, Latin, or Hebrew title. For example, one scholar might translate סופר as schoolteacher, but another scholar as scribe, copyist, secretary, or treasurer. It is clear that each of these different translations comes with its own semantic connotations in English: taking translations at face value would thus be flawed. However, if the goal is to better understand the function(s) of the coin deposits, it is important to get to the motives behind their placement. Knowing what specific roles priests, archisynagogoi, hazzans, grammatei, and schoolteachers fulfilled within the realm of the synagogue can give us indications of the possible purpose(s) of the different deposits. These roles, and their connection to the synagogue deposits, will be further explored in chapters Four and Five.

### 2.3 Difficulties in Identifying Synagogues

To give an overview of all coin deposits found in ancient synagogues, we must first be able to identify a synagogue building. The term “synagogue” has a broad definition.<sup>171</sup> The English term is derived from the Greek word συναγωγή, which indicates a place of assembly, as well as the assembly itself.<sup>172</sup> Likewise, the Greek word προσευχή (*proseuche*), found in inscriptions, Josephus, and rabbinic texts refers to an act of worship or prayer, and a place where this worship took place.<sup>173</sup> The Hebrew equivalent, בית כנסת (*bet kneset*), literally “House of Assembly,” appears in rabbinic literature as well, and refers both to the Jewish congregation that assembled for religious, communal, and other functions, and the building in which they gathered.<sup>174</sup> Despite occasional references to synagogues as buildings, the texts are never explicit as to how such a building was defined, or what its specific architectural features were. It is only because of the archaeological discoveries of Jewish communal buildings in Israel/Palestine excavated over the course of the last century that we have gained a clearer image of what a typical synagogue in ancient Palestine looked like.<sup>175</sup> To summarize, a “typical”

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<sup>171</sup> For an overview of the different Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic words used to denote ancient synagogues, see for example McKay 1998, pp. 110–12; Levine 2000, pp. 21–44, 2004, pp. 91–92; Spigel 2012a, pp. 28–30; Werlin 2012, pp. 12–14; Hachlili 2013, pp. 6–13.

<sup>172</sup> McKay 1998, pp. 105, 110–12; Levine 2000, p. 1; Hachlili 2013, pp. 7–13. The Septuagint uses the word συναγωγή as the Greek translation of עדת (*edah*), meaning ‘community’. Josephus in *Ant.* 19. 300, 305 refers to a synagogue building in Dor which was used by Jews for cultic purposes; in *War* 2. 285–289, he describes access to the Caesarea synagogue as being restricted, indicating that he is referring to a building, not to a congregation or assembly. This word is also used in the Theodotos inscription (Kloppenborg 2006, pp. 242–244).

<sup>173</sup> Rajak and Noy 1993, p. 76. See Hachlili 2013, pp. 8–10 for an overview of scholarly discussions on the interpretation of this word.

<sup>174</sup> Schürer et al. 1979, pp. 429–430; Hachlili 2013, p. 7.

<sup>175</sup> A further complication is that while we do have inscriptions from Egypt dating to the 3rd c. BCE, there is no single excavated synagogue from this area; and while we do have a lot of pre-70 buildings from Palestine, none

ancient synagogue in (post-70 CE) Palestine was a large hall constructed of stone blocks containing rows of internal columnar supports, at least one platform, and rows of benches along of the walls (See chapter 2.1). Nonetheless, no two synagogue buildings are alike, and there is great variation between geographical regions.<sup>176</sup> This often makes identifying a building as a synagogue difficult, especially if the remains are poorly preserved. Because synagogues suffer from a lack of standardization, archaeologists sometimes rely on other considerations to identify the building.<sup>177</sup> For example, the context and the size are frequently used to label a structure as a synagogue: a communal building in a Jewish village, even without any other markers, is designated as a synagogue.<sup>178</sup> However, this interpretation can be misguided. In the early 1970s, a small columnar building was discovered during the excavation of the Roman settlement at Magdala, a site situated beneath the remains of the Arab village of el-Mejdel on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>179</sup> The excavators labelled the building a synagogue because it was located in a Jewish village, is a rectangular hall constructed of large, basalt ashlar, and has columns and several layers of steps along the sides, interpreted as benches. However, in 2012, Rick Bonnie and Julian Richard proved that the building is a *nymphaeum* or

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came with inscriptions. The only inscription mentioning a synagogue from pre-70 Palestine is the Theodotus inscription.

<sup>176</sup> See Levine 2000, pp. 214–224.

<sup>177</sup> Werlin 2015, pp. 24–26.

<sup>178</sup> Here as well, there has been debate on how one can assess the “Jewishness” of a village: does one, for example, have to find typical Jewish iconography lying around, like menorahs and depictions of Temple vessels, or does the discovery of stone vessels or *miqvehs* at the site indicate Jewish purity observations? See for example Meyers 2001; Zangenberg 2013b.

<sup>179</sup> Corbo 1974, 1976. To be clear, I am here not referring to the 1<sup>st</sup> century synagogue with the famous stone table discovered at the site in 2009, but to another building that was excavated earlier by the Franciscans.



fountain-house, and the “benches” were steps to go down into the pool.<sup>180</sup> Based on comparanda from the ancient city of Sagalassos in Turkey, they demonstrated that not every large, open building in the center of a Jewish town should be identified as a synagogue. Examining our case-studies specifically, the identification of the synagogue at Caesarea has been disputed. In 2009, Marylinda Govaars, Marie Spiro, and L. Michael White published a final report on excavations at Caesarea conducted in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>181</sup> During these excavations, a building was uncovered with at least 4 Phases: first the structure of Stratum I-III, second, Stratum IV, third, Stratum V, and fourth, a new Stratum VI or a later Phase of Stratum V. In the first three strata the structure was a square building with a cistern. In Stratum IV, which is dated to the late 4th century, the structure was a large hall measuring 18 by 9 meters, oriented east-west, with the entrance on the short eastern side that faced the town, and a mosaic floor. Inside the building there was evidence of a platform, as well as a chancel screen and posts. Close by, a plaque inscribed in Hebrew listing the priestly courses and oil lamps decorated with menorahs were discovered. There was also evidence of an entry hall and an adjoining triclinium. Avi-Yonah identified this final stage of the building as an ancient synagogue, as did Govaars *et al.*<sup>182</sup> Magness, however, doubts this identification.<sup>183</sup> She points

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<sup>180</sup> Bonnie and Richard 2012.

<sup>181</sup> Govaars, Spiro, and White, 2009.

<sup>182</sup> In 1956 and 1962, Michael Avi-Yonah of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem conducted large-scale excavations at Caesarea, but no final report of this research has been published. He identified the building as a synagogue, describing five strata, with a possible Early Roman house-synagogue in stratum II and synagogue buildings in strata IV and V (Avi-Yonah 1960, 1963, and 1993, and Avi-Yonah and Negev 1975).

<sup>183</sup> See her review: Magness 2010, in which she notes that Govaars concludes that the last phase might be a synagogue, but she is tentative about this.

out that none of the inscriptions found in the mosaic floor (all of which are in Greek) are unambiguously Jewish.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, because Govaars *et al.* do not present (un)published material from Avi-Yonah's excavations (no pottery, glass, coins, or small finds), it is impossible to date the various strata of this building. The elevations of the various floors uncovered (including the mosaics) are mostly unknown, meaning it is impossible to determine their relationship to one another and the surrounding buildings. Last, the fragments of the chancel screen and the plaque listing the priestly courses were discovered not in Avi-Yonah's area A, where the building is located, but in other areas more than 70 meters away. Therefore, Magness is skeptical that stratum IV indeed was a synagogue building. If this interpretation by Avi-Yonah and Govaars *et al.* is indeed wrong, then the deposit of 3700 bronze coins found next to its apse cannot be categorized as a synagogue deposit. Nevertheless, the twenty-four buildings included in this survey traditionally have been interpreted as synagogues and their coin deposits as synagogue deposits. When compiling the catalogue, certain decisions had to be made and Caesarea has been included based on its importance in the synagogue deposit debate. Readers should thus note that the Caesarea material has been included in the graphs and tables.

## **2.4 Difficulties in Dating Synagogues**

To determine when the phenomenon of coin deposits in ancient synagogues started, it is also important to know the construction dates of the (different phases of the) buildings. However,

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<sup>184</sup> During Late Antiquity, it was not uncommon for public buildings or ornate houses to have decorated mosaic floors. Mosaic art constructed cultural, religious, and ethnic identities, and they were created by Jews, Christians, and pagans alike. Thus, a large building with mosaic inscriptions does not need to be a synagogue (Hachlili 2009; Talgam 2014).

unlike churches of the Byzantine period, ancient synagogues rarely have dated dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>185</sup> Thus, these buildings must be dated using other means. In the past, synagogue buildings often were dated based on their art-historical and architectural styles.<sup>186</sup> “Galilean” type synagogues, especially the one at Capernaum, were originally dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, based on stylistic parallels with temples in Syria and Asia Minor.<sup>187</sup> In 1971 Gideon Foerster wrote:

“The late second and third century A.D. dating is founded on architectural and stylistic parallels in contemporary Roman art and architecture in Syria and Asia Minor. The synagogue in Capernaum is in harmony with the classical architectural concept that stresses the outer appearance of a building. In contrast, Byzantine architecture concentrates on the interior (e.g. the lavish mosaic pavement of the synagogue of Hamath-Tiberias, which dates to the first half of the fourth century A.D.). Though in some remote areas in Syria and Asia Minor classical concepts of the exteriors of buildings seem to continue even in the Byzantine period, the architectural details are non-classical. At Capernaum, however, the capitals, friezes, cornices and other architectural details belong to types well-established in the late second and third centuries A.D.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Exceptions are the Beth Alpha synagogue (according to a dedicatory inscription in the mosaic, built during the reign of Roman Emperor Justinus, which is either Justin I (518–527 CE) or Justin II (565-578 CE)), the Nabratein synagogue (a dedicatory inscription found on the lintel of the main door reads: “Built four hundred and ninety four years after the destruction of the Temple under the leadership of Hanina ben Lizar and Luliana bar Yuden,” or 564 CE), and the synagogue of Gaza-Maiumas (a dedicatory inscription in the south aisle reads: “Mena-ḥem and Yeshua, sons of the late Isai/Issi, wood merchants, as a sign of thanks for the most holy place, this mosaic (we) have donated in the month of Loos [July-August], 569 [of the era of Gaza = 508/9]”). See Naveh 1987, Nos. 13 and 43; Werlin 2012, pp. 332–334.

<sup>186</sup> This scholarship is sometimes called the “first school,” and started with Kohl and Watzinger, who dated Galilean synagogues on the basis of their architectural style and historical context (Kohl and Watzinger 1916; Aviam, 2001, p. 166). This school still exists, especially among Israeli archaeologists, who, for example, often link the construction of synagogue buildings in the Galilee to the thriving age of the rabbis in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (see for example Ma’oz 1996, p. 422; Dar 1999, p. 31).

<sup>187</sup> Many of the Syrian buildings cited as *comparanda* have inscriptions that date them primarily to the second and third century CE (Leibner 2018, p. 10). For an overview of the history of the tripartite synagogue typology into the Galilean type, broadhouse type, and Byzantine type, see chapter 2.1.

<sup>188</sup> Foerster 1971, pp. 207–208.

Scholars claimed that the architecture and decoration of the Capernaum synagogue are so different from those at Hammath Tiberias and Beth Alpha (dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries) that they could not possibly have been constructed at the same time.<sup>189</sup> They also believed that historical considerations supported these dates. Foerster writes:

“In the second century, the Jewish authorities together with a large number of Jews left Judea and settled in Galilee after two wars against the Romans. The prosperous condition of Jewish communities, as a result of their political, economic, and, not least, spiritual strength was the proper background for unusual building activity, of which the Capernaum synagogue can serve as one example.”<sup>190</sup>

Scholars like Jodi Magness, however, have rebutted these theories over the last decades, pointing out that the building style of Galilean-type synagogues was in use for hundreds of years and can be found in houses and churches in Syria through the fifth and even sixth centuries CE.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, differences in architecture between synagogue buildings are influenced by factors such as regional styles or local topography and building materials, and not necessarily by the period of construction (see chapter 2.1). Magness argues that the archaeological evidence should be interpreted in its own right; the dating of a building should not be dictated by historical trends deduced from written sources. Only after the chronology of each ancient synagogue has been determined on the basis of the archaeological evidence can

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<sup>189</sup> Avi-Yonah 1981, p. 61: Avi-Yonah objects to a 4<sup>th</sup> century date for the synagogue of Capernaum since that would mean it was contemporaneous with the nearby synagogue at Hammath Tiberias, a building that is very different in style.

<sup>190</sup> Foerster 1971, p. 208.

<sup>191</sup> Magness 2001b. She refuted the architectural dating method by using the pottery and coins found in the synagogues at Capernaum, Gush Halav, and Meroth as case-studies, showing that these buildings are much younger than previously thought. Magness belongs to the so-called “second school” of thought, who state that in the field of archaeology, the *terminus post quem* provided by coins and other artifacts cannot be ignored (Magness 1993, 2005b, 2007a, 2012a; Aviam, 2001, p. 166).

we accurately reconstruct the historical setting of ancient Jews.<sup>192</sup> Magness has been at the forefront of this, often heated, dating debate, insisting that ancient synagogues should be dated scientifically on the basis of ceramics and coins found in and under the buildings.<sup>193</sup> She insists that only a close examination of the archaeological material can provide us with the correct construction, renovation, and destruction dates for these buildings. Each synagogue building should be dated independently of typological or historical considerations, on the basis of well-excavated and thoroughly published archaeological evidence.<sup>194</sup> However, although I agree with this methodology and also apply it in this study, not all archaeologists are convinced, and synagogues continue to be dated based on stylistic considerations,<sup>195</sup> or historical events.<sup>196</sup> In this study, I have tried to assess the dating debates for each building, choosing the date that I believe is the most accurate based on the published stratigraphy and the site's archaeological materials. However, sometimes a date was determined by the original

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<sup>192</sup> Magness 2001a, p. 35.

<sup>193</sup> Magness 1993, 2001b, and 2012a in which she re-dates the ancient synagogues of Meiron, Gush Halav, Chorazin, Capernaum, and Khirbet Shema' based on the published stratigraphy of the excavations, as well as the pottery and coins. In recent years, Magness has started her own excavations in the Galilean synagogue at Huqoq and the results of this excavation will undoubtedly contribute to the discussion. The fact that the synagogue would have been dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century CE based on stylistic considerations but can actually be dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century based on archaeological evidence shows that Galilean-type synagogues cannot automatically be dated to the second-third centuries based on stylistic considerations alone (Magness 2016, 2018, 2019b).

<sup>194</sup> Magness 2001b, p. 90, see also Chen 1986b.

<sup>195</sup> Foerster 1989; Tsafirir 1995. See also Amir 2012, who rebutted Magness' assessment of the Galilean architectural style being used in Syria in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>196</sup> For example, many synagogue destructions in Israel have been linked to earthquakes that occurred in the region in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. However, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to prove if an earthquake was the reason for a building's destruction. An earthquake could have happened decades after a building was already deserted for other reasons, causing construction stones to crack, giving archeologists the false impression that this was the reason for the abandonment. For a critical analysis of using seismic activity as the cause of archaeological destruction layers, see Karcz and Kafri 1978.

excavators many decades ago and was never re-evaluated. In other cases, the archaeologists admit that their date is problematic, but they have no other means of determining the exact time of construction. In both these cases, for the sake of the data needed in the database, I have chosen to use the dates provided by the excavators. Readers should note that as new evidence comes to light in the future or pottery types are re-dated, these dates might need to be adjusted.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> For example, Daniel Schindler recently re-evaluated the Galilean pottery from the Late Roman and Byzantine period in his PhD. dissertation. In his work, he re-dated many of the local pottery types, meaning that the associated archaeological levels from this region should be redated (Schindler 2017).

## CHAPTER 3 NUMISMATICS AS AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD

### **3.1 Archeology Versus Numismatics**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, coin studies received particular attention among the burgeoning field of archaeology.<sup>198</sup> At this point in time, archaeology was still developing as a new branch of the study of history, and principles like “typologies” and “seriations” of material culture were still being explored. Coins, by their serial nature, lend themselves well to the systemization and classification of historical periods. Archaeologists interested in particular periods or geographical regions regularly learned to recognize, date, and systematize the coins in their field. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this situation changed as archaeology became rapidly influenced by the social and natural sciences.<sup>199</sup> The 1950s and 60s saw the advent of Processual Archaeology: rather than describing and ordering artifacts, archaeologist now attempted to understand the people and societies that created them. Post-Processual Archaeology, which followed in the late 1970s and 80s, emphasized the subjectivity of archaeology: the past cannot be explained by large overarching, objective theories, but rather by studying the patchwork of individuals with their own agencies. Research questions shifted from the WHAT to the WHY. In so doing, archaeology created its own theoretical and methodological frameworks based on

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<sup>198</sup> Kemmers and Burström 2011, pp. 87–89. For an overview of numismatic scholarship and its connection to archaeology, see Grierson 1975, pp. 182–192; Jones 1990, pp. 213–222; Burström 2019. For an overview of coin hoard scholarship, see Duyrat 2016a, pp. 2–18.

<sup>199</sup> Kemmers and Burström 2011, p. 88.

principles like the *longue durée*, the “small” history of the individual, and global connectivity. Numismatics no longer formed an integral part of this endeavor: it was (and still is by many) considered a highly descriptive and specialized field of study, which mainly contributes to archaeological research on an ancillary level: to provide dates for excavated features. Coins found in excavations are now almost always handed over to numismatists, or coin specialists, who write a short report on the coin finds and deliver a conclusion to the archaeologists.<sup>200</sup>

Luckily, this view has been changing again. Archaeologists are slowly rediscovering the broad opportunities coins can offer as they not only reflect the economic world in which they are circulated, but also the social, cultural, and religious aspects of a society.<sup>201</sup> Having coinage or money meant access to power, opportunities, and possessions. Not having money meant a life in poverty and struggle, especially in the Roman empire.<sup>202</sup> People made careful choices on how they used their money and what they spent it on: exploring these decisions tells us something about what communities valued or deemed important, be it food, clothing, shelter, security, or pleasure. Excavated coins furthermore provide a means of understanding the kinds of denominations in circulation, the level of monetization of a settlement, and its economic ties

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<sup>200</sup> Of course, that is not all what numismatists do; papers and books are written constantly on the understanding of coins as evidence for economic and social analyses relevant for a comprehensive interpretation of “their” sites. However, coin studies tend to be an independent field, separate from mainstream archaeology, with its own specialized websites, journals, and conferences. Most excavation reports do not include these kinds of in-depth coin analyses (See Kemmers and Myrberg 2011).

<sup>201</sup> For example, Sheedy and Papageorgiadou-Banis (eds.) 1997, Burström 2009, Elkins 2009, Myrberg 2009, von Kaenel 2009, Kemmers and Burström 2011, Haselgrove and Krmnicek (eds.) 2016, Burström and Ingvarðson (eds.) 2017, and Evans DeRose 2018, whose works are bridging the gap between numismatics and archaeology. See also Frey-Kupper and Kemmers 2018 for an appeal to fully integrate coin studies into the study of Classical Antiquity and open up communication between numismatists and archaeologists.

<sup>202</sup> Meggitt 1998.



to the surrounding area.<sup>203</sup> They can also provide insights into ancient commodification, iconography, cultural exchange, religious practices, and social patterns.<sup>204</sup> A coin is not an autonomous object — it is part of history, and as such should be treated as any other artifact. Coins provide information about the past that is otherwise unknown and thus supplement other categories of finds.<sup>205</sup> Coins also have several advantages over historical sources and other categories of excavated artifacts. First, they are primary sources and contemporary in nature.<sup>206</sup> Second, they were mass-produced, meaning they give us an opportunity to apply statistical analysis to the bulk. We can, for example, find the same coins spread out over a long time and large distances, allowing us to discern chronological and geographical patterns. Third, coins were produced by the state rather than by private individuals. Their designs and inscriptions provide information about politics, religion, fashion, artistic tastes, and propaganda. And finally, because of their standardized forms, we are comparatively well informed about the official minting sizes, weights, and composition of coins. This enables us to examine the value of coins, the timespan of their circulation, and the influence of socio-

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<sup>203</sup> For an introductory overview of what we can and cannot learn about the ancient economy from coins, see Butcher 2016, pp. 225–237.

<sup>204</sup> See also Syon 2015, pp. 31-49.

<sup>205</sup> See also the appeal by Sauer from 2004, p. 327: “Far too often studies on ancient religion focus almost exclusively on literary and epigraphic evidence, iconography, and architecture. ... It is symptomatic that the findspots or dates of mintage of the coins were not considered to be worth mentioning. ... It is time to redress the balance and to take each item of evidence on its own merits.”

<sup>206</sup> Compared to, for example, texts written about events long after their occurrence. For more about the advantage of using coins to interpret the past, see Grierson 1965; 1966; 1975, p. 3; Burnett 1991, p. 7 and pp. 31–41; Howgego 1995, pp. 62–87.

economic circumstances on a society. All these elements taken together make coins an essential source of information for archaeologists studying all regions and periods.

### **3.2 Coins and how to properly excavate, publish, and read them**

In order to fully comprehend my project, it is first necessary to get a better understanding of how coins are excavated, read, and published. This chapter is also an appeal for “best practices,” as careful excavation, thorough analysis, and complete publication of each coin found at an archaeological excavation would have made a project like this one much easier to accomplish.

Just as in other sciences, work in the field of numismatics requires the highest standards of accuracy. To utilize the maximum potential of coins, they must be analyzed and described with great attention to detail, so that every piece of information can be used for its interpretation.<sup>207</sup> This careful treatment should already start at the excavation site, where the recording of coins should follow the most meticulous standards established to locate and fix the position of a small find. Preferably, coins are measured in according to their X and Y axes, giving their longitude and latitude coordinates as well as according to the Z axis, providing a three-dimensional position. Measuring each coin in the field according to this procedure enables archaeologists on the site as well as future readers of excavation reports to determine the exact

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<sup>207</sup> It is first necessary to stipulate what we mean by the word “coin”. Merriam-Webster defines a coin as “A piece of metal (or, rarely, of some other material) certified by a mark or marks upon it to be a definite exchange value, and issued by governmental authority to be used as money; also, such pieces collectively.” The classic source for all numismatic vocabulary is F. von Schrötter *Wörterbuch der Münzkunde*. In English there are the A.R. Frey *Dictionary of Numismatic Names* and R.G. Doty *The Macmillan Encyclopedic Dictionary of Numismatics* (American Numismatic Society Website, Introduction to Numismatic Terms and Methods, footnote 2). For this project, a coin is any piece of flat, rounded metal that seemed to have been used for economic exchange, whether it has certified marks on it or is a blank flan.

find spots of coins, as well as their relative position to each other.<sup>208</sup> This system has recently been successfully used at Horvat Kur, where it enabled the archaeologists to plot each coin on a heatmap, clearly showing clusters of coins in certain parts of the site.<sup>209</sup> Thus, the contexts of coins should always be recorded and the record of the findspot should always travel with the coin. Ideally, the archaeologist will also provide a description of the coin's context, e.g., a pit, a fill layer, or any other feature that is distinct from the matrix in which the coin was embedded.<sup>210</sup>

Coins found in excavations should be cleaned professionally in a lab. Often, coins are found in very poor physical condition and show clear signs of deterioration, with patches of green copper chloride corrosion or heavy incrustations of silver chloride or copper carbonate.<sup>211</sup> Only a professional laboratory that possesses the right equipment should be allowed to clean the coins: scraping away corrosion in the field will only damage them further. Furthermore, ALL coins should be cleaned: it is impossible to determine in the field which coins will be useful for analysis and which ones will not. Only cleaning the “pretty” coins, like the

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<sup>208</sup> This, of course, is essential in this study: for example, it is vital that we know if coins were found on, in, or under the floor. Any change in position has severe consequences for our interpretation of the function of specific coins.

<sup>209</sup> This has turned out to be crucial for our understanding of the coins at Horvat Kur: because of the heatmaps, we were able to see patterns in how the coins were dispersed over the surface of the portico. Recording like this could thus be crucial for our future understanding of ancient synagogue coins.

<sup>210</sup> Casey 1986, p. 144. That this high standard of excavation is frequently not adhered to is evident. Archaeological work methods differ from site to site, and sometimes even from year to year, depending on who is in charge, and how much time and budget there is available in any given season. Discrepancies in quality between certain excavations will also be apparent in this project.

<sup>211</sup> For an overview of the deterioration processes on metals, see Schiffer 1987, pp. 189–197.

silver and gold ones, as has often been done in the past, drastically skews the picture of the total assemblage of coins deposited at a site.<sup>212</sup>

After the coins have come back from cleaning, it is up to the numismatist to analyze each one. Unfortunately, different specialists apply different recording methods, picking and choosing which information they deem important enough to document. In addition, there is no universally accepted system for the presentation of coin catalogues, and published records exhibit a range of different lists and schemes.<sup>213</sup> Last, poor publication standards, in which archaeologists only publish coins they believe are “archaeologically significant,” are common, and make comparisons between published sites challenging.<sup>214</sup> Ideally, each numismatist should record and publish coins in a similar fashion, noting all elements that make up a particular coin, to enable comparisons between coins and across sites.<sup>215</sup> Luckily, some

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<sup>212</sup> This is also a problem in this study; sometimes an excavation project does not have the budget to clean all the coins and a selection needs to be made based on a first visual assessment. In theory, for example, until the last coin of an assemblage is cleaned, one can always argue that the closing date given to a specific deposit is not final, and that a later coin can be present within the group of unidentified coins (a point also made by Ahipaz 2015, p. 11).

<sup>213</sup> For example, some numismatists choose to list and summarize assemblages by emperor or minting place, while others arrange their coins chronological by minting date. Most catalogues do not mention coin sizes or weights, or the coins are assigned to a minting place and emperor but do not give an exact date. Consequently, this makes comparing excavating assemblages time consuming and frustrating. The availability of published coin lists and the method of presenting the material determines what we can say about them: we should thus strive to have as much consistency as possible between excavation reports. For more recommendations on publishing coins, see Duyrat 2016b.

<sup>214</sup> As we will also see in the analysis of our coin deposits (see below).

<sup>215</sup> Often limitations in space in the publication report cause the numismatic report to be very brief or incomplete. With the convenience of the internet, however, this could be a thing of the past. Some excavations have already chosen to publish their full coin catalogue on the internet, either for free or with a password (for example, the Caesarea synagogue coin catalogue at: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxuqy-fB\\_vKrNE5fVHh2Y3hoc0U/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxuqy-fB_vKrNE5fVHh2Y3hoc0U/view)

standards have been reached of late, and more and more numismatists are publishing their data in a similar way.

Let us now take a closer look at the different elements of a coin, as each element can provide valuable information to the archaeologist, and their information has been used in our statistical analyses. The specific elemental details of each specific coin from this project can be found in the various downloadable Excel-files on the website.

Numismatists use specialized vocabulary to describe the various components that make up a coin.<sup>216</sup> The shaped piece of metal onto which the coin design is imposed is called the *blank* or *flan*. The flan is struck with a pair of *dies* to impose an image on the metal. On the two sides of a coin, the side that bears the portrait is called the *obverse* (abbreviated to *obv.*) and the side that bears the *type*, or design, is called the *reverse* (abbreviated to *rev.*).<sup>217</sup> The coin may have an obverse and reverse written inscription, or *legend*.<sup>218</sup> Included with the reverse legend, which often describes the coin type or issuing authority, may be letters or figures in the

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<sup>216</sup> For further details and examples on coin reading, see Casey 1986, pp. 146–153; Grierson 1975, pp. 72–123; Howgego 1995, pp. 26–35; and American Numismatic Society Website: Introduction to Numismatic Terms and Methods.

<sup>217</sup> Jones 1990, pp. 224–225. It is impossible to categorize the great variety of coin types in one satisfactory manner. Some series of coins show the ruling emperor, which makes it easier to date the coin, while others depict city gods and goddesses, or illustrate specific events. Often catalogues refer to coins by an agreed-upon abbreviation for the type. For example, the “fallen horsemen”-type coin refers to one of the most common series of Roman coins minted in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, depicting men falling off their horses. For an overview of figures depicted on the reverse side of Roman coins, see Klawans 1959, pp. 37–100.

<sup>218</sup> Jones 1990, pp. 162–164. Coins often served as propaganda for the imperial state, and their complexity of design could exceed the minimum elements required for simple identification. Thus, a separate field of numismatics has developed over time that approaches coins from an art historical point of view. This approach reads the iconic language of coinage following the same theoretical procedures as reading verbal language: the images are coded and communicate a certain meaning to its user; the image as a sentence. Examples of scholarship on coins as art historical objects are; Howgego 1995, pp. 75–77; Elkins and Krmnicek 2014; Elkins 2017; Caccamo Caltabiano, 2018; Noreña 2018; Stewart 2018.

*field* of the coin, that is, the space between the main image and the legend: the *fieldmarks*.<sup>219</sup>

The reverse image is often set above a horizontal groundline, which creates a small lunate space at the bottom of the coin. This space is called the *exergue*, and may be occupied by a date or a *mintmark*: an abbreviation of the place where the coin was minted.<sup>220</sup> Additionally, the mintmark may be followed by an indication of the workshop where the coin was minted, called the *officina*. The *officina* on Roman coins is usually indicated by a Greek letter (A, B, Γ, Δ, etc.).<sup>221</sup>

Sometimes, things went wrong during the minting process as ancient coins were hand struck and mistakes happened easily. Occasionally, a new coin was struck on a pre-existing one instead of on a new blank: this is called an *overstrike*.<sup>222</sup> Not to be confused with this process is one in which more than one attempt was made to strike a coin and where the die shifted across the face of the blank between blows, creating a *double-struck* coin (or a *double-strike*)<sup>223</sup>.

Additionally, some coins show signs of *graffiti*; letters or symbols scratched into the fields of the

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<sup>219</sup> The field is often further subdivided into a left and right side. In publications “to l.” and “to r.” refer to the left side and to the right side of the field, as the viewer sees it. When, on the other hand, the l. arm or the r. arm of a figure are described, this refers to the left arm or right arm of the figure itself. Some catalogues use a graphic technique to avoid this confusion. For example: A|\* refers to an A in the left field and an \* in the right field (see examples in the catalogue). The items that are held by the figures are often called *attributes* or *adjuncts*. Examples are a scepter, a snake, a branch, etc. In general, when describing a coin, an author moves from left to right, from top to bottom.

<sup>220</sup> Jones 1990, pp. 190–192. The word *exergue* derives from *ex argon*, or literally “outside the (main) work.” A mintmark frequently found in Israel, for example, is CONOB: Con(stantinopoli) ob(ryziacus), “fine gold solidus of Constantinople”. The letters OB refer to the number 72, that is, the number of gold solidi struck to the weight of one pound.

<sup>221</sup> Jones 1990, pp. 225–226.

<sup>222</sup> Jones 1990, pp. 229–230.

<sup>223</sup> Jones 1990, p. 103.

coin after its creation.<sup>224</sup> Last, coins sometimes were re-used as *amulets*: the user would pierce a hole through the coin to use as a pendant on a necklace or bracelet.<sup>225</sup>

Most ancient coins were made of one of three metals: bronze, silver, or gold.<sup>226</sup> Coinage was nominally tri-metallic, though by the fifth century the production of silver coins in the West had mostly declined to ceremonial issues.<sup>227</sup> Normally in describing coins in prose, English terms are used for the predominant metal in the coin. Catalogues, on the other hand, almost universally employ abbreviations either taken directly from the periodic table or from Latin terms. Thus, AV (*aurum*) stands for a gold coin, AR (*argentum*) for a silver coin, and AE (*aes*) for a bronze or copper coin.<sup>228</sup> In antiquity, the only way of stabilizing a definite exchange value to money was to strike a coin to a specific weight and to regulate its alloy.<sup>229</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>224</sup> Jones 1990, p. 129.

<sup>225</sup> Written sources indicate that the use of coins as amulets was popular in Late Antiquity. For example, John Chrysostom warned against “wearing bronze coins of Alexander of Macedon as amuletic bracelets and anklets” (Maguire 1997, p. 1040; *John Chrysostom*, 52). This phenomenon will be explored in more detail in chapter 5.

<sup>226</sup> The material from which a coin was produced needed to be abundant enough to provide the raw material for an exchange medium, but scarce enough to have value in its own right. The selection varied from culture to culture. For example, in India the metal of choice was silver whereas in China it was copper. The earliest coins found in the West, which were minted in western Asia Minor in the mid- to late seventh century BCE, were of electrum, a naturally-occurring alloy of gold and at least 20 per cent silver. It was not until the reign of Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, that gold coins became common (American Numismatic Society Website).

<sup>227</sup> Grierson 1999, pp. 12–13; Guest 2012, p. 105. This might explain why we do not have any examples of silver coins found under the floors of synagogues (see chapter 5).

<sup>228</sup> See Jones 1990, pp. 8–9, 24–25, 31. Although there is a difference between copper (a pure material found in nature) and bronze (an alloy of copper and tin), the difference between the two materials in coins is difficult to distinguish with the naked eye. Therefore, numismatists historically have used the terms interchangeably. Only in recent years with advanced chemical analysis like spectroscopy or irradiation, has it been possible to determine with any degree of precision the exact metals of which a coin is composed. Perhaps in the future the general terms AV, AR, and AE will be replaced by more exact scientific descriptions of the coin’s content (see King, Metcalf, and Northover 1992, who found a wide diversity of different alloys among the same mints).

<sup>229</sup> American Numismatic Society Website, Vocabulary.

tariff or exchange value of a coin was related directly to the amount of precious material that went into the coin: the coin had an *intrinsic* value.<sup>230</sup> Coins within a certain series and denomination all had the same weight (at least, in theory). Thus, by weighing a coin, it is sometimes possible to determine to what series it belonged and when it was minted.<sup>231</sup> Today it is customary to register coin weights in grams, and for the past decades, scholars have attempted to compile lists of coin series and their corresponding weights in grams. Next to the weight, many catalogues also note the size of the coin. This is sometimes called the *module*.<sup>232</sup> The size is generally given in millimeters and describes the diameter of the coin. When the coin is not completely round, two numbers may be given (the shortest and longest diameter of the coin) or only the maximum diameter is indicated.<sup>233</sup> In numismatics there are four categories of sizes, each given a specific number. Coins over 25 mm are given the number 1, coins between 21 and 25 mm are category 2, coins between 17 and 21 mm category 3, and coins smaller than 17 mm category 4. So, a bronze coin of 10 mm would be abbreviated as an AE4 coin.<sup>234</sup> Here as well, studies have tried to link the sizes of coinages to certain coin types, often connected to

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<sup>230</sup> In comparison to modern currency that has an *extrinsic* value; the worth of a certain coin or paper bill is set by the government and depends on the stock market and exchange rates.

<sup>231</sup> It is important to note that the weight standard of an issue is the weight of the unit of which the various denominations produced are fractions or multiples. In Late Antiquity, most standards were based on the *siliqua*: a silver unit of 3.4 grams. A gold *solidus* was worth 24 *siliquae*, while a golden *semissis* was half a *solidus* and thus worth 12 *siliquae* (Jones 1990, pp. 289–290).

<sup>232</sup> Jones 1990, p. 199.

<sup>233</sup> In this project, I have chosen to give only the average diameter of a coin. Providing one number per coin makes comparison between coins easier and statistical analyses more feasible.

<sup>234</sup> These abbreviations are mostly used for small bronze coins for which we don't have specific denominations. They are the most common coins found in ancient synagogues.



die-studies.<sup>235</sup> Last, numismatists indicate the axis of the coin: how the obverse and reverse side of a coin relate to one another in reference to their rotation. This can be noted in three ways, either by using arrows, or by numbers of a clock, or by degrees from 0 to 360. Arrows give a visual representation of the axis: for example, ↓ means that when looking at the obverse side of the coin, the front will be in upright position, while the back of the coin will be upside down. This same position can be written as 6 o'clock or as 180°. The material of the coin as well as its size, weight and often axis can identify the *denomination*: a term indicating the coin's specific value (for example, solidus, tremissis, semissis, denarius, nummus, etc.).<sup>236</sup>

One important complication is that excavated coins typically show a lot of “wear,” meaning the surfaces and edges have been smoothed due to extensive handling or use. The wear on a coin can imply either a long period of circulation or a shorter period of circulation at a higher intensity.<sup>237</sup> Bronze coins in particular are made of a softer material than silver and gold and therefore are more susceptible to this deterioration. One result of this wear is that the coin pieces become smaller over time and lose some of their weight (and are harder to read). Hence, measuring and weighing a coin might not tell us anything about the series to which this coin belonged but might provide a clue about the handling of the coin. For example, if we know

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<sup>235</sup> For example, Bland 2018a.

<sup>236</sup> See also Sperber 1974. A good resource to look up coin denomination is [nomisma.org](http://nomisma.org); a digital representation of numismatic concepts according to the principles of Linked Open Data, established by a wide community of numismatic scholars and institutions.

<sup>237</sup> It is thought, for example, that worn coins of the first century CE were in circulation for a prolonged period as suggested by countermarks or graffiti of the second and third century CE on these coins (Evans DeRose 2018, p. 6) There is no accurate way of assessing how many years of circulation the degree of wear on a coin indicates. Numismatists have tried to use the weights of discovered groups of coins to construct tables of frequency, comparing the worn group to a group of newly issued pieces and assessing the differences (Crawford 1983, pp. 204–205).

the minting size and weight of the coin through its legend and mintmarks, we can calculate how worn it is, and thus how new or used the coin was before it was deposited.

All these pieces of information must be recorded by the numismatist to provide a complete picture of the coin.<sup>238</sup> Each element can teach us something about the history of that coin, its value, and its circulation. Together they lead the numismatist to the final step: the dating of the coin. Often coin catalogues in excavation reports arrange the published coins according to date, starting with the oldest coins and working their way up the youngest. For clarity, the coins are further ordered in clusters according to the emperor who was responsible for their minting. Thus, although trying to pinpoint an exact minting date for a coin is often the last step, it is the determining factor for the presentation of coins in publications.<sup>239</sup>

When publishing a coin catalogue, the locus and basket numbers for each coin should also be provided, with an explanation of the archaeological context. Plans and maps should accompany these lists, indicating which parts of the building were excavated, enabling readers to pinpoint the find spot of each coin within the building. Only when all these elements are fully described for each coin does it become possible for future scholars to compare deposits found within the same building and between different buildings, as would be needed for a project like this one. However, as the reader might have already guessed, most of these practices are not being systematically applied by scholars in the field. Below, I will go over some obstacles that archaeologists and numismatists commonly encounter when digging and analyzing coins, as

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<sup>238</sup> A good introduction to reading and dating coins is Klawans Z, 1959, *Reading and Dating Roman Imperial Coins*.

<sup>239</sup> Crawford established eight different considerations for dating a coin and appraising its minting place; see Crawford 1983, pp. 189–190.

well as some of the consequences these problems might have for future scholars, and how I have tried to overcome these shortcomings in this particular project.

### 3.2.1 Difficulties in Identifying Coins

When a coin is unearthed after having been buried for hundreds, or even thousands of years, it emerges covered in dirt. Oxygen in the air, acid in the ground, and salt in the soil cause copper to corrode and silver to tarnish. Although the first step of a numismatist is to clean the coin chemically, corrosion may have caused serious, irreversible damage such as pitting and scarring to the surfaces of the coins. On these poorly-preserved pieces, mint-marks, punctuation marks, smaller iconographic attributes, and legends may be difficult to discern or completely illegible.<sup>240</sup> Corrosion can also cause coins to “stick” together, making it often impossible to separate individual coins without destroying them. Finally, many hoards of the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries also contain blank coins which were never struck and have no identifying markings. As a result, on average 25-50% of all coins discovered at an excavation site are illegible and these are, especially in older publications, often omitted from final publications.<sup>241</sup> That this is problematic for our research is evident: to compare all coin deposits, one must take into account every coin that was found, legible or not. Excluding illegible coins skews interpretations of the assemblages as a whole: small, bronze coins that are no longer legible are discarded,

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<sup>240</sup> Sometimes catalogues mention the condition of a coin using abbreviations. For example, coins have been labelled as FDC (*à fleur de coin*, or fresh from the dies), EF (extremely fine), VF (very fine), F (fine), Fair, M (mediocre), and P (poor). Of course, these terms are not objective and great variety exists between catalogues in the determination of the grade of deterioration.

<sup>241</sup> See Burrell 2007, p. 251. Luckily, this trend has started to disappear over the last two or three decades; modern standard practice, at least in archaeology of the Mediterranean world, is now to try to clean and publish all excavated coins.

while gold coins, often better preserved, are kept. This creates the false impression that there was a higher proportion of gold coins in the original deposit. In this database, I have tried to note the illegible coins in every synagogue deposit as I could find them in the literature or the IAA database, but, unfortunately, many coins never made it into the database and their exact quantity and information is lost forever.<sup>242</sup> A methodological consequence of this might be that we are missing the latest coin in the deposit, in which case we would establish an incorrect *terminus post quem* date for the assemblage, or that we are missing certain kinds of coins that would be able to tell us something on the function of the deposit (for example, when we are missing the older coins, making us interpret the deposit as an emergency hoard instead of a savings hoard, see chapter 4). This will remain an obstacle that could not be overcome.

Even when coins are cleaned and legible, the numismatist may encounter other problems. For a long time, for example, coin specialists had no idea how to date a coin when no datemarks were struck. For the oldest excavations, numismatists thus mention coins found but without any attempt to date them. This problem only began to be resolved around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when coins were discovered in more controlled excavations where they could be compared to other materials found in the same strata.<sup>243</sup> Eventually, numismatists began to publish catalogues which give detailed overviews of all the coins minted by the Roman

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<sup>242</sup> Personal communication Donald T. Ariel. One way to work around this problem in the future would be for archaeologists to use metrology; the weighing of coins as a whole, as weight is one trait coins still retain, no matter how illegible (Grierson 1975, pp. 146–149; Burrell 2007, p. 248). Especially when lumps of coins are stuck together, weighing the lump can tell us the number of coins in the cluster. Comparing bronze hoards based on their total weight could provide relative information about the sizes of the deposits.

<sup>243</sup> For example, if a coin is found in a stratum with 5<sup>th</sup> century pottery, the coin could be assigned a 5th century *terminus post quem*. By combining dozens of strata, numismatists can establish relative chronologies of coin types, connecting them to specific emperors and fixed periods.

and Byzantine emperors including mints and dates.<sup>244</sup> Most catalogues describe the following information about each coin, organized by emperor and mint: the type of metal, date, obverse and reverse inscription, reverse description of the image, and exergue or minting mark.

Elaborate catalogues are now standard tools for any numismatist. However, catalogues are also updated as new coins are discovered and new insights learned. Thus, coins can be identified differently in various catalogues, depending on when the catalogue was published, or the personal preferences of the author.<sup>245</sup> For this project, I have provided references to the catalogues as provided by the numismatist who published the coins from that site, or by the IAA when they acquired the coins from the excavators.<sup>246</sup> For my own analyses, I used the RIC and BMC catalogues. Readers should bear in mind, however, that the identifications of the coins are influenced by the catalogue used and that this could have had an influence on the analyses of the coins.<sup>247</sup> Future re-evaluations of types might change some specific details, such as the dates of the coins.

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<sup>244</sup> In the future, these catalogues maybe surpassed by coin-recognition software. See for example, the work done by the Computer Vision Lab at the Vienna University of Technology (Zambanini, Kavelar, and Kampel 2013; Anwar, Anwar, Zambaninie, and Porikli 2019) or at the University of St. Andrews, in Scotland (Cooper and Arandjelovic 2019).

<sup>245</sup> New insights not only come from new archaeological discoveries but from updated methods of analysis, like testing the material used in a coin and linking it to a minting place, or taking better microscopic pictures of coins that show datable minting marks.

<sup>246</sup> We will see in our catalogue that there often are discrepancies between the published reports and the information on the same coins in the IAA database. Summary lists in excavation reports are especially occasions for mistakes: often, a numismatist will arrange the coins per locus for their own analysis, but then publish them chronologically instead. This causes errors to slip in. When a coin analysis is published in multiple reports, even more mistakes pop up. When this has happened, I have noted this in the catalogue. In most cases, the analysis of the IAA database has then been followed.

<sup>247</sup> This is of course especially true for older coin reports, which used some of the earliest coin catalogues published which now have been revised. In cases where the coins are lost (for example, at Beth Alpha), we do not have the possibility to check if the interpretations by the archaeologists are correct. Their analyses have thus been taken at

### 3.2.2 Difficulties specific to synagogue coin deposits

As we have seen, not all excavations follow the same archaeological standards in the field. Different excavation techniques affect the quantity of coins found at synagogue sites.<sup>248</sup> For example, sifting the soil will yield more small coins than excavating with pickaxes and trowels.<sup>249</sup> The use of a metal detector can also help to find more metal objects.<sup>250</sup> For our research specifically, it is further important that the archaeologist took detailed field notes: we need to know if the coins were found on top of the floor, immediately underneath it, or deep in the foundations, as this changes their function. Were the coins found close to each other or were they spread out over a large area? In the case of a stone slab floor, were coins found between the stone slabs or only underneath them? Small differences in the context of a deposit can have a huge impact on its final interpretation. The lack of images of these deposits in published reports, moreover, makes it impossible for researchers to re-examine the finds, their contexts, and their arrangement. Furthermore, the final excavation report should mention also if the entire floor was excavated or only parts of it. Is this the total assemblage of coins at the

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face value in this project. In cases where we do have the possibility, the latest analyses by the IAA have been followed.

<sup>248</sup> This was also brought up by Ahipaz 2015, p. 12.

<sup>249</sup> Even more, my personal experience with the excavations at the Horvat Kur synagogue has shown that there can be differences in the numbers of coins found between sifting with an 18 mm mesh and a 10 mm mesh.

<sup>250</sup> Especially when it has been decided not to excavate the entire floor. A metal detector can be very useful at the site to make sure you are not missing any (large) coin deposits. I have noted in my catalogue when coins were found through the use of a metal detector (if known). Unfortunately, it is (in most cases) impossible to know if archaeologists were digging with large or small tools, or if all soil from an excavation site was sifted or not, and thus if all coins from each deposit were recovered. In my catalogue, I follow the number of coins as stated by the original excavators in their final publication reports, or (in case there is no report) the number of coins as could be found in the IAA database. It is very likely, however, that many more coins were missed by the excavators.

site or can we expect there are more coins under other parts of the floor?<sup>251</sup> Were the coins found under a sealed patch of the floor or did the archaeologists only excavate areas where the floor was missing, which could make the coins intrusive?<sup>252</sup> Did the archaeologists check under or behind the benches or were these not lifted? How far did they dig inside the *bemah* in those cases where the structure had fill in it? Were there visible layers inside the *bemah* and did they receive different locus numbers? When a coin deposit was found, were there other objects close by, like nails or pieces of organic material that might indicate a container?

As the reader can assume from the above list, most synagogues have not been excavated according to these standards and most published synagogue deposits do not mention all the details required for an objective comparison between deposits. When it comes to publishing especially, archaeologists need to make hard decisions: what should they included and what not? Preference in the past was mostly given to an historical and architectural overview of the site, complemented by maps and plans. The publication reports generally highlight important finds like unique objects and focus on material that can date the different stratigraphical layers. Depending on the particular goal of the excavation project, more or less attention will then be given to the smaller finds, including the coins.<sup>253</sup> A painful example is the

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<sup>251</sup> Sometimes archaeologists decide to only take out a certain number of pavers to check the soil underneath, or to only excavate patches of a plaster floor where the floor has crumbled. When large amounts of coins are found in these areas, it might be assumed that many more coins are hidden under the rest of the floor and this should be taken into account when making statistical comparisons between sites. Many ancient synagogues, moreover, have floors that are covered with mosaics or decorated stone slabs. Because of this, it is often decided to not dig under the floor but to leave it in place. In such cases, the use of a metal detector could be useful to learn if and where metal objects are still laying under the floor.

<sup>252</sup> As one can see in the catalogue, many coins were found in places there the mosaic or flagstone pavement was missing, but the bedding was still intact.

<sup>253</sup> This is especially true for older excavations. For example, the 1932 final publication of the synagogue at Beth Alpha describes the architecture and mosaic floor of the building but does not contain a separate chapter on the

(short article) publication of the Qasrin excavations from 1988, in which Zvi Ma'oz and Ann Killebrew only mention that "120 small bronze coins" were found, the latest of which date to "the reign of the Byzantine emperor Anastasios I, who ruled from 498 to 518 CE."<sup>254</sup> The excavations were conducted in the 1970s, but no further information on the coins has ever been published.

When a coin chapter is included, the quality and detail of the coin catalogues can also vary widely.<sup>255</sup> In the publication of the bronze coins found in a vessel in the synagogue at Gush Halav, for example, Joyce Raynor states that only 417 of the 1953 coins could be sufficiently cleaned to permit identification.<sup>256</sup> For these coins she provides an approximate date, and she also mentions some examples of types within the group. However, no sizes, weights, minting origin, or descriptions of obverse and reverse sides of any of the coins are provided. In the final report on the synagogue at Horvat Kanaf, Donald Ariel published several useful tables.<sup>257</sup> One mentions all 523 coins discovered in the building and organizes them by locus. The IAA registration number and date are also provided for each coin. In another table, the coins are grouped by date and the minting origins within the group are given. However, it is impossible to

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coins. The only information we have on the coin finds of this synagogue is mentioned on p. 48: "Only a few ancient articles were found in the course of the excavation. The most important discovery of this kind was a number of bronze coins in the hollow built into the floor of the apse on the south of the synagogue. Thirty-six coins in all were found in the earth which filled up the hollow. Most of them were so worn and defaced that they could not be identified. Only seven had survived in better condition." (Sukenik 1932).

<sup>254</sup> Ma'oz and Killebrew 1988, p. 18.

<sup>255</sup> See Duyrat 2016a, pp. 214–217 and 2016b for an appeal for standardization in coin publications and what that would look like.

<sup>256</sup> Raynor 1990, p. 243.

<sup>257</sup> Ariel 2015.



correlate the coins within each group to their minting places. Furthermore, none of the tables mentions sizes, types, or weights of the coins. The chapter ends with photographs and full description of some coins, but this is limited to only 16 of the 523 specimens.

These missing or incomplete coin reports make it impossible to obtain an accurate picture of the contents of coin deposits found in ancient synagogues based on published information. Furthermore, incomplete tables make it impossible to compare deposits or to apply statistical analysis on the different groups. Any research project focused on excavated coins is thus impeded by the incomplete data published in excavation reports. To take account of this situation and to obtain as much data as necessary for setting up a meaningful database for comparison and interpretation, the following steps below were taken by me.

### 3.2.3 The present study

According to Israeli law, all antiquities found in the State of Israel become the property of the state and must remain in the country.<sup>258</sup> All coins discovered during excavations are generally stored in the Coin Department of the Israel Antiquities Authority, where one can consult them with permission from the IAA.<sup>259</sup> Access to the coins, however, can be obstructed because of copyright laws: archaeologists holding an official excavation license from the IAA have exclusive publication rights over the excavated finds for thirty years. Only after that do archival materials

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<sup>258</sup> Permission for the export of certain antiquities can be granted by the Israel Antiquities Authority, but this can be a long and difficult process (<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/1998/Pages/Antiquities%20Law-%201978.aspx>).

<sup>259</sup> [http://www.antiquities.org.il/about\\_eng.aspx?Modul\\_id=57](http://www.antiquities.org.il/about_eng.aspx?Modul_id=57)

become available publicly.<sup>260</sup> Thus, if somebody wants to publish material before then, official permission from the excavators must also be sought.

In the fall of 2019, I travelled to Israel/Palestine to access the IAA Coin Department's online database and obtain full records on (almost) all the analyzed coins from excavated synagogues.<sup>261</sup> Thus, this project provides a complete overview of all (non-stray) coins found in ancient synagogues deposits. Furthermore, interviews with the original excavators gave me a better understanding of the contexts of the deposits, and many archaeologists shared with me photographs and images that had never been published. Unfortunately, I was still not able to collect every piece of information that may have been desirable. Many archaeologists who excavated the synagogues, for example, have passed away and their archives are lost. Other specialists I contacted never replied. Others refused to share their numismatic reports before final publication or could only provide partial information. Furthermore, publishing houses like the Israel Exploration Society did not give me permission to reproduce images from their book series for my website. All these limitations made building a database of coin finds a challenging endeavor. I have attempted to assemble as much information I could find on every coin deposit, including looking at pictures and field notes in the archives, and talking to excavators, but it should be clear that this project is not, and can never be, clear-cut and complete.

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<sup>260</sup> Ariel 2016, p. 110. For example, in this project, I was not allowed to publish the 14 Arab-Byzantine coins found at the synagogue of Rehob in 1974 since the excavators are still working on the final publication of the site.

<sup>261</sup> For how coins from archaeological excavations are stored and managed in Israel, see Ariel 2016.

Finally, there are at least two recently excavated synagogues in which coin deposits have been found that could not be incorporated in this database.<sup>262</sup> The first is located at Umm el-Qanatir in the Golan, excavated since 2003 by Yehoshua Dray, Ilana Gonen, and Chaim Ben-David. Here, 7466 coins were discovered under or in between the pavement stones of the synagogue floor, and under the benches.<sup>263</sup> At the beginning of 2021, however, the coins were still in process of being cleaned by Dray and further analysis had not yet been conducted.<sup>264</sup> The only information known to me is that most coins are bronze, but a couple of gold ones were also discovered.<sup>265</sup> The second building is the synagogue of Arbel in Lower Galilee, currently under excavation by Benjamin Arubas on behalf of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. This building will be discussed in more detail in chapter Five but according to sources I spoke to in 2020, here too recent excavations have discovered large numbers of coins that had previously been overlooked.<sup>266</sup> More details on these coins have not been released yet.

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<sup>262</sup> There might also be a third: the synagogue at H. Natur in the Upper Galilee. This synagogue has not been excavated, but oral testimonies attest that over the years residents of nearby settlements have collected thousands of coins from the site. Some members have reported and delivered 365 coins of those to the IAA, who have identified 199 of them; they can be dated to 425-450 CE. According to the members, the coins came from below the floor level (Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 219, n. 27; Ilan, 1991, p. 33 (Hebrew); Yosef Stephanski, *Rosh Hanikra Survey Map*, Site 196: <http://survey.antiquities.org.il/#/MapSurvey/2/site/535> (Hebrew)).

<sup>263</sup> Dray, Gonen and Ben-David 2017, p. 216, p. 225: the coins were scattered all over under the floor, forming a sort of “carpet” of coins.

<sup>264</sup> Personal communication Yehoshua Dray.

<sup>265</sup> Personal communication Chaim Ben-David. Gold coins as part of a scattered “coin layer” under the floor would be very unusual. The fact that the synagogue has been dated to the late 6<sup>th</sup> century would also make this the youngest example of the phenomenon. The uniqueness of this site will be important for further research into this topic.

<sup>266</sup> Hundreds of coins from this site had already been collected over the years before the renewed excavations, see Dolev 1988. Approx. 500 have now been found in several groups under the floor in the renewed excavations (Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 219, n. 31). I tried several times to get in contact with Arubas through email and phone calls, but never received a reply.

### 3.3 Categorization and Terminology

#### 3.3.1 History of Scholarship

Chapters Four and Five will provide an in-depth overview of the different categories of coin deposits found in ancient synagogue buildings. However, to understand the detailed information about the coin deposits and individual coins in my catalogue (Appendix), it is first important to establish our working definitions. Scholars often use various words interchangeably when talking about synagogue coin deposits: hoards, caches, treasures, treasuries, stashes, savings, foundation deposits, *favissae*, and more. But are these words appropriate? Do they all have the same meaning or are these different phenomena, and if so, which categories should we establish and how should they be labeled?<sup>267</sup> Defining terminology is important, as it will provide a basis for future discussions and comparisons of the different kinds of deposits excavated.

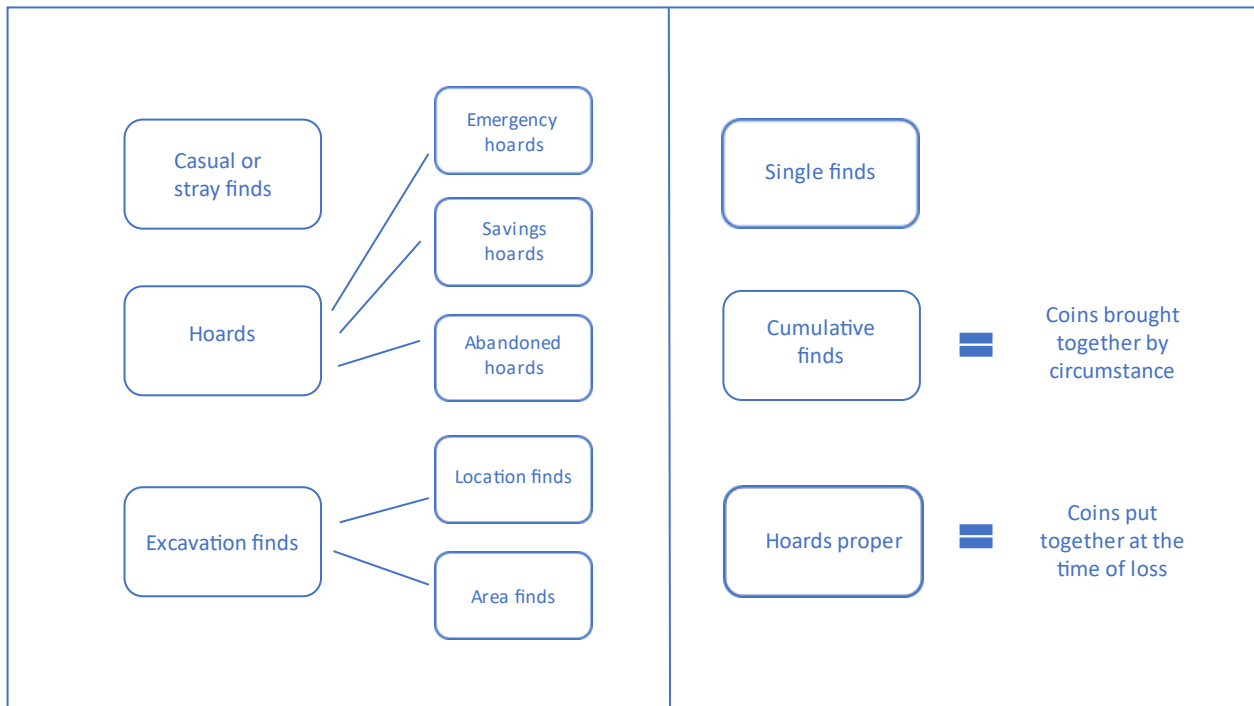
The question of how to divide up coin finds into different categories and how to label each distinct category is an old one.<sup>268</sup> In 1965, Philip Grierson grouped coin finds into three categories: 1) casual or stray finds (also known as accidental losses), 2) hoards, and 3)

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<sup>267</sup> That there is indeed a need for a greater understanding of the different categories of coin deposits in synagogues can for example be seen in the article by Waner and Safrai (2001). In this article, the authors try to determine the “shelf life” of coins in Palestine by comparing the coins from all known coin hoards with each other. However, since they do not distinguish between coins in synagogues found scattered under the floor and coins found together in hiding places, their results are problematic. When one wants to compare different hoards with each other, their function within the building must be taken into consideration.

<sup>268</sup> Here I only go into the classification systems that are helpful for our project and have had the most influence on the field of numismatics. Of course, dozens of systems have been proposed over the last century, and are still being proposed, ranging from scholars studying Roman coins found in Britain (Johns 1996), to those studying Byzantine coins that were concealed in the period 1204-1453 (Lianta 2003).

excavation finds.<sup>269</sup> The two last categories can be subdivided into smaller groups: hoards according to the probable circumstances of their loss (emergency hoards, savings hoards, and abandoned hoards), and excavation finds according to whether they were location finds or area finds (Fig. 1). Additional distinctions can then be made between finds of single coins, cumulative finds, and hoards proper, the two latter involving a number of coins, but hoards implying groups put together at the time of the loss, and cumulative finds implying those brought together by circumstance.<sup>270</sup>



**FIGURE 1. CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM AS PROPOSED BY GRIERSON 1975**

<sup>269</sup> Grierson 1965; 1966; 1975, p. 125; 128–138. This categorization was partly based on Mattingly 1932 and Laing 1969, but Grierson’s classification has been widely accepted as the standard way of thinking about hoards and it is frequently quoted in hoard studies.

<sup>270</sup> His definition of a hoard is “a group of coins or other valuables which was concealed as a unit.” Grierson 1975, p. 125.

Grierson's systemization was a valuable first step to categorizing coin deposits and his distinctions are entrenched in coin studies,<sup>271</sup> but his categories pose several problems since they are based on quantitative and contextual factors and assumptions. First, the categories are too general as, for example, an "excavation find" can mean any coin found at any excavation, lost accidentally or not. Second, the categories are a mixture of description and interpretation, and do not establish boundaries between the two methodologies. Finally, the categories do not rely upon empirical observation such as coin density but incorporate a large degree of interpretation.<sup>272</sup>

Over the years, scholars have tried to modify these categories. In 1974, John Philip Cozens Kent distinguished only two basic groups: currency and savings.<sup>273</sup> Currency, according to him, encompasses a cross-section of the available currency in the desired denominations at the date of deposition. Such deposits (or what he calls, hoards) reveal a gradation of wear from the earliest to the latest coins. Savings, on the other hand, result from setting aside coins from time to time over a longer period: such deposits contain random peaks of material, corresponding to fluctuations in the collector's prosperity, and do not show wear to such an extent. Recently, scholarly thought around coin hoard categories has become more prudent, with numismatists realizing that hoards do not always fall into neat categories, and that different organizational systems will need to be developed for different regions, periods, or

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<sup>271</sup> For example, Crawford 1970; Kent 1974; Casey 1986; Burström 2019.

<sup>272</sup> This critique has also been brought up by Aitchison 1988.

<sup>273</sup> Kent 1974, p. 185.

contexts.<sup>274</sup> It would take us too far afield here to provide an overview of all these different systems, however, as a summary, we can state that most modern scholars have been trying to find a way to differentiate between stray coins and clustered coins, while also trying to take note of the characteristics of the coins themselves to try to come up with certain interpretative groups.<sup>275</sup>

This study here is concerned with hoarding and the deposition of coins in the broadest sense, but limited to a very specific context: ancient synagogues. Since this context is unique, we will have to come up with our very own system. Categories such as “military hoards” and “market finds” are, for example, not applicable in our case. On the other hand, we may have several reasons for hiding money inside synagogues, including cultic or religious ones, which are not relevant to other sites or regions.<sup>276</sup> Hence, it is necessary to develop a new system and a separate, specific set of vocabulary that is appropriate for synagogue deposits. Luckily, we do not need to start from scratch.

Donald Ariel was one of the first scholars to propose specific categories for synagogue coin deposits. In a 1987 article, Ariel distinguished between “foundation deposits” (coins deliberately deposited with no container, during the construction or remodeling of the building, and thus not really “hoards”) and “genuine hoards” (coins intended as a contribution to the synagogue for the maintenance of the building, and the purchase of books and equipment, or

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<sup>274</sup> Reece 2002; Krmnicek 2010; Thüry 2016; Bland 2018b.

<sup>275</sup> For example, Danny Syon, who divides coin finds up into four categories according to the way in which they were deposited: Loss, Abandonment, Hoarding, and Discard (Syon 2015, pp. 36-37).

<sup>276</sup> The same problem exists for coin deposits found in ancient Greek temples, see for example Hunt 2016; Lykke 2017.

as donations for charity, which usually were in a container or wrapped in cloth).<sup>277</sup> He also pointed out that the synagogue was a center of commercial and communal activity, and that many coins could have been lost in and around the building, especially in times when, according to him, relatively valueless small coins were in circulation throughout the Eastern Empire.

The second classification system was proposed by Jodi Magness in 2001. In her article on the typology and dating of ancient synagogues, she suggests distinguishing between the following four groups of synagogue coin deposits:<sup>278</sup>

1. Coins that were mixed with the earth or fills imported during the synagogue's construction. These were usually individual coins, but they can add up to larger quantities, as she suggests might have been the case at Capernaum.
2. Coins that were deliberately deposited, individually or in groups, during the construction of the synagogue. These were placed in or next to the foundations, or under the floors.
3. "Hoards" of small bronze coins, stored together (usually in ceramic vessels) in a room in the synagogue, above the floor level. Here she mentions the coins found in the western corridor at Gush Halav and the coins discovered in a small hole between two stones at Horvat Rimmon as examples.
4. True hoards of coins of precious materials. Examples could be the gold hoard found at Horvat Rimmon and the gold coins found beneath the benches of Capernaum.

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<sup>277</sup> Ariel 1987, pp. 148–149, and nn. 4–15. He divides synagogue deposits according to these categories: the deposits found at 'En Nashut, Capernaum, Khirbet Marus (Meroth), Horvat Kanef, Qasrin, Dabiyye, Khorazin and Gush Halav are interpreted as foundation deposits, while the deposits at Gush Halav, Capernaum, Rehob, Horvat Rimmon, and another deposit at Khirbet Marus are interpreted as genuine hoards.

<sup>278</sup> Magness 2001, pp. 31–32.



From these four groups she deducts the first one, as she believes these coins were brought in with no specific purpose, and the last group, as these deposits are relatively rare. This leaves her with the second and third group of deposits, which she believes represent a similar phenomenon: a ritual deposition of large numbers of small bronze coins in and under synagogues.

The third, and most important contribution, was made by Rachel Hachlili, who wrote a sub-chapter in her book *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art: New Discoveries and Current Research* entirely dedicated to the phenomenon of sub-floor coin deposits.<sup>279</sup> She divides synagogue coin deposits into four categories: 1) hoards, 2) caches, treasuries, and community boxes, 3) coin assemblages, and 4) small groups of scattered coins, and defines them accordingly:

1. Hoards: Deposits that contain gold, silver, and bronze coins, hidden in containers such as pots and cloth, purposely placed or buried in a special place for future retrieval.
2. Caches, treasuries, and community boxes: Deposits that include groups of gold, silver, and bronze coins, hidden or placed in a special spot. These may represent accumulations of public cash or treasuries intended for maintenance purposes or as charity donations.
3. Coin assemblages: Large numbers of coins collected over long periods and placed in hiding places or buried in fill or foundations. These deposits contain mostly low-value,

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<sup>279</sup> Hachlili 2013, pp. 559–562. Note that she here also includes synagogues that technically do not have not coin deposits, like Meiron (1003 single coins found), Nabratein (138 single coins), and Sepphoris (20+ single coins).

corroded bronze coins, likely deliberately deposited or stored together in hidden places or below foundations inside the building, possibly during the construction of the synagogue.

4. Deposits that are probably lost coins: These are coins that had slipped between the stones of the pavement, between benches, and between benches and the wall.

Hachlili's contribution to the field cannot be overstated; her chapter created greater awareness of the phenomenon and encouraged archaeologists to pay attention to the occurrence of coin deposits at excavation sites. However, like the definitions brought forward by Grierson fifty years earlier, her four categories are a mixture of description and interpretation and, especially for the second category, are too broad, for example, by combining treasuries and charity boxes (and each of the categories is, in turn, also too narrow because it implies a specific reason for depositing without having made any attempts to prove it). Hence, a better classification system is needed to communicate consistently about the full range of synagogue deposits.

### 3.3.2 A new categorization system

On the basis of the previous debate, I conceive that synagogue coin deposits need to be categorized according to a more flexible system, leaving room for adaptability as well as uncertainty. The word "deposit" then is here chosen as the most neutral term encompassing all coin groups, without making any assessment on their archaeological context, form of burial, or function. However, each deposit can also be further categorized according to three different approaches or elements: according to its arrangement (description), its permanency

(retrievability), and its function (interpretation).<sup>280</sup> This unique categorization method allows for a “mix-and-match”-system, in which each deposit can be described according to three categorical elements. So, instead of finding a specific label for each type of deposit (“clustered hoard”, “scattered hoard”, “scattered emergency hoard”, “scattered charity hoard”, etc.), which would create dozens of unique categories, we are implementing a code-system, which allows for more truncated nomenclature.<sup>281</sup> Examples of how this system works will be provided below.

The **first way** of categorizing the deposits is purely *descriptive*: the coins are divided into categories based on the *form* of their burial. I argue that there are two categories: I) scattered coins, and II) clustered coins (or hoards).

- I. Scattered coins: These deposits consist of loose coins retrieved from a larger area of the building, seemingly without any connection to each other. The number of coins can range from as little as ten to several thousands. These deposits differ from hoards or caches in that they do not seem to have been placed in or under the building as a cluster of coins (that is, they are not found together in a container, wrapped in organic material, or stacked together) and they were not placed in one particular spot; instead,

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<sup>280</sup> A similar approach was used by Suchodolski in 1998, who divided all coin finds into four categories: according to their quantitative aspect, find spot, mode of origin, (the circumstances under which coins found their way into the soil), and mode by which the coins became historical evidence. This approach is useful for coins in general, but not applicable to synagogue deposits, where, for example, the find spot is always the same context: the synagogue building (Suchodolski 1998).

<sup>281</sup> This also helps in cases where certain characteristics of the deposit are unknown. If one finds a deposit that is clustered and irretrievable, for example, but has idea about its function, they can at least indicate something. In this case, this would make the deposit a IIB? deposit, indicating to the reader that we know only two of its three qualities.

they can be found scattered under the threshold or the benches as well as under the floor of the nave, the aisles, and the courtyard of the building.

- II. Clustered coins (Hoards): The second category is coins stored in clusters, with a minimum number of three. These contain “deposits hidden as a rule in a protected form, unrecovered, containing complexes of metal objects withdrawn from circulation which directly and regardless of the owners’ intentions assumed an archaeological form,”<sup>282</sup> as well as groups of lost coins or coins that were never meant to be retrieved. Hoards are found mostly in and around the *bemah* area, in hidden compartments, or under other distinct features of the synagogue such as thresholds or benches. These deposits can consist entirely of bronze coins, but they can also contain silver and gold coins. Sometimes these deposits are sealed in a container like a pottery vessel, a bag, or were wrapped in cloth (these can also be referred to as “money pouch hoards”, or “purse hoards”).<sup>283</sup>

The **second way** of categorizing the deposits is according to their *permanency*: were the coins deposited in a manner that made them easily accessible, or not? In other words, could the coins be accessed by the users of the synagogue at any given point without much difficulty, or were they deposited in the building in a sealed context and could not be accessed? There are two categories:

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<sup>282</sup> Tabaczyński 1987, p. 184, as translated by Suchodolski 1998, p. 368.

<sup>283</sup> Casey 1986, pp. 57–58. Of course, when the clustered coins are not protected by a container, deposits that started out as clustered could have become scattered over time, because of bioturbation, earthquakes, groundwater, and other causes. Careful analysis of the context must thus be taken when placing a deposit in a specific category.

A. Retrievable Deposits: These are the deposits that could be retrieved without having to dismantle (parts of) the synagogue building. These deposits were either stored in “open” spaces, like in a wall niche or in a container on top of the floor, or inside a space that could be easily opened, like under a movable stone or in a hole in the ground covered by a wooden plank or carpet. Stashed in this way, coins could easily have been added to, or taken from, the deposit, making it a “living” deposit.

B. Irretrievable Deposits: These are the deposits that could not be recovered without having to break out the floor, walls, or benches to get to them. As such, these coins were completely removed from the monetary economy and stored within the building permanently and inaccessible. The deposit is a “dead” one.

The **third way** of organizing coin deposits is *interpretative*: categories based upon the assumed function the deposit had to the people who placed them within the synagogue building. I argue that there are seven possible categories in our context, which will be explored in chapters Five and Six: 1) accidental losses, 2) votive offerings and *genizot*, 3) charity hoards or *tzedakah*, 4) treasuries, 5) emergency hoards, 6) magico-religious deposits connected to tithing money, and 7) post-destruction offerings.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> I have omitted a couple of common coin groups as I do not believe they are applicable to our context. For example, I do not think that any of the deposits in ancient synagogues are “abandoned coins,” that is, coins that were neither lost nor deliberately placed in a building but were in the possession of an individual and simply “left” there when the building collapsed because of an unexpected catastrophe. This would be the case, for example, when a house would burn down, a dwelling would collapse because of an earthquake, or a ship would sink. I do not think this situation is applicable to ancient synagogue contexts in Israel/Palestine. We also do not have any grave goods or post-mortem gifts to the dead in our contexts, as no dead bodies have ever been found under an ancient synagogue building (in contrast, for example, to churches in antiquity), although a finger-bone was discovered buried under the threshold of the Dura-Europos synagogue (see chapter 5.2).

- 1 Accidental Losses: Some of the loose or scattered coins are accidental losses dropped by, e.g., the builders during the construction of the synagogue, or more specifically, during the construction of the floor or benches of the synagogue. Their occurrences are accidental and the coins have no specific purpose. In general, accidental losses are coins of low value, not worth spending much time trying to recover. Sometimes these are called stray finds.<sup>285</sup>
- 2 Votive offerings and *genizot*: These are coins that were given to the building to be put on display, mostly as donations from Roman rulers. The coins, together with many other objects that were donated to the community, were placed in a visible spot inside the building for all visitors to see and to remind them of the benevolence, power, or success of the donor.<sup>286</sup> After their function was fulfilled, they were kept and stored in the building as part of a *genizah*, where they can now be found (and recognized) by the archaeologist. Other coins that might have been used for ritual purposes as well could have ended up in these *genizot*, together forming “*genizah* coins.”
- 3 Charity Hoards or *Tzedakah*: Charity hoards are collections of money kept at the synagogue to be distributed to the poor and needy. These charity hoards were living hoards (donations were added and removed from it when needed), containing coins

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<sup>285</sup> Another group that belongs to this category is infiltrated coins: coins that accidentally worked their way into the deposit, mostly because of natural processes like the pushing of plant roots and animal burials. I place infiltrated coins in this category as it is almost impossible to determine if a coin was lost under the floor or if it is a later intrusion.

<sup>286</sup> Unfortunately, there is no way to recognize coins put on display as votive offerings in the synagogue. Only when they have been discarded and stored in a secondary context, are we able to interpret their previous function. See chapter 4.2.

from a relatively short date range, and were often stored in containers such as wooden boxes or in specific units, such as niches, built into the synagogue itself.

4 Treasuries: These are coins that were collected and stored together in a deposit as taxes or donations by the community. This money could have been intended for the synagogue to pay for upkeep, books, and personnel, or for the community to, for example, pay taxes to the Roman government. The treasury is usually a public hoard to which individuals were expected to add at regular times. These deposits were often placed in areas that were easy to remember and have access to, so that coins could be added to, or deducted from the deposit on a regular basis. Treasuries are part of the larger category of “savings hoards”: deposits deliberately accumulated over time and added to at intervals.<sup>287</sup> Coins in savings hoards generally give an overview of the coins that were in circulation for a longer period.

5 Emergency Hoards: This type of hoard was created on impulse rather than careful planning. It is a deposit in which the coins were not deliberately selected but consists of what was on hand when a crisis arose that created the impulse to hide the coins.<sup>288</sup> Consequently, emergency hoards will usually be heterogenous in variety but homogeneous in date range, reflecting the coins in circulation at the time of deposition (creating a numismatic “snapshot”). Emergency hoards are always retrievable deposits:

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<sup>287</sup> Because savings hoards were accumulated over time, an intriguing occurrence that can manifest in this group is stratification of the deposit: the coins are stratified within their container or hole in a dated sequence, with the oldest coins at the bottom and the youngest ones on top. Excavation of this kind of hoard must thus be done with the utmost care: it is important to record the relative position of each coin as it is removed to see if any stratification is evident.

<sup>288</sup> Casey 1986, p. 54; Ahipaz 2013, p. 63; Butcher 2013, p. 3.

the owner planned to return to the spot after the crisis was averted to retrieve the money and thus needed easy access to it. Archaeologists are only able to find emergency hoards when something happened to the original owner that prevented him or her from returning.

6 *Magico-religious Deposits and Tithing Money*: These are assemblages of coins placed inside the building during its construction or renovation. They were never meant to be retrieved but were intended to remain as long as the building was in use. These deposits were placed as part of *magico-religious* practices to call upon supernatural powers to protect the building and its users. Coins in such deposits are usually of low value, illegible because of their poor quality, their long circulation, or their burial circumstances, and a large number are imitations of original coins.<sup>289</sup> Their primary function may have been *ma'aser sheni*, or second tithing money, taken out of monetary circulation and stored inside the building in a secondary context.

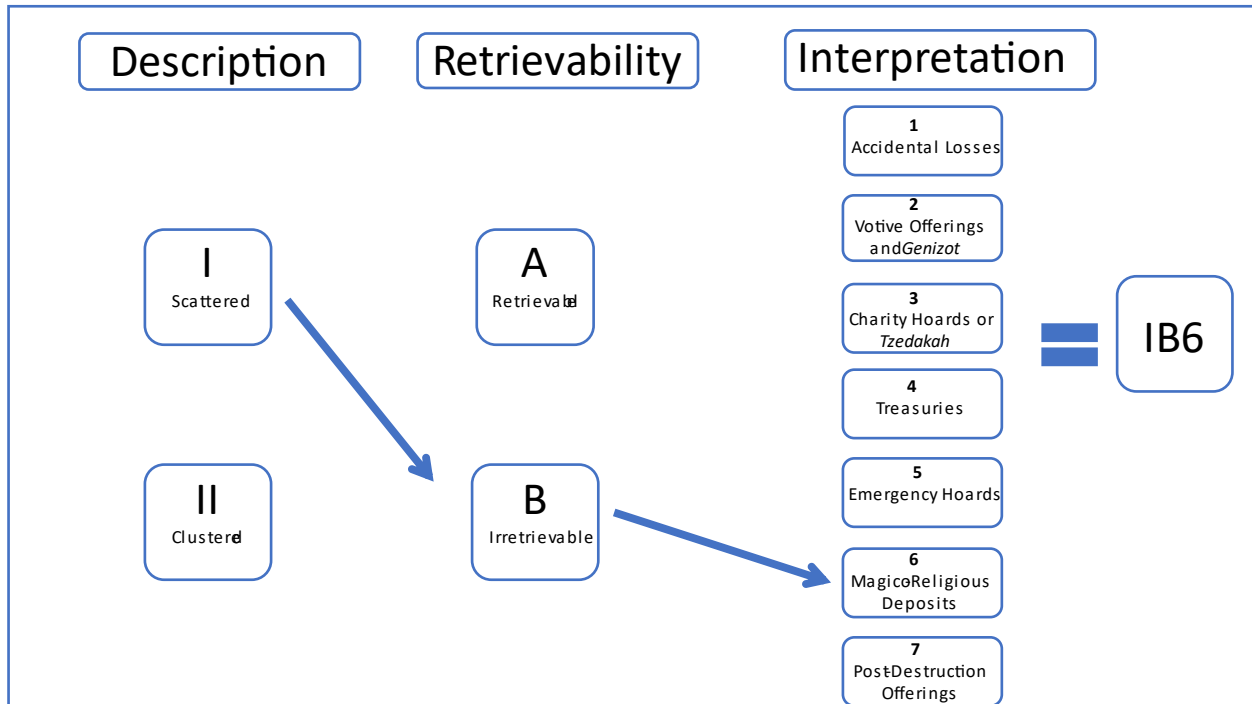
7 *Post-Destruction Offerings*: These are coins that were hidden in the synagogue after its use as a ritual place ended or after its destruction because of the belief that the sacredness of the space would protect the coin deposit from harm (or theft?).

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<sup>289</sup> Bijovsky 2012a, pp. 75–77. One will note that I do not use the term “foundation deposit” here, nor do I have that term as a possible category. The reasons for this will be explained in chapter 5: in any case, the term “foundation” would refer to the founding, or initiation of the building, and not to the physical foundations of the building.



The merits of the above classification are apparent: by using a tripartite categorization system, each deposit found in an ancient synagogue could in theory be described with only three symbols, creating a much simpler language-like “mix-and-match system” (Fig. 2).



**FIGURE 2. NEW MIX-AND MATCH CATEGORIZATION SYSTEM**

For example, scattered coins under a stone floor placed deliberately during the construction of the building would be a IB6-deposit (a scattered, irretrievable, magico-religious deposit). A deposit found inside a hole in the *bemah* used as treasury of the building would be classified as a IIA4-deposit (a hoard, retrievable, treasury deposit). When one of the factors is unknown, a question mark can replace the number/letter.

While this system works in theory, the problem, as the reader realizes, lies in the application of the interpretative part: we simply do not know the different circumstances under

which coins were deposited in synagogues.<sup>290</sup> It is this problem that has been puzzling scholars for decades and it is this issue that drove this database project. However, interpreting the coin deposits can only be the result of careful consideration of a) the contexts and burial circumstances of the deposits, and b) the socio-cultural and religious frameworks in which this phenomenon took place. The appendix provides a catalogue of all coin deposits found in ancient synagogues. For each deposit, I carefully describe and analyze its depositional context (as far as can be known), and give a detailed overview of the coins within the deposit. The catalogue will be able to provide us with the Description and Retrievability element of each deposit. Chapters Four and Five then provide an in-depth analysis of the different cultural and religious circumstances that could have led to the placement of these coins in and under the ancient synagogue building. These chapters will provide the Interpretation element. Together, these three parts will give us a complete overview of the phenomenon of coin deposits found in ancient synagogue from Late Antique Palestine.

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<sup>290</sup> See also Osborne 2004; Manning 2012; Crease 2015; Guest 2015.

## CHAPTER 4

### SYNAGOGUE COIN DEPOSITS: FUNCTIONS AND INTERPRETATION

*Hoardings are difficult to evaluate because usually the circumstances of neither formation nor burial can be determined with any certainty. A single hoarding may be wholly untypical and its contents may thus provide misleading evidence. If, however, a number of hoardings show common features, or combine to produce a coherent picture, their evidence obviously deserves much more attention.*

— Colin M. Kraay<sup>291</sup>

As stated in chapter 3, it is relatively easy to determine a synagogue coin deposit's form of burial (its *descriptive* quality) and its accessibility (*retrievability*). However, the problem lies in the *interpretative* part: archaeologists simply do not know the different circumstances under which coins were deposited in synagogues. Ancient Jewish sources do not discuss the phenomenon of coin deposits in synagogue buildings. Although the Mishnah and the Talmud talk at length about the ancient synagogue as an institution and the rules for proper behavior inside the building, they do not mention the custom of placing or storing coins in or under the building, not even indirectly. It is possible that the custom of storing synagogue funds inside the building was so obvious to the community members that there was no reason to comment on it

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<sup>291</sup> Kraay 1956, p. 48.

explicitly. As Ahipaz notes, it is also possible that the omission might reflect the fact that there was no explicit objection against it, and thus there was no need to bring it up; or that the terminology regarding the custom was different than what it is today and we simply do not recognize the phenomenon.<sup>292</sup> Last, the omission of the coin deposits in Rabbinic sources, especially the ones placed underneath the floors, might also be explained due to the fact that the custom only started long after most of the rabbinic works were completed, an argument that will be further explored in chapter 5.12.

In the absence of written sources, we must thus adopt an indirect approach to better understand this phenomenon, analyzing both the archaeological circumstances of the deposits as well as their specific contents. We also need to assess the different deposits based on their ancient Jewish context, analyzing their possible functions based on what we know about social practices in this geographical region and period.

In this chapter and the next, I propose understanding coin deposits in ancient synagogues in the framework of seven possible categories of interpretation or functions: 1) accidental losses, 2) votive offerings and *genizot*, 3) charity hoards or *tzedakah*, 4) treasuries, 5) emergency hoards, 6) post-destruction offerings, and 7) magico-religious deposits and tithing money.<sup>293</sup> In chapter Five, I have bracketed off the first six categories. For each category, I will provide a historical socio-cultural and religious background overview, which will end with a list of different inherent and contextual characteristics I believe a deposit should have to be

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<sup>292</sup> Ahipaz 2015, p. 116. She is here only talking about the phenomenon of “foundation deposits.”

<sup>293</sup> Of course, the interpretation of archaeological phenomena on the ground can never be as accurate as a theoretical structure; we can only operate under reasonable assumptions. See chapter 4.7 for some interpretative remarks.

interpreted under this specific category. Then, I will place the specific deposits from our catalogue under each category based on their characteristics. My hope with this chapter is that it will enable future archaeologists to be able to assess and explain newly discovered deposits more precisely. Chapter Six is devoted to the last category: magico-religious deposits and tithing money. This category contains almost half of our deposits and is also the most academically debated one. A full chapter will explore this category in-depth.

#### **4.1 Accidental losses**

Accidental coin losses are coins that were inadvertently dropped and never recovered by their owner or anyone else.<sup>294</sup> Accidental losses were lost by chance and were not purposely placed in a certain context for a specific goal: thus, they have no function. Thousands of coins found in ancient synagogues can be interpreted as accidental losses; coins discovered as single specimens in fills, foundation trenches, destruction debris, etc. They can be recognized not only because they appear by themselves, but also frequently because they do not make sense in their archaeological context (for example, a coin found in a drainage pipe) or in their stratigraphical layer (for example, an Islamic coin on a Roman floor). In principle, this database did not record any of such accidental losses since their “interpretation” is known to us and needs no further explanation. Of course, it is always possible that some individual coins were placed in a specific context on purpose (as, for example, two Charon’s obols often placed on the

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<sup>294</sup> An amusing ancient example to illustrate this phenomenon can be found in Luke 15:8-10. In this story, a woman lost a tetradrachm, worth about a day’s wage, so she searches all over her house. The loss of small, bronze coins, on the other hand, might not have caused such a frantic hunt.

eyes of the deceased in the Roman world).<sup>295</sup> It is also possible that some of the deposits analyzed in this project and interpreted as one of the categories below were, in fact, accidental losses. However, in the absence of reliable, archaeological evidence that would point towards such a function, single coins have not been included in the database and none of the coin deposits under analysis belongs to this category.

## **4.2 Votive Offerings and *Genizot***

### 4.2.1. Historical background and description

A votive offering or votive deposit is an object displayed in a sacred place for broadly religious purposes without the intention of recovery, often, but not necessarily, to fulfill a vow or gain favor with supernatural forces.<sup>296</sup> This phenomenon is known from the early Neolithic period to the modern day and can be found in religious spaces ranging from prehistoric funerary monuments to Greco-Roman temples, Christian churches, and Buddhist temples. Such offerings might include libation vessels, small objects that represent human body parts, images of people, incense and other smoke devices, texts and notes, and precious materials. The group of offerings is “open” or “living” in the sense that items can be added and removed at any time. Offerings represent objects that circulated over a long period.

We know that votives were offered in ancient synagogues. Josephus tells us how the successors of Antiochus Epiphanes gave to the synagogue at Antioch the votive offerings he had

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<sup>295</sup> To be clear, this was not a custom in ancient Judaism although we do have a couple of examples of coins found in Jewish burials (Hachlili and Killebrew 1983).

<sup>296</sup> In this project, I adopt an inclusive definition of the word votive, encompassing both objects connected with prior vows (*ex voto*) as well as those requesting the repetition and re-performance of a donor’s prayers.

taken from the Jerusalem temple. These objects were “laid up in the synagogue” for display. Later monarchs continued to give gifts and these “costly offerings formed a splendid ornament to their synagogues.”<sup>297</sup> The practice of making votive gifts to synagogues continued into Late Antiquity.<sup>298</sup> A Roman law from the *Codex Theodosianus* tells us that on February 15, 423, the emperors Honorius and Theodosius II decreed that the synagogues of the Jews should be protected from future seizure and damage, adding: “Votive offerings (*donaria*) as well, if they are in fact seized, shall be returned to them provided that they have not yet been dedicated to the sacred mysteries (*sacris mysteriis*); but if a venerable consecration does not permit their restitution, they shall be given the exact price for them.”<sup>299</sup> Apparently, Christians were looting synagogues before destroying them, and laws were needed on what to do with the votive offerings inside. Thus, it seems that on occasion, synagogues would receive objects from Greco-Roman rulers or others, which were subsequently placed inside the building for all visitors to see. The hope was that viewers would not only recall the item but also the donor for decades or maybe even centuries afterwards.<sup>300</sup>

Votive offerings of coins were not uncommon in the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>301</sup>

Coins had images on them — of emperors, gods, communal buildings, or military themes — and

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<sup>297</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 7. 44-45.

<sup>298</sup> Satlow 2005, p. 93.

<sup>299</sup> *Codex Theodosianus* 16.8.25 (trans. Linder 1987, p. 288, no. 47).

<sup>300</sup> Satlow 2005.

<sup>301</sup> See, for example, Crawford 2003 on the use of coins as votive offerings in the Hellenistic period, Sauer 2004 on votive coins in *mithraea*, Rowan 2009 on examples of votive coins hidden beneath the masts of ships, Lykke 2017 on the use of coins in Greek sanctuaries, and Leatherbury 2019 for coins as votive offerings in Greece, Asia Minor, and Syria-Palestine.

were thus fitting objects for rulers to donate.<sup>302</sup> Coins were an effective medium of propaganda and many ancient sources attest to the power of the imperial image: under Tiberius it reportedly was illegal to enter a brothel or lavatory carrying a coin with the emperor's image on it.<sup>303</sup> Numismatic imagery could transcend the currency it was stamped on and enter the realm of the "magical" or religious sphere (see also chapter 5.4 below). In the *Philopseudes*, the satirist Lucian describes a statue of Pellichus, a Corinthian general, with coins lying at the statue's feet and other small silver coins stuck onto the statue with wax as "votive offerings or payment for a cure from one or another of those who through him had ceased to be subject to fever." At the sacred site of Mamre near Hebron, pagans, Christians, and Jews worshiped at the sacred tree and the altar next to it well into the 5<sup>th</sup> century, leaving behind bronze coins.<sup>304</sup>

Combining these different sources and archaeological evidence from around the Mediterranean, it is conceivable that votive coins were deposited in synagogues as well, either by its users to fulfill a vow or to give thanks, or by its leaders, to show the dominance of a

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<sup>302</sup> See also chapter 5.4 for more examples of coins with imperial images given by ruling emperors as diplomatic gifts.

<sup>303</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius* 58: "The defendant was found guilty and in time malicious accusations of the following kind resulted in capital trials: beating a slave near a statue of Augustus, or changing one's clothes there; carrying a coin or ring bearing his image into a lavatory or a brothel; criticizing any of his words or deeds." See also the example found in Mark 12:13-17, in which a coin with the image of Caesar is portrayed as a symbol of power and oppression.

<sup>304</sup> Leatherbury 2019, p. 257; Kahlos 2020, pp. 170–171.



ruler.<sup>305</sup> Perhaps a special bench or area could even be dedicated for these materials (for example, could the Horvat Kur stone have been used for votive offerings?).<sup>306</sup>

However, it is difficult to identify any coins in ancient synagogue deposits as votive offerings. If they were not removed before the building was destroyed or abandoned, we would simply identify them as “lost coins.” Unfortunately, written sources also do not inform us about what happened to votives once they were no longer needed or wanted inside the building (for example, when a ruler went out of favor,<sup>307</sup> or the synagogue building was remodeled). Were they taken out of the building and put back into circulation, or were they destroyed? Or were they stored somewhere inside the building, as part of a *genizah*? A *genizah* is the permanent storage of old, broken, or otherwise unwanted sacred objects that were once used in synagogue rituals but became worn-out and needed to be discarded.<sup>308</sup> According to Jewish law, these ritual objects, especially when containing the name of God, could not be destroyed

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<sup>305</sup> Among synagogue leaders, the most fitting person to fulfill this task would have been the nasi, who fulfilled a political role in Jewish society. Of course, it is unknown in how far people would have paid attention to these portraits, but it might have been the only imperial images the Roman and Byzantine leaders could have smuggled into the synagogue!

<sup>306</sup> Crawford 2003, p. 72 discusses some possible places for coins as votive offerings in Hellenistic pagan spaces: both offering tables as well as suspension seems to have been used.

<sup>307</sup> Of course, this means that someone would pay attention to this, to ensure the right emperor was being shown.

<sup>308</sup> The Hebrew word *genizah*, גניזה, means “hiding,” or “to put away.” *Genizot* are best known as depositories or archives for worn-out Hebrew books and papers on religious topics, but they could also contain ritual and sacred objects. Although the origin of the *genizah* lies in Late Antiquity, the burial of religious objects in Palestine is in fact an ancient custom that existed since the Late Bronze Age, then more commonly known as a *favissa* (Garfinkel 1994; Straßburger 2015, 2018; Kletter 2010, 2018). The word *favissa* originally refers to hewn subterranean chambers near the Capitol Hill in Rome, used to store temple objects: statues of gods and votive objects that became obsolete (*fovea* means “hole, pit”). Just as with the word “foundation deposit”, however, archeologists have used the term *favissa* to refer to a range of different phenomena, including foundation deposits, the ritual burial of “cancelled” religious shrines, the burial of votive offerings, the deposition of discarded religious cult objects, etc. (see for more info, Kletter 2010). Thus, the word *favissa* overlaps with many of our coin deposits and is hence not a useful categorization term, and it will not be used in this project.

but were deposited in a storage space or *genizah*.<sup>309</sup> Since the Talmud (*pt. Shabbat* 115a) directs that holy writings in other than the Hebrew language also be deposited in a *genizah*, it is likely that votive coins were included.<sup>310</sup> The *genizah* commonly was placed inside the *bemah* or under the Torah shrine, the most sacred place within the building, but it could have also been a hole in the wall, as was the case for the famous Cairo Genizah.<sup>311</sup> Every so often, the *genizah* would be opened and obsolete objects added to the collection.<sup>312</sup> Thus, coins used as votive offerings could have found their way into these *genizot*, accompanied by other disposed artifacts. Of course, it is always possible that the coins found in *genizot* were originally used in other synagogue rituals, but if that is true then we do not have any (written or archaeological)

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<sup>309</sup> The term *genizah* (Ezra 1, 7-8; Esther 3, 9; Ezekiel 27, 24; etc.) derives from the Persian-Elamite term *ganzabara*, meaning roughly “treasurer.” A similar phenomenon of depositing of ritual objects did not exist in early Christianity, however, which might explain why we do not find hidden coins in churches from Late Antiquity in Palestine.

<sup>310</sup> *Mishna Shabbat* 16:1: “With regard to all sacred writings, one may rescue them from the fire on Shabbat, whether they are read in public (e.g., Torah or Prophets scrolls), or whether they are not read in public (e.g., Writings scrolls). This ruling applies even though they were written in any foreign language. According to the Rabbis, those scrolls are not read in public, but they are still sacred and require burial.” The same Mishna paragraph, furthermore, discusses the existence of coins with the holy objects “in the same casing of tefillin” (תִּפְלִין, a phylactery or the container for the tefillin): “One may save the container of a scroll together with the scroll, and the container of tefillin together with the tefillin, even if it [also] contains money.” Does this indicate that it was common to have a “bag holding holy objects” that would also contain coins? The tractate then continues to discuss the writing of amulets and blessings by rabbis, which was forbidden according to the Talmud, however, their destruction was seen as an even worse violation, as they may contain the divine name.

<sup>311</sup> See, for example, Hoffman *et al.* 2016.

<sup>312</sup> In this regard, one could confuse the storage location of these coins with the Chamber of Secrets, the space to place the charity funds, or even with the treasury space. The difference, however, is that coins, once placed inside a *genizah*, could never be taken out and used again for non-ritual purposes. Their low value and small quantities also indicate that the deposit was seen as symbolic; they were not to be retrieved as savings. The one exception might have been made for magico-religious purposes: coins could have transferred from the *genizah* to the floor in tertiary deposits (see chapter 5).

indication of their original purpose. Votive offerings make the most sense based on our current knowledge of ancient synagogue usage.<sup>313</sup>

I believe there are four characteristics a coin deposit should have to make it a *genizah* deposit:

- 1) the number of coins is low (each specific coin fulfilled a distinctive role),
- 2) the deposit is accessible (so coins can be added to it),
- 3) the coins are found mixed with other objects,
- 4) and the deposit is found in a symbolic or distinctive location within the synagogue.

#### 4.2.2 Deposits categorized as votive offerings or *genizot*

Based on our catalogue, I have identified the following nine deposits as possible votive offerings or *genizot*: Gush Halav (Deposit 2), H. Shema' (Deposit 1), Beth Alpha (Deposit 1), Hammath Tiberias (Deposit 1), Horvat Kur (Deposit 2), Ma'oz Hayyim (Deposit 2), Horvat Sumaqa (Deposit 2), and Horvat Rimmon (Deposit 3) and Horvat Rimmon (Deposit 5). A map can be found at <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/votive-offerings-and-genizot/>.

Let's go over each assemblage to indicate why I have placed them under this category.

The coin deposit at Gush Halav was discovered in a side room of the synagogue building. It consists of 141 bronze coins, with at least two clusters (perhaps indicating that they were originally stored in money pouches?), found in a soil layer that formed the make-up for a

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<sup>313</sup> Thus, I connect the location of the coins (*genizot*) with a possible interpretation (votive offerings), as this is the aim of this project. Of course, other scholars may choose to just designate these coins as *genizah* coins, with an unknown primary function.

plaster floor above it, but originated as an accumulation upon the plaster floor of the previous synagogue phase. In this soil layer, an assortment of other artifacts was discovered: lamp fragments, iron implements, and bronze, glass, and wheel-turned hanging lamps. At Khirbet Shema', archaeologists discovered 13 bronze coins in a small chamber under steps leading from the western side room into the synagogue hall. This man-made cave could originally have been part of an industrial installation, but was later integrated into the synagogue structure. Inside the cave, archaeologists found the coins together with pieces of glass and an oil lamp fragment, and pieces of Islamic pottery. At the time of discovery, the chamber was sealed off and had flooded with water. At Beth Alpha, 36 Byzantine coins were found in a plastered hole dug into the floor of the apse, which was covered with stone slabs. No other objects were found.<sup>314</sup> At Hammath Tiberias, 31 bronze coins were found in a cist or hole in the floor, in a small room or niche on the southeastern side of the hall. The cist was built into a stone slab floor laid on top of an older mosaic floor, and originally had a wooden structure above. With the coins were oil lamp fragments, a spindle whorl, parts of a stone measuring cup, a fragment of a roof tile, three broken bone needles, fragments of a bone spatula, and some metal hooks and nails. At Horvat Kur, archaeologists found 45 bronze coins dispersed over several layers of stone floors and fills inside the stone *bemah*, together with a bronze oil lamp and many fragments of pottery and

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<sup>314</sup> This deposit is a hard one to determine, because the coins were not found mixed together with other materials, as would be a requirement for this category. However, the 36 bronze coins found in the *bemah* were excavated in 1929, a time in which excavation standards were not yet high (for example, the archaeologists did not sift the soil). The plastered cist had also collapsed and filled up with rubble: it is thus unclear if all archeological materials were collected. The long range of dates and the small number of (low-value) coins makes me think this was a *genizah*, but they also could have been part of a treasury or charity accumulation, like Sukenik indicated: "It is probable that this cavity served as the treasury of the synagogue, and that these coins, in course of time, dropped down to the floor of the cavity" (Sukenik 1932, p. 13).

clay oil lamps. At Ma'oz Hayyim, archaeologists found "several" (probably bronze) coins in a hole in the floor in the apse of the building behind the *bemah*, together with some pieces of clay and glass lamps. These coins, however, were never published. At Horvat Sumaqa, three bronze coins were discovered in a cave under the northern part of the west wall of the synagogue building. As this natural cave was not blocked off during the time that the synagogue was in use, and a small wall built inside the cave has the same make-up as the synagogue wall on top of it, the excavators assume that the cave was contemporaneous with the synagogue building and the contents can be connected to it. Together with the three coins were metal, stone, and bone vessels, some cosmetic tools, a bronze pin, a spindle whorl, some iron working tools, and two large nails. Last, scattered bronze coins were found in two deposits inside the western side room of the synagogue building at Horvat Rimmon: according to the excavators 160 loose bronze coins were found in dirt debris beneath the ash floor in one area of the southern part of the room,<sup>315</sup> and 54 coins in another. The coins were found mixed in with other objects like lamps, pieces of candelabra, and jewelry.<sup>316</sup>

All the deposits from this category were found in distinct, retrievable places in or around the synagogue: in bemot, in caves, or in holes in the floor. The coins were always found mixed in with other objects: oil lamps, vessels, working tools, hooks and nails, etc. These artifacts are

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<sup>315</sup> But only 131 could be found at the IAA and have here been used in the analysis.

<sup>316</sup> I made the decision on the deposits at Horvat Rimmon based on the fact that the coins in these two deposits were found in a scattered fashion, surrounded by other artifacts and they were left inside the building after its destruction/abandonment. However, the large number of coins could also indicate that they were (originally) a treasury or charity fund.

not of particular high monetary value and are mostly broken; seemingly the remains of ritual objects that were no longer being used.

All the coins in this category (444 in total, plus an unknown number from Ma'oz Hayyim) were bronze. Unfortunately, many of the coins are illegible as they were placed in unprotected contexts: for example, at least two deposits were found in chambers that flooded regularly. When looking at the dates of the 403 legible coins, one can discern a clear emphasis on the 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century: 160 coins were minted in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and 95 in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Only Horvat Kur has six coins of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century (<https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/votive-offerings-and-genizot/>). Most coins could also not be connected to a minting place; only 63 of the 444 coins could be read. Of those, 13 came from Antioch, 13 from Constantinople, and 9 from Nicomedia.

### 4.3 Tzedakah or Charity

#### 4.3.1 Historical background and description

*Tzedakah* (Şedaqah, צדקה), or charity-giving, was a prominent concern of the sages who authored the classical rabbinical literature between the second and seventh centuries CE.<sup>317</sup> According to the rabbis, being compassionate to the poor and giving *tzedakah* to the less

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<sup>317</sup>Ulmer and Ulmer 2014, pp. 40-41; Wilfand 2014, pp. 44-49; Gardner 2015, pp. 1, 26-29: *Tzedakah* evolved from the word *Tzadik*, or righteousness, and meant “righteous giving”: the commandment to assist others, or a mandatory obligation upon every Jew to give if s/he could do so (Deut 24:13; Prov 14:34; Ps 106:3). Levine notes that giving charity “by Late Antiquity had become a well-accepted practice.” He lists biblical and historical sources that mention communal funds deposited in the synagogues (Levine 2000, pp. 396-398). Weddle notes that rabbinic *tzedakah* could have also been a replacement for the Temple sacrifices after 70 CE (Weddle 2017, p. 72). See also Mark 12:41-44.

fortunate were qualities that God expected from all the people of Israel.<sup>318</sup> By performing *tzedakah*, a person fulfils one of the most important duties laid out to Moses on Mount Sinai,<sup>319</sup> it brings one closer to the divine,<sup>320</sup> and increases peace in this world.<sup>321</sup> Indeed, charity-giving was considered so powerful that it could prolong a donor's life by 22 years and even save one from imminent death.<sup>322</sup>

*Tzedakah* could be performed in multiple ways; either by giving directly to beggars or by donating to *tzedakah* funds. Begging was a common sight in antiquity and beggars could be found in and around sacred spaces such as near Roman temples or divine statues and shrines at the city gates.<sup>323</sup> Jews as well were known to beg near religious buildings, such as at the Jerusalem temple and near synagogues.<sup>324</sup> This, according to Gregg Gardner, was for two

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<sup>318</sup> Ulmer and Ulmer 2014, p. 49: "according to the rabbinic literature, God has the expectation that we imitate his divine attributes. This leads to *Imitatio Dei*, or the becoming of the human being like the Creator."

<sup>319</sup> Deut. 15:7-11.

<sup>320</sup> Ulmer and Ulmer 2014, pp. 71-73.

<sup>321</sup> *Tosefta, Pe'ah* 4:21, p. 61 (Lieberman edition), and *Babylon Talmud, Bava Batra* 10a.

<sup>322</sup> *Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra* 11a; *Vayikra Rabbah* 34:1.

<sup>323</sup> Wilfand 2014, pp. 175–183.

<sup>324</sup> Cf Acts 3:2. See, for example, *Cleomedes, On the Circular Motions of the Celestial Bodies* II, 1:91 (Since, in addition to other things, his style [scil. Epicurus'] is also a corrupt motley, making use of expressions like "stable states of the flesh" and "hopeful hopes" concerning it, and calling tears "glistenings of the eyes" and having recourse to phrases like "holy screechings" and "ticklings of the body" and "wenchings" and other bad mischiefs of this kind. One may say that these expressions derive in part from brothels, in part they are similar to those spoken by women celebrating the Thesmophoria at the festivals of Demeter, and in part they issue from the midst of the synagogue and the beggars in its courtyards. These are Jewish and debased and much lower than reptiles) and *Artemidorus, Interpretation of Dreams* III, 53 (A synagogue and beggars and all people who ask for gifts, and such as arouse pity, and mendicants, foretell grief, anxiety and heartache to both men and women. For on the one hand, no one departs for a synagogue without a care, and, on the other, beggars who are very odious-looking and without resources and have nothing wholesome about them are an obstacle to every plan). Scattered coins found at the entrances of ancient synagogues, as in Capernaum or Horvat Kur, could perhaps be interpreted as retrieved coins given to/thrown at beggars who were stationed there.

reasons: first, the poor sought divine protection and comfort at the deity's abode. Second, beggars improved their chances of receiving alms by begging in places where large groups of people gathered. Just as it was common to beg at marketplaces and road junctions, it was strategic to solicit alms from the stream of people entering and exiting sacred spaces, especially if they had just been told to perform *tzedakah*.<sup>325</sup>

However, the Tosefta states that one need not give alms when a beggar comes to the door, and begging in the streets was often seen as a shameful act that should be avoided.<sup>326</sup> Instead, rabbinic texts instruct that charity be given and received in a collective and organized way, removing the sight of beggars from the community, and thus providing "charity with dignity."<sup>327</sup> In Late Antique Palestine, this organized approach meant donating to the two official *Tzedakah* funds: the *tamhui* and the *quppa*.<sup>328</sup>

The *tamhui* can best be translated as "the soup kitchen." Originally, the word *tamhui* only referred to a serving bowl (sometimes translated as "tureen"), a common household vessel that had no particular connection to the poor or charity.<sup>329</sup> It could be made out of ceramic, silver, wood, glass, or stone (making it an excellent vessel for purity reasons), and had an open shape with concave sides.<sup>330</sup> Because of its large size, the *tamhui* could hold enough

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<sup>325</sup> Gardner 2015, pp. 5–6.

<sup>326</sup> *Tosefta Pe'ah* 4:8.

<sup>327</sup> Hamel 1990, pp. 216–219; Gardner 2015, p. 2, 35; *Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra* 9b.

<sup>328</sup> *Tosefta Pe'ah* 4:10; *y. Pe'ah* 8:6, 21a; *t. Pe'ah* 4:9.

<sup>329</sup> For an overview of the transition of *tamhui* from a vessel to an institution, see Gardner 2015, pp. 67–69.

<sup>330</sup> *T. Kelim Bava Batra* 7:10; *t. Mikvaot* 6:15, 16; *m. Shabbat* 3:15. See also Brand 1953, p. 539 (Hebrew) and Schwartz 2006, p. 441.



food for several individuals, and the rabbis talk about passing it around at the table to share the food. Thus, the vessel often appeared at communal meals and banquets.<sup>331</sup> It is for these reasons that this vessel was transformed into the figurative manifestation of the soup kitchen: an official institution that provided the poor with the foods necessary daily sustenance.

According to rabbinic literature, the *tamhui* should provide a loaf of bread to anyone unable to afford two meals a day (three on Sabbath) on a daily basis. If a travelling poor man stayed overnight, legumes should be donated from the *tamhui*. The *tamhui* also provided olive oil, a dietary staple in Roman Palestine that supplied necessary fat and calories. Together, half a loaf of bread, some legumes, and olive oil could support an individual's daily caloric needs, providing the poor with their most basic needs.<sup>332</sup>

The *quppa*, on the other hand, originally was a wicker basket made of palm leaves, woven so tightly it could hold coins.<sup>333</sup> Tannaitic texts depict the *quppa* as relatively large (about 85 cm high) and holding 24 pints in volume but small enough to be carried by one person slung over the shoulder.<sup>334</sup> *Quppot* found in excavations in the Judean Desert held personal belongings, such as metal utensils, textiles, keys, papyri, etc., but texts mention that

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<sup>331</sup> *m. Nedarim* 4:4; *m. Pesahim* 10:1. In the ancient texts, it has also been identified with the Greek *tryblion* or the Latin *paropsis*: vessels that were used for handwashing in the Gospels and were present at the Last Supper. According to Gardner, archaeological examples have been found at Beth She'arim, Jerash, Nazareth, and Qumran (Zevulun and Olenik 1979, pp. 24–25, 16\* and plates 50–54), and a stone example at Jerusalem (Avigad 1983, pp. 176, 181), although no basis for the identification of these vessels as *tamhui* are provided.

<sup>332</sup> On special occasions, other foods were donated as well, such as wine for the Seder on Passover, or fish and vegetables on the Sabbath (Gardner 2015, pp. 91–97). Furthermore, the *tamhui* as an institution provided shelter and lodgings to travelers or those who needed a place for the night (Gardner 2015, pp. 98–109).

<sup>333</sup> *m. Kelim* 16:2-3; *Kelim Bava Batra* 3:1; *m. Shekalim* 3:2.

<sup>334</sup> Gardner 2015, p. 71.

they were also used to hold and carry other dry goods, such as fertilizer and, especially, food.<sup>335</sup> Similar to the *tamhui*, the *quppa* lent itself well to holding, collecting, and distributing food to multiple individuals. Unlike the *tamhui*, however, the *quppa* could be closed, allowing more control over who had access to it, and it was larger, capable of holding a significant quantity of provisions.

Both common household vessels were transformed into central institutions of organized charities during the rabbinic period. The *tamhui*, because of its open shape, became symbolic of provisions ready to consume: the soup kitchen, a space for immediate sustenance.<sup>336</sup> The *quppa*, on the other hand, could be closed and contained enough produce to support an individual for a week: it became the institution of the Charity Fund in which money was donated, a larger support system that could be more easily controlled. In this sense, these vessels became more than mere collection containers: they were, as Gardner states, forms of conduct articulated by a system of rules that organized and controlled activities. In our case, these were institutions that controlled the way assets or alms were transferred from one individual to another.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Yadin 1963, pp. 136–151 (contains drawings of the baskets); Gardner 2015, pp. 72–74.

<sup>336</sup> Perhaps this food was stored in an upper room of the synagogue, which could have also been a space for communal meals or banquets (Ottenheim and Pater 2021).

<sup>337</sup> Gardner 2015, pp. 81–82. In other words, the names of the institutions were based upon the names of the vessels, which became the symbolic nomenclatures for these organizations. This is similar to how we, for example, say “to xerox a document,” a process which does not necessarily have to include a Xerox machine or happen in a Xerox-owned copy-center. So too were the original vessels not necessarily a part of the “House of the Tamhui” or “Public Charity Fund”.

Members of the community were instructed to donate to both the *tamhui* and the *quppa*: bread to the *tamhui* and money to the *quppa*.<sup>338</sup> Early Tannaitic texts do not specify how much one should give: according to Gardner, the rabbis may have deliberately left this obligation openended to encourage individuals to donate as much as they could.<sup>339</sup> It was only from the Amoraic period onwards that people were instructed not to donate more than one-fifth of their income, to prevent benefactors from falling into poverty themselves.<sup>340</sup> We also know that giving to and taking from the institutions happened anonymously, to protect the dignity of the poor.<sup>341</sup> But how? According to the Tannaim, a charity supervisor, an unpaid, voluntary official, was responsible for overseeing the operations of the *quppa* (and in later Amoraic texts, also for overseeing the *tamhui*). The tasks of the charity supervisor were twofold: to be a charity collector (*gabbai tzedakah*) and to be a charity provider (*parnas*).<sup>342</sup> As a charity collector, the supervisor was responsible for collecting funds publicly and privately.

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<sup>338</sup> This money could come from the *ma'aser shani*, the tithes for the poor (see below).

<sup>339</sup> Gardner 2015, p. 129: "giving should be done in accordance to the needs of the poor and not the means of the donor." In other words, the poor needed to be compensated according to their needs, which could be limitless and so too should the donations be limitless. The needs of the poor were understood differently by the rabbis than they are today. Donations were supposed to have a "restorative function" as the aim was to restore to each individual exactly what they had before they became poor. Thus, they had to offer more than just sustenance: they also had to provide the individual with the means to purchase clothing, food, slaves, and horses, if that was what they had before they became destitute. In other words, the charity institutions were designed to restore the poor to their former social status.

<sup>340</sup> This is outlined in the so-called "Usha ordinance" as found in *m. Pe'ah* 1:1; *Babylonian Talmud Ketubot* 50a. Perhaps this was in reaction to the common practice in early Christianity in which people gave away all their possessions to others?

<sup>341</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot mattenot 'aniyyim* 108-10; *t. Pe'ah* 4:18 and perhaps most famously Matthew 6:3-4: "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret."

<sup>342</sup> Originally, these two functions could have been served by two different individuals. For an overview of the history of both professions and their specific functions over time, see Gardner 2015, pp. 158–163.

Publicly, funds could be raised in public spaces, such as at the synagogue.<sup>343</sup> Privately, the supervisor would go door-to-door to ask people for their contributions, reminiscent of tax collectors (the word *gabbai* on its own also means tax collector).<sup>344</sup> As for the distribution, the supervisor was responsible for assessing exactly how much each individual needed, if they were eligible to receive in the first place. But where was this money stored? *T. Sheqalim* 2:16, D-E, probably written around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, states: “Just as there was a chamber of secrets in the Temple, so too there was such a chamber in every town, so that wellborn poor could be maintained from it in secret.” In other words, this text reveals that there was a “secret place” in every town where the poor could go to get donations anonymously to preserve their dignity, protecting them from the humiliation of begging. Perhaps this “chamber of secrets” as remembered from the Temple might have become the *quppa*, located in or near the synagogue?<sup>345</sup> We may even have evidence for this: in the synagogue at Arbel, a niche or “chamber” was discovered by archaeologists. The Arbel synagogue was first excavated by Kohl and Watzinger in 1905-1907 and then by Zvi Ilan and Avraham Izdarechet in 1978-1988.<sup>346</sup> In

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<sup>343</sup> Kindler 1989; Hamel 1999, p. 218; Spigel 2012a, p. 36. Safrai 1995 calls this the “allocation” or *psikah*: during the allocation, the purpose or specific need for the funds was announced and everyone present contributes as they saw fit.

<sup>344</sup> *Tosefta Demai* 3:20; *y. Dema* ch. 3, 23b; *y. Horayot* ch. 3, 48a; *Leviticus Rabbah* 5:4; *Deut Rabbah* 4:8.

<sup>345</sup> Of course, archaeologists have also found a plethora of coin deposits in private houses from Late Antiquity, so it is possible that the *quppa*, at least in some instances, was kept at the house of the collector, perhaps in a separate room or chamber. Here, however, I want to pay attention to possible examples of *quppot* in synagogues. A link between synagogues and charity distribution is also made by Rosenfeld and Menirav 1999, p. 267.

<sup>346</sup> Kohl and Watzinger 1975, pp. 59–70; Hüttenmeister and Reeg 1977, pp. 15–17; Chiat 1982, pp. 114–116; Chen 1986, pp. 235–240; Dolev 1988, pp. 29–34 (Hebrew); Ilan and Izdarechet 1989, pp. 111–117 (Hebrew); Ilan 1991, pp. 116–118 (Hebrew); Ilan and Izdarechet 1993, pp. 87–89; Dauphin 1998, pp. 718–719; Milson 2007, pp. 214, 302–305; Leibner 2009, pp. 250–264; Spigel 2012a, pp. 143–148; Hachlili 2013, pp. 17, 57, 59–60, 183, 540; Gardner 2015, p. 66.

the building, which is dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century for Phase I and the 6<sup>th</sup> century for Phase II, a small carved, stone cupboard of 135 cm high, 148 cm wide, and 110 cm deep was discovered in the east side of the north wall.<sup>347</sup> The niche was hewn out of a single stone and its sides were about 15 cm thick. Access to the cupboard was possible through a small door that opened to the *outside* of the building. Unfortunately, no coins or other objects were found inside the cupboard, but some scholars have identified this receptacle as a possible *quppa*.<sup>348</sup> If this is true, then this kind of niche or cupboard could have been an integral architectural part of many synagogues, but no longer recognizable by archaeologists as the upper parts of walls of ancient synagogues are rarely preserved.<sup>349</sup> New excavations at Arbel, currently conducted by Benjamin Arubas, might shed new light on this interpretation of the cupboard.<sup>350</sup>

If there was a *quppa* receptacle placed inside the niche, how should we imagine it? Was it a wicker basket, as found in the Judean desert? Or a wooden box, or a clay storage jar? In all those cases, however, the receptacles would be long gone and all we would find are its contents: the coins. So how then could we recognize these deposits? I suggest there are five qualities a coin deposit should have to make it a candidate for a *Tzedakah* deposit:

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<sup>347</sup> Ilan and Izdarechet 1993, p. 88. According to Hachlili 2013, p. 540, the cupboard was 118 cm high, 100 cm wide and 80 cm deep. As Zvi Ilan and Avraham Izdarechet were the excavators of this building, I am following their measurements in this dissertation.

<sup>348</sup> Perhaps there was a *quppa* box or other receptacle stored in this niche that at some point was taken out. *Tzedakah* boxes, nowadays often called *pushkaks*, still exist but are now kept in the private home, a custom that arose at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Eastern Europe. Charity boxes now come in all sorts and shapes, from plastic boxes to silver caskets, and everything in-between.

<sup>349</sup> However, in other synagogues with completely preserved or reconstructed walls, like Umm el-Qanatir, no such cupboards have been recognized.

<sup>350</sup> I tried to contact Benjamin Arubas on different occasions to talk about this cupboard but all emails and phone calls went unanswered.

- 1) the coins are found together as a group,
- 2) the deposit is found in a retrievable, accessible place (so that coins could have been easily added to, and taken from it),
- 3) the deposit mostly contains small, low-value coins (the money that people had in their pockets on a daily basis and were willing to donate),
- 4) the quantity of the coins is low (as they were intended for distribution rather than long-term storage),
- 5) and the coins are all more or less of the same date (because the money would change hands quickly and was never stored for long in the *quppa*).

It would also make sense that these deposits were stored in a separate part of the synagogue building, away from the ritual spaces, in the symbolic “Chamber of Secrets”: in a niche in the (outer) wall or in a side room.

#### 4.3.2 Deposits categorized as charity hoards or *Tzedakah*

Based on the qualifications laid out above, I believe these three deposits are possible candidates for charity hoards: Beth She’arim (Deposit 1), Wadi Hamam (Deposit 1), and Horvat Rimmon (Deposit 4). A map can be found at

<https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/tzedakah-or-charity/> .

At Beth She’arim, 1200 bronze coins were discovered in the basement of a building “associated with” the synagogue. This building, designated Building B, was located northwest of the synagogue hall, on the other side of a small courtyard in front of the synagogue. The coins were found in the basement of the two-story building, in burnt debris. Of the reported 1200

coins, 615 were legible and kept at the Hebrew University. At Wadi Hamam, 37 silver coins probably came from the collapsed east wall of the synagogue. The coins were found dispersed in between the collapse of the upper part of the east wall among roof tiles and rubble just outside the synagogue building. Last, at Horvat Rimmon, a coin deposit was discovered in a hole or crack in the west wall of the side room of the synagogue building, some 20 cms above the floor. The 64 bronze coins were still stuck in between two stones of the wall.

The three deposits identified as charity hoards are diverse in content and context. Two deposits consist of bronze coins, while one solely contains silver coins. The silver deposit can be dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, while the bronze deposits from Beth She'arim to the mid-fourth century and the one from Horvat Rimmon to the first quarter of the fifth century. The Wadi Hamam and Horvat Rimmon deposits were stored inside walls, while the original location of the Beth She'arim deposit is unknown, but the coins were discovered in a basement. In other words, the charity deposits are our most "random" and hardest category to identify. The reason for why they can be recognized as *tzedakah*, and are set apart from other categories like the treasuries, however, is that these kinds of deposits are always found in retrievable places, the coins are low in value,<sup>351</sup> and they have a (relatively) limited time span: the Wadi Hamam coins have a range of 173 years (except for the single Jannaeus coin), Horvat Rimmon of 141 years, and Beth She'arim of only 59 years, with 557 of the 623 datable coins coming from the second quarter of the fourth century (<https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/tzedakah-or-charity/>).

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<sup>351</sup> The value of silver coins in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century is still debated, but waves of debasement could indicate that their value was decreasing rapidly in this period (Reece 1975; Grierson 1999; Bland 2012).

## 4.4 Treasuries

### 4.4.1 Historical background and description

The term treasury (or *thesauros*) was first used in Classical Greece to indicate small, temple-like structures that were built as ancillary rooms to temples, to house donations made by private citizens to public sanctuaries.<sup>352</sup> Objects that could be donated included sculptures and paintings, objects of precious materials like gold, silver, and bronze, and objects valued because they were unusual in some way. Treasury objects were not only seen as offerings to the gods but also as a statement of power on the part of the local government and citizens, displaying their wealth and status. In times of emergency, however, the precious metals stored in treasuries could be used as a reserve to mint coinage.<sup>353</sup> In this sense, treasuries could act as financial back-up systems. The Jerusalem temple similarly had a treasury in which the main contributions were the half-shekels paid every year by male Israelites over the age of 21.<sup>354</sup> At the time of the initial construction of the temple, biblical law required every adult male Jew to make a one-time payment of a half shekel. This modest sum allowed Jews of all economic levels to participate in the construction. After the building was completed, however, the temple authorities continued to collect the tax for the purpose of purchasing the public sacrifices and renewing the furnishings of the temple. Delegations from communities around the Roman empire and beyond would come to Jerusalem with their donations, and the money was stored

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<sup>352</sup> Simmons 2016, p. 29.

<sup>353</sup> Von Reden 2010, p. 30.

<sup>354</sup> See for example *Mishnah Shekalim* 6.



in the treasury-chambers or storerooms until needed.<sup>355</sup> It is conceivable that these donations were first kept in early synagogues, before a delegate would collect the money and bring it to Jerusalem.<sup>356</sup> After the destruction of the temple, the Romans imposed a new tax, the *Fiscus Judaicus*, which diverted this half-shekel donation to the temple of Capitoline Jupiter in Rome.<sup>357</sup> However, it is not inconceivable that local synagogues kept collecting donations, especially as their role in the local communities grew over the following centuries. The synagogue was an economic center in its local community.<sup>358</sup> It had personnel (see chapter 2.2), organized events and festivities, acted as a hostel for visitors,<sup>359</sup> and fulfilled many duties any modern community house would. All this required coinage. Rabbinic sources inform us that

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<sup>355</sup> It is unclear where or what this treasury was in Herod's temple. The Gospels seem to refer only to 13 trumpet-shaped boxes that were placed in the court of the Women in front of the Temple for the reception of the offerings. This court is expressly named the "treasury" in John 8:20: "These words spoke he in the treasury, as he taught in the temple."

<sup>356</sup> Binder 1999, p. 428–430; Runesson *et al.* 2010, p. 152. Philo *Spec.* 1-76-78 states that "practically in every city there are banking places (ταμεία) for the holy money (ἱερῶν χρημάτων) where people regularly come and give their offerings. And at stated times there are appointed to carry the sacred tribute envoys selected on their merits, from every city those of the highest repute, under whose conduct the hope of each and all will travel safely." See also the decree given by emperor Augustus stating that it is prohibited to steal sacred books or *sacred money* "from a Sabbath [building] or from a public school" (Josephus *Ant.* 16.164). Meshorer believes he found evidence of the private stashing of tithing coins in a house at En-Gedi. Here, 139 bronze quadrantes coins dated between 42 and 59 CE were found in an oil lamp hidden in the wall of a townhouse (Meshorer 1976, 2007). Half a Tyrian shekel (the amount that needed to be given to the Temple on a yearly basis) can be calculated to 128 quadrantes. The extra 11 coins were, according to him, added to pay the 8% exchange fee imposed by the money changers to change the bronze coins into the silver half Tyrian shekel. If this is true, then we have here a very early example of storing money that was meant for the Temple.

<sup>357</sup> The amount levied was two denarii, equivalent to the one-half of a shekel. The money now went to the temple of Capitoline Jupiter in Rome. And while the tax paid for the temple of Jerusalem only needed to be paid by adult men between the ages of 21 and 50, the *Fiscus Judaicus* was imposed on all Jews, including women, children, and the elderly. In this dissertation, I am not taking into account these taxes and many others, like the land tax, the poll tax, etc. that people from Palestine had to pay to the occupying Roman or Byzantine rulers. These taxes, both in kind and in coin, were probably directly collected by state officials and were, presumably, not stored in synagogues. See, for example, Hamel 1990, pp. 142–163.

<sup>358</sup> Safrai 1987 (Hebrew); Rosenfeld and Menirav 1999.

<sup>359</sup> See the Theodotus inscription, footnote 145.

individuals would donate money not only for the construction of the building but also for its upkeep and use. Sometimes, a donation to the synagogue was made in the form of goods rather than money, and the synagogue would have to sell these goods to acquire their value in coins.<sup>360</sup> The synagogue could have also served as the community bank. Profits made by the community as a whole, inheritance money, or other sources of communal income could have been stored in the synagogue for safe-keeping until needed.<sup>361</sup> All this money needed to be stored somewhere in the building, and just as with the *quppa*, these deposits could have been kept in a stone or wooden box, a clay vessel, or any other receptacle. We are familiar with similar kinds of movable and immovable treasury boxes (*thesaur[o]ji*) from the Classical world.<sup>362</sup> For example, the lower part of a late fifth or fourth century BCE “offertory box” was found *in situ* at bedrock level in the area of the Temple of Apollo in Corinth, and in 2008 a treasury box was discovered at a sanctuary in Campo della Fiera, dated to the 3rd century BCE – or later.<sup>363</sup> These early examples from Corinth and Athens suggest that the use of boxes designed for the collection of coins was well understood and implemented in the sanctuaries

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<sup>360</sup> Rosenfeld and Menirav 1999, p. 267: an inscription from Beth Alpha records a combined contribution from the members for the needs of the synagogue to the amount of “one hundreds *seahs* of wheat.” Another inscription from the synagogue of Na’aran states that contributions could be made “whether in gold, silver or anything else.”

<sup>361</sup> Again, this money could have been kept at the house of a rabbi, priest, archisynagogue, archon, or phrontistes, but here I am looking for possible examples of treasuries in the synagogue building.

<sup>362</sup> Crawford 2003; Pafford 2006; Lykke 2017.

<sup>363</sup> Lykke 2017, p. 213; Ranucci 2011. In these cases, the boxes were used to receive the fee that the worshipper had to pay the priests for animal sacrifices. In other words, they were used to collect the money needed for the daily operations of the sacred building.

even before the Hellenistic period. That this phenomenon spread to the eastern Mediterranean and continued to exist in the Roman period is indicated in Luke 21:1-4:

“As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the *temple treasury*. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Thus, according to this text, there was “treasury” or γαζοφυλάκιον located in the temple. The Greek word γαζοφυλάκιον only appears three times in the New Testament, each time in the same episode.<sup>364</sup> Nowhere is the appearance of this “treasury” mentioned, but we do have a possible predecessor from 2 Kings 12:9-10:

“And Jehoiada the priest took one chest (‘*aron*, אֲרוֹן) and bore a hole in its lid (delet, דִּלְתָּוּ); and he placed it near the altar on the right, where a person enters the house of the Lord: and the priests, the guards of the threshold, would put all the silver/money [חֶסֶד] that was brought into the house of the Lord, into there.”

In this story, set in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the collection box is a “box” with a “door” (or lid) with a hole in it through which silver pieces could be deposited.<sup>365</sup> Is this how we should imagine treasury boxes in Late Antiquity? Or did people from Late Antiquity switch to using oil lamps as coin containers, as archaeologists have found several examples of this phenomenon in Palestine?<sup>366</sup> Perhaps there could have also been containers made from perishable materials,

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<sup>364</sup> Luke 21:1, Mark 12:41, and Mark 12:43.

<sup>365</sup> It’s unclear what material this chest was made of. Presumably, it would have been made out of wood, but it could have also been made out of stone or other materials.

<sup>366</sup> For example, in the wall of a house at En-Gedi dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE (Meshorer 1976, 2007), under the courtyard of a Galilean farmhouse dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE (Syon 2000–2002), or the Bar Kohba hoard found “near Hebron” dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE (Hendin 2000–02). However, no such examples have been found in synagogue contexts.

like textiles or reed, in which case we would not be able to recognize the deposit as a treasury.

In any case, I believe the treasury was an integral part of the synagogue building.

I suggest there are six qualities an excavated synagogue coin deposit should have to make it a candidate for a treasury deposit:

- 1) the coins are found together as a group,
- 2) the deposit is found in an open, accessible place (so that coins could have been easily added to and taken from it),
- 3) besides small bronze coins, coins of a higher value in silver and gold may be represented (large amounts of lower currency that was changed into higher currency, so that it would take up less space, kept in case of an emergency),
- 4) the quantity of the coins can be high (money could have been saved up over a long period, for example, for planned renovations),
- 5) the coins can have a broad date range (because the money could have been stored for a long time, and only now and then was a small number of coins removed as needed),
- 6) and the deposit was stored in a secure place such as in a closed-off annex room or in the *bemah* to prevent it from being stolen.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> In this sense, the context of the treasury could be very similar to that of a *genizah*. The difference here is that the coins were meant to go back into circulation and were not set apart as sacred.

#### 4.4.2 Deposits categorized as treasuries

Based on the criteria above, I believe the following seven deposits in our database could have been treasuries: Deir 'Aziz (Deposit 1), Deir 'Aziz (Deposit 2), Gush Halav (Deposit 1), 'En Gedi (Deposit 1), Caesarea (Deposit 1), Meroth (Deposit 2), and Rehob (Deposit 1). A map can be found at <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/treasuries/>.

At Deir 'Aziz, excavators found two deposits that could be categorized as treasuries. In a small, hewn pit about 95 cm deep, they found 2027 bronze coins as a group, covered by stone slabs. This pit might have belonged to an earlier Phase/floor of the synagogue. Another 14 gold coins were found in a juglet in a gap area between the floor and a row of stones (also called by the excavators “a foundation” or “wall-*bemah*”) parallel to the east side of the south wall of the synagogue building. The excavators suggest that this unpaved area might have been the locus for a portable *bemah*. There were also broken molded and decorated architectural fragments as well as fragments of a decorated arch with Greek inscription.<sup>368</sup> The coin deposit at Gush Halav was discovered in a side room of the synagogue building. This deposit consists of 1943 bronze coins stored in a cooking pot, originally placed on top of the plaster floor of the room.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> This deposit is hard to determine. Because it was placed under a possible movable *bemah* and people thus had access to it whenever they wanted, and because the building was never destroyed but repurposed over time, I believe it to be a treasury and not a magico-religious deposit, emergency hoard, or post-destruction burial. If they were part of a *genizah*, the coins must have had some previous liturgical and/or votive function, which is possible, but 14 gold coins seems a very high sum to take out of circulation, even if the money was deemed sacred. If this is a second treasury, however, one must ask the question why this synagogue had two separate treasuries. Perhaps for different functions?

<sup>369</sup> Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 222, note 35 remark that “it is tempting to suggest the hypothesis that these coins and construction materials uncovered in the storage room were placed as preparations for a future renovation and a 'floor deposit', but has not been realized due to the earthquake.” This is an interesting theory, suggesting that the magico-religious coins (and thus the tithing money? See below) were collected and stored in the synagogue building itself, waiting its final deposition under the floor. Archaeologically, however, there is no way to prove this. If this hypothesis is true, on the other hand, then the bronze deposits at Deir 'Aziz, 'En Gedi, Caesarea, and even

At 'En Gedi, archaeologists found about 3000 bronze coins in the debris of the Torah shrine of the synagogue building. Unfortunately, only 175 were in a good enough condition to be identified. At Caesarea, excavators discovered 3700 bronze coins "in the plastering of a projection which might have contained the Ark." No other objects have been indicated as found together with this deposit. At Meroth, 236 gold and 238 bronze coins were recovered from a hollowed-out stone laid in the northeastern corner of a western side room. The coins, lying at the bottom of this niche, could only be accessed through a circa 60 cm long tunnel pierced through the stone. In the vicinity of the niche, eight more gold coins were found scattered, together with a pair of bronze scales. Last, at Rehob, a clay box was discovered during modern agricultural work around the ancient synagogue, which contained 28 gold coins dating to the 7th century. Together with this box were fragments of a chancel screen with the depiction of a seven-branched menorah, indicating that the box and its content can be associated with the synagogue. Where in the building the box would have been originally placed is not known.

Like charity and votive deposits, treasuries are found in retrievable places. However, the large quantity of coins and their high value (three deposits contain a large number of gold coins) sets them apart. The Caesarea deposit has a time span of 108 years,<sup>370</sup> the Deir 'Aziz (Deposit 1) 198 years, the Gush Halav deposit 295 years (or even 800 years if we take the earliest coin and latest coins as not intrusive), the Meroth deposit (minus intrusives) 468 years, the 'En Gedi deposit 627 years, and the gold Rehob deposit 71 years

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Beth She'arim could also be interpreted this way (although Ahipaz and Leibner do not bring up this possibility in their own case-study of the synagogue at Deir 'Aziz).

<sup>370</sup> This is a shorter time span than some of the charity hoards, but the large number of coins (3700) made me place this deposit under treasuries.

(<https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/treasuries/>). As for the *terminus post quem* of each deposit, the latest datable coin from Caesarea dates to 423 CE; Deir 'Aziz to 498 CE and 565 CE; 'En Gedi to 527 CE; Gush Halav to 565 CE; Meroth to 611 CE;<sup>371</sup> and Rehob to 687 CE.

## 4.5 Emergency Hoards

### 4.5.1 Historical background and description

In 1900, Adrien Blanchet published the first systematic discussion of 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE Roman coin hoards.<sup>372</sup> According to him, the coins were deposited when Germanic tribes invaded Gaul; to preserve wealth in the face of danger, people buried their savings. Blanchet's work was extremely influential in the development of Roman hoard studies in the 20th century, to the extent that every hoard found since then has been associated with threats of violence, even if they are not recorded in historical sources. This principle is still influential in modern hoarding studies in Britain, where scholars try to pinpoint the advance of historical armies based on the locations of coin deposits.<sup>373</sup>

However, critics have pointed out that we also possess large quantities of coin deposits from regions and periods in which there was peace and stability.<sup>374</sup> Furthermore, identifying deposits as emergency hoards assumes that Roman coins were perceived invariably as valuable money and therefore represent the storage of monetary wealth, a perception with which not

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<sup>371</sup> Not taking into account the two later, possibly intrusive coins dated to 783 and 1198 CE.

<sup>372</sup> Blanchet 1900.

<sup>373</sup> See for example, Crawford 1983; Aitchison 1988.

<sup>374</sup> For a good introduction to emergency hoards, see Curta and Gândilă 2012.

everyone agrees. Thus, the interpretation of any coin deposit as an unretrieved emergency hoard must be scrutinized carefully. What we can say is that this kind of deposit was created on impulse rather than careful planning: one did not deliberately select certain types, but took whatever was on hand when the crisis arose. Thus, emergency hoards will usually be heterogenous in variety but homogeneous in date range, reflecting the coins in circulation at the time of deposition (creating a numismatic “snapshot”). Emergency hoards were also meant to be retrieved: they were placed in accessible spots and archaeologists are only able to find them when something happened to the owner that prevented him or her from returning.

I believe there are six qualities an ancient synagogue deposit should have to recognize it as an emergency hoard:<sup>375</sup>

- 1) The coins are found together as a group (they were often placed in a container, to make retrieval easier),
- 2) the deposit displays the full range of denominations that were in circulation at the time of a threat and were being used as functional currency, but the deposit may contain low value and high value coins, depending on the wealth of the owner,
- 3) the deposit shows a narrow date range, as the owner took what was on hand,<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> I believe that most emergency hoards would have been buried or hidden inside the owner’s house (see the debate on ‘En Gedi, Deposit 2). Here, however, I am looking at deposits discovered in synagogues to see if any might have been emergency hoards. See also Avi-Yonah 1981; Tzaferis 1981; Ilan and Damati 1987.

<sup>376</sup> This is perhaps the weakest quality, as people could also hide their personal savings, which they had stored in their own house for decades. However, the narrow date range of emergency coins has been discussed by Waner and Safrai in their study on the “shelf life” of coins in ancient Palestine hoards (Waner and Safrai, 2001).



- 4) there is no evidence that coins were selected for certain types or emperors, and both new and worn coins are represented,
- 5) the deposit was hidden with the aim of one day being recovered and thus may contain other personal items of value (like gems and jewelry),
- 6) and an emergency deposit is “closed,” placed in a hidden location where it could not be found by outsiders, but easily retrievable by the owner or others.

Why the synagogue was chosen to hide coin deposits is unknown, but perhaps it was considered sturdier than a normal house and could be locked, elevating the chances that the building would survive a riot;<sup>377</sup> the building could have been considered a sacred and safe place to protect the money;<sup>378</sup> and there were more safe hiding spots such as under the stone flooring or inside the *bemah* where the money could have easily been retrieved if the building was destroyed. People might also have seen the synagogue as a holy place in the sense that it is specially protected by God and robbing it would be a particular sacrilege.

#### 4.5.2 Deposits categorized as emergency hoards

Based on the qualifications set up above, I suggest that the following six synagogue deposits may fall under this category: Qasrin (Deposit 2), Korazin (Deposit 4), Horvat Kur (Deposit 3), ‘En Gedi (Deposit 2), Ma’oz Hayyim (Deposit 1), and Rehob (Deposit 2). A map can be found at <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/emergency-hoards/>.

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<sup>377</sup> Of course, houses could also be locked, especially if the owner was wealthy.

<sup>378</sup> Think, for example, about the storage of valuable items in churches and synagogues during WWII.

At Qasrin, 84 or 85 bronze coins (folles and half-folles) were discovered over the course of the excavations along the southern wall of the synagogue hall, close to the northeastern corner of a platform built against this wall. 82 of these coins were found grouped together probably below the plaster floor of the building, although at the time of its discovery, no attempt was made to establish the deposit's stratigraphic relationship to the synagogue floor. Three additional coins were found in close proximity to the deposit during separate excavations, and these have been added to the final deposit count. Two of the coins come from a matrix of small stones and compact earth that acted as foundation fill below a pillar base placed in the plaster floor next to the platform. This plaster floor is a replacement of an earlier mosaic floor, and it is possible that the coins originally were placed under the mosaic floor and not the later plaster floor. Although no container was found, the coins were not scattered but clustered in one place, and in good condition: it is thus possible that they were deposited together in a perishable container. No coin deposits were found below the floor in other parts of the synagogue. Over 400 bronze coins were found in a building north of the synagogue at Korazin, separated by a corridor. This building, labeled Building E, also contained a *miqveh*. The coins were found inside a natural water channel covered by stone beams.<sup>379</sup> Eight gold coins were found under the eastern stylobate bench of the synagogue at Horvat Kur. These coins were discovered close to and below two large stone blocks next to each other that made up a bench dividing the main hall from the eastern side aisle (but above the plaster floor on which the bench sat). Under the

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<sup>379</sup> This assessment has been made on the assumption that the deposit was indeed found in a water channel, and that this channel was connected to the synagogue. If, however, the coins were found in a "specially cut chamber" as Yeivin first claimed in 1987, I would place this deposit under the treasury category. If the room cannot be connected to the synagogue, we should delete this deposit from our overview.

southernmost block, a lead vessel was excavated as well, which had two of the coins lying next to it. The excavators assume that all eight coins originally came from the same deposit.<sup>380</sup> At 'En Gedi, 41 Byzantine folles were found wrapped in cloth, placed in an oil lamp, and hidden underground, in a courtyard just outside the synagogue.<sup>381</sup> At Ma'oz Hayyim, a clustered deposit was discovered just outside the apse, next to the synagogue building.<sup>382</sup> This deposit consisted of 48 gold coins, wrapped in a piece of cloth and placed under a broken roof tile. These coins were never published but are located at the IAA. Last, at Rehob, archaeologists found 14 Arab-Byzantine bronze coins, apparently wrapped in cloth, beneath the rubble of a collapsed wall separating the western aisle from a small room west of the *bemah*.<sup>383</sup> The coins have not been published yet.

All the coins from these deposits were found in clusters, wrapped in cloth or other materials, and stored in places that were easily recognizable, and thus easy to remember: in a water channel, under a decorative stone, right outside the protruding apse, etc. However, half of our examples (Korazin, Ma'oz Hayyim, and 'En Gedi) were found not inside but in close proximity to the synagogue: this might indicate that emergency hoards were not normally

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<sup>380</sup> This deposit could also be interpreted as a magico-religious deposit or a treasury (as Zangenberg, Rheeder, and Bes *forthcoming* state). However, the fact that the coins were grouped together, low in number, inaccessible, and all from the same period, makes me think it is a (communal, seeing the effort it would take to lift the stone) emergency hoard (perhaps originally part of the community treasury but stored here for safekeeping?).

<sup>381</sup> Again, this interpretation has been made on the assumption that the courtyard was connected to synagogue complex.

<sup>382</sup> Same remark as 'En Gedi. I still believe this is an emergency hoard, but it might not have been connected to the synagogue and its functions.

<sup>383</sup> Since this deposit, including its archaeological context, has not been published yet, this is an educated guess. The fact that the coins date from the period just before the synagogue was destroyed and were wrapped in cloth makes me think it was an emergency hoard.

buried in synagogues, but that scholars have mistakenly associated these deposits with synagogue activities. Perhaps these three examples should no longer be mentioned in connection to ancient synagogue coin deposits.

As for dating the different deposits, they all seem to belong to different, but late, periods. The *terminus post quem* of the deposit of Korazin is the fourth quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (498 CE), of Horvat Kur the fourth quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (584 CE), of Qasrin the first quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (608 CE), and of Ma'oz Hayyim and Rehob the fourth quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (696 CE and 690 CE respectively) (<https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/emergency-hoards/>). More research into the historical context of these periods in the future might be able to connect the deposits to specific crisis events.<sup>384</sup>

#### **4.6 Post-Destruction Offerings**

The last category in this chapter are deposits placed in the synagogue or in its ruins after the building was destroyed. The coins could have been placed in the synagogue building because people believed that the sacredness of the space would protect the deposit, or that they would bless the building (as a closing or protective offering?). While coins from the magico-religious deposits were brought in before the building was constructed, and the votive offerings and *genizot*, charity hoards, treasuries, or emergency hoards were deposited inside the building

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<sup>384</sup> Reasons, for example, could have been Persian attacks on the region between 540 and 562 CE; continuous waves of the plague (Ariel 2002, p. 299; Ahipaz 2007, p. 162); the Samaritan revolts of 484 and 529 CE; the Persian invasion of 614-615 CE (Ariel 1996, p. 69); and the power struggles over the caliphate in the 680's, which can be discerned in a clear rise in the concealment of hoards in Syria-Palestine (Walmsley 2007, p. 324). Of course, as mentioned earlier, the need to assume that each hoard was created in light of a public crisis might not always be correct. Some emergency hoards could have been made because of personal fears, like hiding money from a debt collector or estranged family.

during its use as a ritual space, post-destruction offerings were placed in the building after its (partial) destruction. However, while their category, based on their stratigraphy, is easy to determine, their specific function is difficult to decipher. The only two examples that can be categorized as post-destruction deposits with certainty are Horvat Rimmon (Deposit 1) and Horvat Rimmon (Deposit 2). After the synagogue was partly destroyed by fire at the end of Phase II, the main hall was cleared out and restored.<sup>385</sup> The ashy destruction debris was collected and stored in the western side room. Shortly after this, sometime in the late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century, two coin deposits were placed in the upper layer of this debris.<sup>386</sup> Both deposits contain gold coins (12 and 35 coins respectively), placed inside a ceramic vessel, closed off by a stone, and buried *upside down* in the destruction fill, carefully covered with earth. As we will see below (chapter 5.2), the so-called “Aramaic incantation bowls” from Late Antiquity were also buried upside down to trap demons creeping into the building. Could this habit of burying magical objects upside down have spread from Mesopotamia to other regions and other objects, even if these objects did not have a half-round “trapping” shape, thus only preserving the allegorical meaning? Did these deposits have an apotropaic, defensive function, keeping evil out of the building, but more importantly blessing and protecting the building and its visitors?<sup>387</sup> And were coins chosen because the community was influenced by the magico-

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<sup>385</sup> Werlin 2015, p. 228.

<sup>386</sup> Magness 2003, pp. 97–98 and Bijovsky 2012, p. 96. Unfortunately, we still cannot be sure about the burial circumstances of these deposits. Our interpretation of “post-destruction deposits” stands or falls with the notion that the deposits were placed here *after* the destruction, not *with* the destruction.

<sup>387</sup> Magness 2003, p. 98 notes that “the hoard of gold coins was buried...as a security precaution against similar future destructions,” giving it an apotropaic function. Bijovsky 2012, p. 97 on the other hand states that the dump

religious coin phenomenon (see below), but wanted something stronger (gold vs. bronze) to make sure a catastrophic fire would never happen again? All of this is possible.

Because of their specific archaeological context, post-destruction offerings can be relatively easily discerned; the only prerequisite is that they were placed in the building after its (partial) destruction. Only two of our deposits might be assigned to this category: Horvat Rimmon (Deposit 1) and Horvat Rimmon (Deposit 2). A map can be found at <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/post-destruction-offerings/>. The latest coins in these deposits date to 518 CE.

#### **4.7 Difficulties in interpretation**

As one may deduce from the many footnotes and remarks, although I feel that I have made the interpretations of the diverse ancient synagogue coin deposits clearer and more distinct than in the past, the categories and interpretations can never be as definite as we would want them to be. Post-depositional processes and excavation methods, for example, could have altered the profile of a deposit, making it difficult to determine its original character. Processes like bioturbation, earthquakes, and rising groundwater levels could have influenced the original deposit, making, for example, a clustered deposit a scattered one, or changed its archaeological context. Diverse excavation methods, with some archaeologists excavating with metal detectors and sifters while others do not, can make two functional similar deposits look like two contrasting ones. Furthermore, there are many blurred lines within the parameters of the coin groups themselves. In theory, emergency hoards should contain more coins from the time

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area was “a safe spot to hide valuable goods,” indicating that the deposits were meant to be retrieved and were not defensive.

of deposition (forming an upward curve), while coins from treasuries should have coins of all periods evenly distributed. However, multiple problems hamper these kinds of analyses for our particular synagogue deposits. First, we have no idea how and when coins were collected and distributed for treasuries or savings hoards. Were coins added every week, every year, or every seven years? Were the treasuries regularly emptied (and so we cannot estimate when the original deposit started) or did they keep adding coinage to the original pile? Second, on multiple occasions we have pointed out that the lifespan of 4th century coins was long and can only provide a *terminus post quem*: it is impossible to say if a coin minted in 310 CE was deposited in 315 or in 410 or even later. Thus, it is impossible to determine if coins were added over a long period or all at once. We also cannot be sure of the exact closing date of the deposit. Third, we cannot know if certain coins were removed from a (retrievable) deposit when they were in danger of being demonetized and had to be taken out of circulation quickly before they became worthless. How do we know if we have all the coins that were originally deposited in these hoards? Without this kind of information, it is impossible to say how the contents of different deposits compare to each other, beyond the observations we made in this chapter (for example, that treasury deposits on average have a longer time span than votive and charity deposits). Thus, our proposed definitions are theoretically sharper than the blurry archaeological evidence on the ground allows us to be. In this regard, we can only operate with degrees of certainty when it comes to categorizing a deposit and we should avoid the impression that it is possible to decide on either / or categorizations. Nonetheless, the proposed interpretations and their attributes offer a starting framework to begin identifying

characteristics, and advance our discussion of the understanding on ancient synagogue coin deposits in Late Antiquity.



## CHAPTER 5

### SYNAGOGUE COIN DEPOSITS: THE FLOOR DEPOSITS

In the previous chapter, I assessed six possible socio-cultural and religious interpretations for why coins were placed in the ancient synagogue in Late Antiquity and set out specific qualities a deposit should have to fall under a certain interpretative category. In this final chapter, I discuss in greater depth the seventh, and last category, which has received the most attention in synagogue coins scholarship: the hundreds of small bronze coins discovered under the floors and in the foundations of ancient synagogues. In considering the function of these coins, I find it useful to apply the theoretical framework of “power-geometry.” Power-geometry, as proposed by the social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey, is the more or less systematic and usually highly uneven ways in which different individuals and groups are positioned within networks of time-space flows and connections.<sup>388</sup> There are spaces where power is concentrated (for example, in global cities), and spaces with less power (poor, rural communities).<sup>389</sup> In between, there are spaces with fluctuating power. The same can be said about the signification of archaeological objects. Take, for example, a baptismal font. When discovered in archaeological excavations, we know what the intended function of the object

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<sup>388</sup> Massey 1993.

<sup>389</sup> Massey 2009.

was (to baptize people) and what the meaning behind the object was (purification and admission into the Christian Church). The boundaries of the meaning of the object are sharply delineated and protected, both by the overseeing institution (the Church) and its users (the early Christians). The same can be said about our previous deposits, which have a high power-geometry: deposits that are official or institutionalized and only have (more or less) one specific function. They have a single identity. Floor deposits, however, have a low power-geometry: there is less control over the limits of their interpretation and function. Their boundaries of meaning are flexible. For these deposits, there was no overseeing entity structuring their signification.<sup>390</sup> Thus, their existence became encoded with multiple meanings.

Ritual is the act of world creation, or meaning-making.<sup>391</sup> But although ritual utilizes a limited and rigidly organized set of acts or expressions (which anthropologists often call “the restricted code”), their meaning or symbolism is highly dynamic. Rituals can function as forms of communication, as forms of social solidarity, or as forms of rebellion. To different audiences and participants, the same act can thus connote many different meanings. I propose that the same is true about the floor deposits. Although I believe that the ritual was performed by all participants in a similar manner (throwing small coins into the synagogue construction site), the reasons for why this ritual was performed was divergent. In this chapter, I propose multiple functionalities and interpretations for the floor deposits.

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<sup>390</sup> As will be explained in chapter 5.9: although the practice must have been at least condoned by local Jewish authorities (seeing that the coins were not removed during the synagogue construction process), there was no centralized Jewish “governing board,” similar to the Byzantine Christian Church, who wrote rules and guidelines on how to practice certain rituals, and had different levels of clergy to make sure these rules were being followed.

<sup>391</sup> Bell 2009, p. 160

I begin this chapter by exploring apotropaic magic in connection to ancient Judaism. I will explain the “magical” concept of the evil eye and discuss different apotropaic devices that were used in antiquity to protect oneself against the evil eye, ending with the addition of coins to this list. Then, I will connect the coins found under the floors and in the foundations of ancient synagogues with the apotropaic use of coins. As a second line of thought, I will explore the Jewish practice of tithing. I believe we have circumstantial reasons for suggesting that the floor coins were post-70 tithing coins, and that their meaning was distinct from an apotropaic function. Finally, I do not believe our floor deposits can be categorized as “foundation deposits” as most scholars have stated in the past. Instead, I choose to call them “magico-religious” coins, a term I will assess in a separate sub-chapter.

I end this chapter by taking a closer look at the emergence of the floor deposit phenomenon by mapping the sites in Palestine where it was practiced, in order to better understand the appearance (and disappearance) of this ritual. Past interpretations of the “floor deposits” were at times proposed by scholars who did not look at the full chronological scope and geographic distribution of this phenomenon, and who did not take into account its cultural background or additional archaeological parallels and ancient literary sources. This chapter will take a broad approach to try to answer a very specific question: why did some Jews of Late Antiquity place coins under their synagogue buildings?

## 5.1 The Evil Eye

*“R. Isaac further said: Blessing is only possible in things hidden from sight... In the school of R. Ishmael it was taught: Blessing is only possible in things not under the direct control of the eye.”*

—bt. Ta’anit 8b

This saying from the Babylonian Talmud is often quoted when trying to understand the phenomenon of coin deposits in synagogues and other Jewish buildings.<sup>392</sup> The expression, explicitly mentioning the control of the *eye*, can be interpreted as referring to the *evil eye*, a concept known from Rabbinic literature.<sup>393</sup> In the Mishnah, the Talmuds, and the Midrashim, the usual terms to denote the evil eye are *‘ayn ha-ra’*, or “the eye of evil.”<sup>394</sup> Sometimes, however, the word “eye” (*‘ayin* or *‘eyna*) is used without an adjective referring to evil. For the rabbis, “eye” was a descriptive term derived from the physical eye’s power to see, perceive, stare, and explore a variety of psychological and physical appearances: its meaning ranges from the emotions which cause it, to the harm it produces.<sup>395</sup> Furthermore, the eye’s power is a reflection of and reaction to the human eye or the eye of God. Some rabbinic sources claim that the evil eye is a major cause of sickness and death; according to the Talmud, the Angel of Death has eyes everywhere.<sup>396</sup> The opposite of the evil eye is the good eye, or “benign,” “beautiful,”

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<sup>392</sup> For example, Meshorer 1976, p. 112; Ilan 1989a, pp. 27–28.

<sup>393</sup> Of course, ancient Jews were not the only ones to believe in the evil eye; it was a concept that was well-known across the Greco-Roman and early Christian worlds. See, for example, Dickie 1995; Trzcionka 2007, pp. 101–120.

<sup>394</sup> Ulmer 1994, p. 4.

<sup>395</sup> Ulmer 1994, pp. 4–5.

<sup>396</sup> *bt. Avodah Zarah 20b, pt. Sanhedrin 10, 28a*. Belief in the evil eye may seem enigmatic to some modern readers, but it was an accepted and widespread part of ancient Judaism. For introductions to Jewish conceptions around magic see: Bohak 2008, pp. 8–69; Harari 2019.

or “nice” eye, which expresses the positive aspects of the eye characteristic of human beings.<sup>397</sup>

Thus, people can have a good eye or a bad eye, depending on if they follow the commandments or not. For example, Moses had a good eye when he shared the Torah with the people of Israel (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:15).<sup>398</sup>

Interestingly, the good and bad eyes are also connected to tithing and charity. According to Midrash, a person who gives the most for the *terumah* has a good eye. Officially, one is not required to be generous with the heave-offering, but one who does has a good eye:

“You shall offer up a *terumah* unto the Lord (Num 15:21). [Why this repetition?] Because the previous words “you shall offer up a cake for a *terumah* (Num 15:20) does not specify the quantity, therefore it is written here: You shall give a *terumah* to the Lord (Num 15:21), which means that it must be such an amount that it could be called a gift to the priest. From this, we can deduce the rule that the minimum which a private individual has to give as a *terumah* is a 24<sup>th</sup> part of the whole; and for the public baker it should be a 48<sup>th</sup> part, *because a man’s eye is good and a woman’s eye is bad*. Therefore, the minimum which is described for her is a 48<sup>th</sup> part.” (*Sifre Bemidbar* 15:21/110, p. 115)<sup>399</sup>

Thus, when it comes to priestly gifts, anything that is sanctified or given to God can be given with a good or bad eye; but one who gives generously is said to have a good eye.<sup>400</sup> The same is true of *tzedakah*. According to the Mishnah:

“There are four types of donors to charity: One who gives and does not want others to give - his eye is evil; one who does others to give, but will not give himself - his eye is evil upon himself; one who gives

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<sup>397</sup> Ulmer 1994, p. 33.

<sup>398</sup> “טוב עין הוא יברך”. To be fair, *Bamidbar Rabbah* is a late source (dated to after 800 CE), and not part of what we generally label “classical rabbinics.”

<sup>399</sup> It seems from this text that women always have a bad eye but that is not the case: *b. Betsah* 29a, states that the good eye of women permits them the right to measure flour, even on a festival day. This shows that the rules concerning good and evil eyes are more complicated than one might think at first.

<sup>400</sup> For example, עין בעין means “equally.” So, a good eye or a bad eye is how generously you weigh what you sell or give. The connection between this term and the evil eye as an entity that can cause havoc deserves further consideration. For other examples, see *bt. Kettubot* 100a, *bt. Menahot* 108b.

and wants others to give is saintly; one who will not give and does not want others to give is wicked.”  
(*m. Avot 5:13*)<sup>401</sup>

In the Palestinian Talmud another story is told:<sup>402</sup>

“A disciple of Rabbi had two hundred *zuz* less than a *dinar*.<sup>403</sup> Rabbi was accustomed to give over to him the poor tithe every third year. Once the disciples used an evil eye against the [poor] disciple by making up [the *dinar*, so that he was no longer short two hundred *zuz* and could not receive the *maaser ani*]. Rabbi came and wanted to hand over the poor tithe as he had been accustomed to do. He said to him: “Rabbi, I have the required amount of money.” He [Rabbi] said: “In the case of this one, the blows of the over pious have smitten him.” He instructed his disciples and took him to a tavern and made him one *qarat* poorer. Then Rabbi handed the poor tithe over to him as he had been accustomed to.” (*pt. Sotah 3, 19a*)<sup>404</sup>

In other words, charity and tithing, and money in general, were often connected to the concept of “the eye.”<sup>405</sup> Giving, donating, and sacrificing in abundance helped to divert the evil eye. But acting immorally attracted the evil eye. In the story of the Babylonian Talmud, not only do the disciples deprive their fellow citizen from receiving aid, they affect their master’s ability to perform a commandment in the way he was used to.

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<sup>401</sup> See also *Pirke Avot 5:16*; *bt. Sotah 9a, 38b*; *bt. Taanit 21a, pt. Pe’ah 8, 21b*.

<sup>402</sup> I am aware that I am utilizing Tannaitic and Amoraic as well as other rabbinic sources to make my case. Since, however, the phenomenon of floor deposits only started in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century (see below), I decided to look at all writings from during and before this period to assess the rabbinic views on the evil eye, magic, and tithing. It would be useful, however, if scholars of rabbinic literature could tease out a more detailed timeline of rabbinic conceptions around these topics.

<sup>403</sup> Because of this, he was eligible to receive the poor tithing or *maasar ani*.

<sup>404</sup> Since Rabbi was reputed to be very wealthy, his poor tithe would likely have equaled a considerable sum. The portion that Rabbi gave to his student could conceivably have supported that man until the next year of the poor tithe. Rabbi’s largesse toward this individual could explain why some of his peers cast the evil eye on that beneficiary by handing him the single *zuz* that rendered him ineligible (Wilfand 2015, pp. 57–58; Ulmer 1994, pp. 54–55).

<sup>405</sup> On the poor tithe, see also Gardner 2015; Wilfand 2014; 2015.

## 5.2 Protection against the evil eye

In the ancient world, magic generally was based on a theory of sympathetic relationships in the world.<sup>406</sup> Human beings, animals, demons, metals, stones, and other materials had sympathetic or antipathetic connections with each other. In the Classical world, this led to the idea of *homoiopatheia* or *similia similibus curantor*; an understanding that any harm could be cured by the same or similar substance that caused it. For example, magical dolls could be created to mimic the source of evil, which then could be bound or pierced with needles to stop the power from escaping. Stones were worn to have a therapeutic effect on the body, or alternatively, could serve as apotropaic devices against dangerous influences, such as an attack by a demon.<sup>407</sup> Jews had similar beliefs and practices. From archaeological discoveries, we know that ancient Jews used all kinds of magical objects in their daily lives.

The evil eye was widely feared in Jewish society since one never knew when and where it would strike. It belonged to a specific realm of magic that did not require special incantations or chants to invoke its power.<sup>408</sup> Any person or supernatural could look at someone and bewitch or charm him or her. A specific category of supernatural creatures that was especially well connected to the evil eye were demons: they were viewed as able to transfer their evil intentions onto people, places, and things through the power of their eyes.<sup>409</sup> According to

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<sup>406</sup> Thompson 1971, pp. 142–174; Ulmer 1994, p. 133; Bar-Ilan 2002.

<sup>407</sup> Ulmer 1994, p. 134. The same could be done by wearing coins as amulets, see below.

<sup>408</sup> Ulmer 1994, pp. 137–138.

<sup>409</sup> For examples in rabbinic literatures, see Ulmer 1994, pp. 153–154. One demon in particular was feared, a monster called *Ketev Meriri*, who stared with one eye, and was often depicted as having many eyes.

rabbinic texts, the best way to combat the evil eye was knowledge of the Torah.<sup>410</sup> In addition to citing Scripture, there were also spells that could be used to counteract magic.<sup>411</sup> Since removing the evil eye was difficult and sometimes even impossible, however, focus was mostly placed protecting against it. For example, benedictions could be uttered regularly to ward off the eye.<sup>412</sup> Reciting the words of Gen 49:22 provided strong protection against the evil eye. Over time, other methods and practices were developed as security measures. One of the most famous methods was the placement of incantation bowls (also known as Aramaic magic bowls or demon bowls) under the corners or thresholds of buildings. These magic bowls were used mostly in Upper Mesopotamia and Syria between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and acted as traps to snare demons trying to enter the building through the ground. The clay bowls were inscribed on the inside with scriptural quotes and other incantations, mostly in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, spiraling towards the middle, with often a depiction of a demon in the center.<sup>413</sup> The bowls were buried upside down, and to date around 2000 examples have been found in excavations.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Ulmer 1994, p. 140.

<sup>411</sup> *b. Pesahim* 111a.

<sup>412</sup> *m. Aggadah I* 191; *Pesiqta Rabbati* 5:10.

<sup>413</sup> See, for example, the work done by Naveh and Shaked 1985; Shanks 2007; Bamberger 2015, 2020; Gideon 2019 for more information on the content of the magic bowl writings. I would like to thank Avigail Manekin Bamberger for meeting with me and further discussing the ideas in this project.

<sup>414</sup> Unfortunately, there is widespread trade in illegally excavated incantation bowls, with thousands more known to exist on the black market.



Another apotropaic device was amulets (*kame'a* or *kami'a*), which are referred to throughout the Talmud.<sup>415</sup> *bt. pesachim* 111b tells of a rabbi writing an amulet to protect a city-ruler against a demon and another rabbi writing an amulet to protect against 60 demons, indicating that rabbis were involved in the manufacture of these devices. The Talmud even states that a person may carry an amulet in public on Shabbat provided it was made by an “expert” (*m. Shabbat* 6:2; *t. Shabbat* 4:5, 9, 10; *bt. Shabbat* 53a, 61a).<sup>416</sup> Amulets could come in various shapes and materials, but the most common ones were pieces of paper, parchment, or metal inscribed with various formulae in Aramaic. A specific example is the amulet with the Seal of Solomon to restrain the evil eye, discovered in various archaeological excavations.<sup>417</sup> The use of inscriptions to ward off the evil eye stemmed from a belief in the holiness and power of words. The text of the Priestly Blessing (Num 6:24–26) was considered effective against the evil eye. Permutations and combinations of the letters of the different names of God were frequently used; names of angels were also common. The simplest amulets were inscribed with the name of God on a piece of parchment or metal, usually made of silver. They were worn close to the person, as a piece of jewelry or sown into the clothing.<sup>418</sup> Amulets have also been

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<sup>415</sup> Chronologically, all amulets found in controlled excavations from Late Antiquity date to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. However, we know what the tradition is much older, as indicated by the Ketef Hinnom amulets of the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as well as Iron Age II amulets from Beersheba, Megiddo, and Lachish (Schmidt 2016, pp. 123–144).

<sup>416</sup> This also shows that rabbis were involved in the creation of amulets. The same can be said about Aramaic magic bowls, which often contain Talmudic passages or even the names of rabbis. See, for example, Swartz 2018, pp. 34–38.

<sup>417</sup> Elliot 2016, p. 133 and following. The literature on Solomon’s role in Judeo–Christian magic is vast: see for bibliography Russell 1995, p. 39.

<sup>418</sup> For example, some Fayyum mummy portraits in Egypt depict the deceased with a cylindrical metal capsule around the neck. Similar capsules to those containing rolled metal amulets have been found in archaeological excavations (Thompson 1982; Bohak 2008, p. 150, Rowan 2009, p. 4).

found in ancient synagogues in Palestine, mostly in the form of inscribed thin metal plaques (called *lamellae*) rolled up or folded, indicating a connection between synagogues and the supernatural.<sup>419</sup> At the synagogue of Ma'on (Nirim), for example, archaeologists discovered 19 amulets of thin copper or bronze in the apse area.<sup>420</sup> Together with the amulets were other small finds, including bone and ivory objects, iron nails, fragments of pottery and lamps, and five coins. The excavators suggest that the finds might have been stored in the Torah shrine or a wooden box inside the shrine. Some of the amulets were wrapped in cloth, suggesting they were treated with care. One of the rolls still had the remains of a thread adhering to it, indicating according to Rahmani that it originally was worn around the body, probably as a necklace, or, according to Naveh and Shaked, suspended from the Ark or the wall behind the Ark. Three have been published so far under the auspices of the Israel Museum: one amulet seems to ask to relieve a woman named Natrun of headaches, the second was written to protect a mother and child, and the last one was made to protect a girl/woman named Asther from evil spirits, including the evil eye.<sup>421</sup> At Meroth, a bronze amulet measuring 4.8 X 13.8 centimeters was found below the threshold of the easternmost entrance in the north wall of the Phase II synagogue. It is dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when the new north wall of the synagogue was constructed. The amulet has 26 lines of texts written in a mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew, with the supplication of a man named Yosi ben Zenobia, who asks God for control over the

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<sup>419</sup> Kotansky 1994; Fine 1997, pp. 73–75, 145–146; Bohak 2008, pp. 318–322; Eshel and Leiman 2010, p. 189; Hachlili 2013, pp. 537–538; Stern 2016; 2018; 2021.

<sup>420</sup> Rahmani 1960, pp. 14–16.

<sup>421</sup> Naveh and Shaked, 1985, pp. 90–101.

community (“so may the people of this town be suppressed and broken and fallen before Yosi son of Zenobia”).<sup>422</sup> At the small synagogue of Bar’am, archaeologists found a rolled-up bronze amulet under the corner of a large stone in the western stylobate wall, inscribed with an Aramaic blessing and a protection against the evil eye.<sup>423</sup> One bronze lamella was also found in the fill of Building 300 directly below the Horvat Kanaf synagogue.<sup>424</sup> This amulet was inscribed with a song of praise, followed by a healing prayer. While its exact finding spot is unknown, it could have been connected to the synagogue; the stratigraphy of the archaeological site is, as we have seen, rather complex, making it possible that the lamella was originally placed somewhere in the synagogue building. Finally, at Korazin a bronze amulet was found in the fill between the stones underneath the threshold of the eastern entrance in the south wall.<sup>425</sup> The context of these amulets (under the threshold, hidden in a wall, kept inside the Torah shrine) shows that they were purposely installed in the building. For the amulets hidden under the thresholds, or walls, it is unclear if they were installed with approval of the synagogue builders

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<sup>422</sup> For the full text, see Naveh 1985, pp. 282–367 (Hebrew), Ilan 1989, pp. 29–30, Ilan 1995, pp. 270–272, and Stern 2021, pp. 227–229. This is the only amulet that contains a curse instead of a blessing, which puts it in the category of *defexiones*; curse or binding tablets that have been found throughout the Hellenistic and Roman–Byzantine world, mostly written in Greek. Another example of a curse in a synagogue context can be found at ‘En Gedi, where an 18–line mosaic inscription curses, among other things, people who reveal the secret of the town to the Gentiles (Levine 1981a).

<sup>423</sup> Naveh 2001, pp. 179–180; Aviam 2004, p. 159; Bohak 2008, p. 319; Stern 2021, p. 227.

<sup>424</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1998, p. 51; Stern 2021, pp. 226–227.

<sup>425</sup> Several more amulets have recently been found in ancient synagogues, but are not yet published (Stern 2016, p. 225).

or if there were snuck in.<sup>426</sup> Nevertheless, the synagogue was apparently seen as an appropriate space to hold magical items; a powerful place indeed.<sup>427</sup>

So far, we explored two categories of objects that were hidden underneath the floors and thresholds, and inside the foundations and walls of ancient synagogues to protect the building or individuals against the evil eye: magic bowls and amulets. To this assemblage, we may add another group of strange objects: bones. Under the threshold of the entrance to the synagogue at Dura-Europos in Syria, the remains of two human finger bones were discovered.<sup>428</sup> The bones were found in a cavity under the doorpost, gouged out of the rubble bedding upon which the sill was set, sealed by a metal plate.<sup>429</sup> Since the bones were carefully placed in a purposely made socket, it is clear they were put there intentionally. Unfortunately, this is the only example we have of human bones deliberately deposited in an ancient synagogue.<sup>430</sup> We do have one Talmudic passage that might explain its function:

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<sup>426</sup> This might document the individual's effort to take advantage of the potency of select movable and architectural features inside the synagogue, to deposit messages for their own gain (Stern 2021, p. 242).

<sup>427</sup> To be clear, amulets have also found in other contexts, for example in houses (at Horvat Kanaf, which Hachlili 2013, p. 537 mistakenly associates with the synagogue at Kanaf, and at Khirbet Wadi Hamam (Leiman and Leibner 2016; Leiman 2018)), in commercial settings (Sepphoris), and in tombs (Tiberias, Samaria, Emmaus). I am focusing here, however, only on the ones found in synagogues to analyze a possible connection between the function(s) of amulets and coin deposits in synagogues.

<sup>428</sup> Kraeling 1956, p. 19; Magness 2012b. Unfortunately, the bones are now lost as they were among the materials left in the excavation house at Dura, which was destroyed in the fighting during the 1948 Arab–Israeli war.

<sup>429</sup> The doorpost is the same space where most of the “prayer” graffiti in the synagogue of Dura–Europos were found, indicating the importance of thresholds and doorways to ancient Jews living in the city (Stern 2012, see below).

<sup>430</sup> That we know of. It might well be that more bones were hidden underneath ancient synagogues, but: A. most archaeologists do not lift the thresholds or walls of their buildings to look for objects underneath it, B. bones cannot be detected by metal detectors, or other ground penetrating radars to go look for them, C. human bones could have been found but discarded by archaeologists as just animal bones or unimportant materials, D. this

Why do they go to the cemetery? With regard to this there is a difference of opinion between R. Levi b. Haman and R. Hanina. One says: [To signify thereby], we are as the dead before Thee; and the other says: In order that the dead should intercede for mercy on our behalf (*bt. Ta'anith 16a*)

This passage indicates that the dead can act as intermediaries on behalf of the living. Could this function also include protection against evil spirits or the evil eye?<sup>431</sup>

The last category of magical “objects” from ancient synagogues are magical decorations, graffiti, and other motifs added to the structure. In the Dura-Europos synagogue, for example, two of the 234 ceiling tiles display the “much suffering eye,” which was used throughout the Roman Empire as a protective symbol against the evil eye.<sup>432</sup> In several other synagogues, such as Meroth, Qasrin, and ‘En-Nashut, entrances and other strategic locations were decorated with the so-called “Hercules knot” (a wreath consists of stylized leaves ending in a bound ribbon), a symbol that was considered to have apotropaic properties.<sup>433</sup> Last, graffiti scratched into the walls or written on the surfaces by visitors, mostly around the door openings, have also been found in multiple synagogues. The most famous example is perhaps Dura-Europos, where

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could have been a local, Syrian phenomenon. Since no other ancient synagogues have been excavated in Syria, we do not know if there were similar examples in other cities.

<sup>431</sup> If so, this could have been in analogy to the Christian cult, where the bones of saints are often kept as relics in churches to intercede with God on behalf of the community (Magnez 2012, p. 236). Since the inhabitants of Dura-Europos were a mixed pagan, Christian, and Jewish community, it would be no surprise if different groups influenced each other’s rituals. Bohak 2008, pp. 193–194 refers to a handful of human skulls inscribed in Aramaic from Late Antique Mesopotamia, but these have never been analyzed. Exceptions are a skull with a love-inducing spell written on it, currently housed at the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin (see image and interpretation Saar 2017, pp. 126–128), and four other skulls in the same museum with incantations and drawings similar to the Aramaic magic bowl writings (Levine 2006). These skulls show that the use of human body parts in Jewish magic might not have been as rare as previously thought, at least in the Diaspora.

<sup>432</sup> Kraeling 1956, pp. 48–49; Goodenough 1953–1968, Vol. II, pp. 238–241; Bohak 2008, p. 322.

<sup>433</sup> See for example, Nicgorski 2013, Stern 2016. This knot might also be connected to the use of knots against *kashfaniyot* or witches. In *bt. Shabbath 66b* we read: “Three [knots] arrest [illness], five cure, seven are efficacious even against *keshafim*.”

hundreds of vernacular drawings and writings have been discovered, written in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Middle Persian, Parian, and Pahlavi script.<sup>434</sup> According to Karen Stern, many of these can be interpreted as wishes made by the inscribers for passersby to see and read, perhaps even out loud before a human and/or divine audience: they were magical “graffiti-petitions.”<sup>435</sup>

Before considering coins as possible means of protection against the evil eye, we need to complete our overview of apotropaic devices by mentioning some objects that so far have not been found or recognized in ancient synagogues. Among these are mirror plaques, which are clay or stone tablets into which one or more mirrors were set.<sup>436</sup> The plaques were round or shaped like a bird, fish, temple, or menorah, and have been found mostly in graves. Small holes indicate that they might have been hung around the house. The plaques likely were used to reflect the evil eye, reflecting back the harmful gaze. Up until now, however, no remains of these have been found in ancient synagogues, possibly because they were meant to be seen by visitors and could not be hidden in walls or other parts of the building. Magical gems (often placed in rings) have also been discovered at Mediterranean sites dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the Byzantine period.<sup>437</sup> They are made of semi-precious stones such as jasper, steatite, hematite, and carnelian, and were engraved with various images including humans, mythological creatures, animals, or floral motifs. The poor execution of the images might

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<sup>434</sup> Noy and Bloedhorn 2004; Stern 2012; 2021, pp. 233–239.

<sup>435</sup> Stern 2021, pp. 235–236.

<sup>436</sup> Rahmani 1964; Fischer and Saar 2007; Saar 2010, p. 19.

<sup>437</sup> Bohak 2008, pp.158–165.

indicate that the gems were worn on the body not for their esthetic beauty but for their magical function.<sup>438</sup> Short inscriptions on some of these gems confirm this: for example, a black jasper gem found in Caesarea depicts a man harvesting wheat, with the inscription “for the hips,” indicating some sort of wish or medical remedy. However, these inscriptions have been found only in Greek, not Hebrew, indicating that the Jewish population might have refrained from using figurative devices.<sup>439</sup> They have also not (yet) been found in ancient synagogues, perhaps indicating that they were solely meant to be worn as jewelry on the body and not placed inside buildings. Finally, from rabbinic sources we know of other apotropaic devices made out of perishable materials such as eggs or a cow’s afterbirth. Obviously, these are not preserved in archaeological contexts.

### **5.3 Jewish Magic versus Jewish Religion and the ancient synagogue**

There is a great deal of scholarship on the exact definition of “magic” and its relationship to religion in the ancient world.<sup>440</sup> Until a century ago, magic was often perceived as either the direct opponent of orthodox religion or the primitive expression of supernatural beliefs exercised on the margins of society.<sup>441</sup> Most recent discussions, however, have argued that rigid distinctions between the two spheres cannot be sustained for the ancient Mediterranean

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<sup>438</sup> Saar 2010, pp. 17–18.

<sup>439</sup> This is, of course, highly speculative and there may be many other reasons for why similar gems do not bear Hebrew or Aramaic inscriptions. It could, for example, indicate that the Jewish population was influenced by Greek culture and did not mind having their magical devices written in Greek, the *lingua franca* of the time.

<sup>440</sup> It is not my aim here to provide a new definition of magic. For a good introduction, see Trzcionka 2007, pp. 5–14; Schmidt, 2016, pp. 2–11; Swartz 2018, pp. 16–18.

<sup>441</sup> Tylor 1889; Durkheim 1915; Evans–Pritchard 1929.

world.<sup>442</sup> As Jacob Neusner states: “The difference then, is social and systemic: the distinction merely a conventional usage of society.”<sup>443</sup> As we saw in the many examples taken from the Mishnah and Talmuds, in Late Antique Judaism as well, a distinction between “religion,” whatever that might mean, and “magic,” has not much meaning.<sup>444</sup> A document found in the Cairo-Genizah, for example, gives instructions for the use of amulets, stating that for the best effect, the amulet is to be buried “under the ark of the synagogue.”<sup>445</sup> The placement of amulets in close proximity to the Ark in the synagogue at Ma’on (Nirim) or the amulet discovered under the threshold at Meroth might indeed suggest that the synagogue was seen by ancient Jews as a locus of power and could be used for magical purposes. Besides these

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<sup>442</sup> McCollough and Glazier-McDonald 1997, p. 144; Frankfurter 2019, pp. 29–35; Kahlos 2020, pp. 195–197. Relevant sources are too extensive to summarize here but see, for example, the many works by David Frankfurter, Christopher Faraone, and Andrew Wilburn. The study of magic in ancient Judaism, and especially archaeology connected with magic, is still in its infancy compared to the study of Greco-Roman magic. Most of the work has been done by Joseph Naveh, Shaul Shaked, Gideon Bohak, Ortal-Paz Saar, and Michael Swartz.

<sup>443</sup> Neusner 1992, p. 61.

<sup>444</sup> Bar-Ilan points out that although rabbinic literature is full of “magical” stories, not once can the word “magic” explicitly be found in them. Thus “the relation of the texts to magical deeds is the product of the thought of the modern commentator, not the transmitters of the tradition” (Bar-Ilan 2002, p. 396). In other words, although the use of amulets and coins in the ancient synagogue (see below) might seem “magical” to us, it was only another component of general Judaism, and a general approach to life. It is not my place here to go deeper into the (often problematic) scholarship on the categorical distinction or overlap between magic and religion in ancient Judaism. For studies and many more examples of ancient Jewish magic from the Hebrew Bible to the rabbinic literature, see Neusner 1992; Bar-Ilan 2002; Bloom 2007; Bohak 2008, 2017; Elliott 2016, 2017; Swartz 2018; Harari 2019. I am not covering here the topic of Jewish mysticism (like *Kabbalah*, *Hekhalot*, or *Merkavah* literature), which is undoubtedly intertwined with Jewish magic but is a separate field. See for example Lesses 1998 (especially her comparison between Hekhalot literature and amulets and incantation bowls); Bohak 2008, pp. 322-339; and Swartz 2018.

<sup>445</sup> Fine 1997, p. 73 (note 65); Bohak 2011. The document can be found in the Cambridge Digital Library, as part of The Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection, under inventory number T-S K1.162 (<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-TS-K-00001-00162/1>). Another example of the connection between amulets and the synagogue can be found in a Jewish magical recipe from later periods in the *Sword of Moses* (dated to before the 11<sup>th</sup> century), which states “And if you want your fear to be upon people, write on a lead lamella from X to Y, and bury it in a synagogue in the western direction.” (Translation Bohak 2008, p. 319).



clearly apotropaic devices, some scholars have pointed to other synagogue features that might have been magical, although this involves more conjecture. For example, in some buildings, inscriptions have been discovered that may be interpreted as magical incantations. The expression “*Amen, amen selah,*” as an example, does not appear in Scripture but appears on amulets and Aramic magic bowls as well as in synagogue inscriptions, for example at Gerasa.<sup>446</sup> The mirroring of letters and words in synagogue floor mosaics might also indicate magical practices.<sup>447</sup>

Much has been written on the synagogue as a “holy space.”<sup>448</sup> Many Jews believed that synagogue buildings, the receptacles of Torah scrolls, were sacred and therefore were the place where God’s presence (*shekinah*) dwelled.<sup>449</sup> Expressions of this sanctity have been found in dedicatory inscriptions such as in the synagogues at Gaza and Ashkelon, where the buildings are described as [most] holy place[s], or at the synagogue of Naro in North Africa where the building is called a *sancta sinagoga*.<sup>450</sup> Thus, the ancient synagogue was perceived as closer to

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<sup>446</sup> Sukenik 1934, p. 77. It also appears in papyri, for example on an unidentified fragment from 4th century Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, discovered by Flinders Petrie in 1922 (Loewe 1923) (See also: <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2018/01/a-papyrus-puzzle-an-unidentified-fragment-from-4th-century-oxyrhynchus.html>).

<sup>447</sup> For example, in the synagogue at Hammath Tiberias, the Hebrew word דלי “*deli*” is written in reverse script (Naveh 1992, pp. 145, 154–155). Of course, the fact that zodiacs appear at all in ancient synagogues can in itself be seen as a form of magic. Steven Werlin also believes that the inscription on the mosaic floor of the Ma’on (Nirim) synagogue contains some magical characters. This makes him conclude that “some members of this community practiced a form of Jewish magic in which incantation formulas and unintelligible language were employed” (Werlin 2012, pp. 349–353). Last, Trzcionka points out that certain motifs on mosaic floors, like peacocks, lions, etc. could have had a protective function (Trzcionka 2007, p. 111).

<sup>448</sup> Branham 1995; Fine 1997; Satlow 2005.

<sup>449</sup> For the *shekinah* in rabbinic literature, see *bt. Berachot* 6a-b, *bt. Megillah* 29a; *Leviticus Rabbah* 11:7.

<sup>450</sup> Branham 1995; Stern 2016, p. 224.

God than any other communal space.<sup>451</sup> When one wanted God to intervene in one's daily life, the synagogue was the place to go.<sup>452</sup>

#### 5.4 Coins as apotropaic devices

We have seen that ancient Judaism associated the act of writing as well as the objects on which letters and symbols appear with power and protection.<sup>453</sup> Amulets and gems inscribed with angelic names, unpronounceable formulas, *voces magicae*, and portions of Scripture provided ordinary materials with a magical essence.<sup>454</sup> Knowledge is found in writing, and strange writing, especially to an illiterate person, holds even deeper and stranger knowledge.

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<sup>451</sup> This could also be evidenced by the large number of graffiti found in the synagogue at Dura-Europos as well as other religious buildings in the city. According to Karen Stern, inscribing one's name on the walls of a sacred building could have been a form of prayer offered to the divine. If a visitor reads the name out loud, the prayer could have been "activated," indicating the importance of writing and reading in ancient religion and magic (Stern 2012, p. 188).

<sup>452</sup> In fact, Mock 2003 has gone so far as to state that synagogues were used as stages for elaborate magical rituals, taking over the function of the temple after its destruction. This is evidenced by John Chrysostom's bitter complaint that too many Christians went to the Jewish synagogue of Daphne in Antioch, including a reference to those who went there for incubation (a ritual in which the individual sleeps in the sacred compound with the hopes of having a divinely inspired dream or cure). It is unclear if this story is accurate or if this practice also took place at other synagogues. It does show that the synagogue might have been a place for active supernatural rituals, a point also made by Magness who thinks that the Helios-zodiac cycles in ancient synagogues can be connected to ritual practices as well (Magness 2005).

<sup>453</sup> In this they were not alone but part of a broader pan-Mediterranean phenomenon in which writing or meaning-making of the world were seen as magical (Frankfurter 1994). As for Jewish magic, the majority of discovered magical recipe texts ask for the inscribing of a particular text on various surfaces such as on parchment, potsherds, or eggs (Saar 2017, p. 90). A well-known example of the power of writing can be found in Numbers 5:16-30, which portrays the so-called *sotah*-ritual: A priest brings a woman accused of adultery before YHWH and makes a potion in which the main ingredient is writing: "Then the priest shall put these curses in writing, and wash them off into the water of bitterness. He shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings the curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her and cause bitter pain... and afterward he shall make the woman drink the water." The writing might have been on a piece of papyrus dissolved in the water, or an ostrakon with letters which that were washed off in the water: in any case, it is the writing that gave the water power (if the ritual was actually practiced or if it was only ideological is beside the point; the story is still an indication of the power of the written word. See Rosen-Zvi 2012).

<sup>454</sup> A potsherd found in the fill of a room north of the Horvat Rimmon synagogue confirms this. The sherd, dated to the 5th or 6th century, contains eight lines of text and one line of "magic characters." The sherd does not seem to be an accidental fragment, but the potter had deliberately cut deep incisions in the pot before firing. This way, the jar could be broken along these lines after the clay had hardened. The writing as well was made before the clay

I propose that (certain) coins were perceived as magical by Jews in Late Antiquity as well. I come to this conclusion for several reasons. First, Late Roman and Byzantine coins were inscribed with both written inscriptions and images that were often enigmatic to the people encountering them. As we have seen, Late Roman-Byzantine coins were inscribed with legends and fieldmarks, often abbreviated to a couple of symbols or markers. The legends were generally written in Latin, a language that the average Jew in Palestine could not read nor speak.<sup>455</sup> According to William Schniedewind, writing in ancient Judaism had a numinous power.<sup>456</sup> He states “Writing was not mundane; rather, writing was used to communicate with the divine realm by ritual actions or formulaic recitations in order to affect the course of present or future events.”<sup>457</sup> Writing was a gift from God and had the supernatural power to curse or to bless. Besides the inscriptions, coins also had finely minted images on them, depicting emperors but also angels, animals, crosses, Victory, and other symbols. Often these emblematic signs were depicted deliberately for their ritual symbolism, such as the Christogram, which appears on coins from Constantine the Great onwards as well as on amulets and papyri with magical spells.<sup>458</sup> All these elements gave coins a mysterious allure, and it

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was baked. The text invokes angels and has parallels among the Cairo Genizah scrolls (Naveh and Shaked 1985, p. 87; Kloner 1989, p.47; Swartz 2018, pp. 105–109).

<sup>455</sup> This does not per se mean that the average ancient Jew could not read or interpret coins in general, only that one had to be informed on the symbolic abbreviations and language before its knowledge could be revealed.

<sup>456</sup> Schniedewind 2004, pp. 24–34. The word numinous was coined by Rudolph Otto in 1917 in his book *Das Heilige*, as a term meaning “arousing spiritual or religious emotion; mysterious or awe-inspiring.” For more on writing as a magical act in ancient Judaism, see Stern 2018; 2021.

<sup>457</sup> Schniedewind 2004, p. 24.

<sup>458</sup> Maguire 1997, pp. 1038–1039, de Bruyn 2017, pp. 56–66. Another powerful image in Late Antique magic was the “Holy Rider”: a victory motif found on amulets associated with King Solomon and his power to defeat and control demons (Bonner 1950, pp. 208–221 and Plates 295–326; Fulghum 2001, p. 142; Russell 1995, pp. 40–41;

would not be unreasonable to suppose that people perceived coins and amulets as enigmatic devices, classifying them under the *materia magica*. In fact, coins with holes drilled into them are found around the ancient Mediterranean world, and are interpreted as repurposed coins to be worn on the body as jewelry or amulets.<sup>459</sup> Literary sources from Late Antiquity, both Jewish and non-Jewish, confirm this practice.<sup>460</sup> According to Henry Maguire, empresses, dependent rulers, and high court officials in Late Antiquity and the early Medieval period often wore portraits of the reigning emperor woven into or sewn onto their garments.<sup>461</sup> Like diplomatic gifts, the images of the emperor displayed upon the person were not only a sign of the emperor's rule but a conduit of his protection.<sup>462</sup> Sometimes, however, it is clear from excavations that the drilled coin was already old at the time when it was worn, suggesting that its apotropaic value could have been increased by its age.<sup>463</sup> John Chrysostom, for example, living in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, scolded the superstitious who wore the coins of Alexander the Great

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Morrisson 2014). Could this motif also have been recognized in the Fallen Horsemen coins which look very much the same?

<sup>459</sup> Bendall 1995; Morisson 2012; Syon 2015, p. 41; Winges 2017.

<sup>460</sup> Maguire 1997; Fulghum 2001; Rowan 2009.

<sup>461</sup> Maguire 1997, p. 1039.

<sup>462</sup> Maguire 1997, p. 1039, who mentions an example from the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE, when the Byzantine orator Hobolos gave a cloth embroidered with the image of the emperor as a gift to the city of Genoa, saying to the emperor "the form of the beloved [emperor], even in a picture, was a great remedy to those who love you. For even your image, if it is beside us, has many powers. It will be a firm means of defense against our adversaries, an averter of every plot, a strong bulwark for your city and ours..."

<sup>463</sup> For example, Fulghum 2001, pp. 143–144. However, we also know from rabbinic sources that some rabbis encouraged the use of "old" ("שֶׁנֶפְסָהוּ": invalidated, chipped, cut up) coins to be used as jewelry (*m. Kel.* 12:7).

— a ruler who lived 700 years earlier — as *peripta* or amulets.<sup>464</sup> It seems unlikely that Jews in Palestine sought imperial protection by wearing coins with images of Roman or Byzantine emperors on their body, although a coin with a hole drilled into it was found in the synagogue at Horvat Kur (a 5<sup>th</sup> century 40 nummi depicting Justinian I,<sup>465</sup> minted in Antioch).<sup>466</sup> Instead, I propose that coins found in walls, behind benches, under the floor, and in the foundations of ancient synagogues might have been placed there as apotropaic devices.

Magic in the ancient world was often connected with the use of metals. Besides being inscribed with symbols and powerful images, coins were made of metal as well. As we have seen, writing magical texts on sheets of gold, silver, bronze, lead, or tin (*lamellae*) was common in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>467</sup> In *Sefer ha-Razim*, a collection of magical texts, probably collected and written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, multiple recipes call for writing Jewish magical inscriptions on a metal surface.<sup>468</sup> For example, magical texts are supposed to be inscribed on *bronze lamellae* in recipes I/201, II/31, II/115-116, II/151-152; on *tin lamellae* in recipe I/144; on *lead* in recipe II/63-64; on *iron* in recipe II/111-112; on *silver* in recipes II/54-55, II/100-101,

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<sup>464</sup> John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos catechesis secunda*, II, 52: “...What is one to say about those who use enchantments and amulets, and who tie bronze coins of Alexander of Macedon around their heads and feet?” It is clear that the image of Alexander the Great, a powerful ruler, would have been seen as very potent.

<sup>465</sup> According to Wings, the largest sample of perforated coins are Justinianic *folles*, further indicating that this coin was used as an amulet (Wings 2017, p. 13. See also Morrisson 2014).

<sup>466</sup> Sometimes coins were not drilled but simply set into a piece of jewelry, in which case we would not be able to recognize them as amulets (Bruhn 1993; Rowan 2009).

<sup>467</sup> See also Naveh and Shaked 1985; Kotansky 1994; Bohak 2008, pp. 149–153, Leiman and Leibner 2016.

<sup>468</sup> For the Hebrew text, see Margalioth 1966 and for English, see Morgan 1983. For an overview on the debate around its dating, see Bohak 2008, pp. 170–175.

II/126-127, II/137-138, III/37; and on *gold* in recipes II/125-126, V/20, VI/29-31.<sup>469</sup> These are not the only instances of metals being used for magical devices in ancient Judaism. The Babylonian Talmud contains the following recipe against fever:

“For a daily fever...he should sit at a crossroads and when he sees a big ant carrying something, let him take it and place it within a *copper* tube, close it with *lead*, seal it with sixty seals, shake it, lift it up, and say to it [the ant]: “Your burden upon me and my burden upon you.” (*bt. Shabbat 66b*)

Some Aramaic incantation bowls also refer to metals and even coins to protect oneself against evil.<sup>470</sup> Thus, we can conclude that coins in Late Antiquity could transcend the market place and appear in numerous other contexts, including magical ones. To be clear, this idea is not new. In 1976, Yaakov Meshorer proposed that the 139 coins from the 1<sup>st</sup> century, found hidden in an oil lamp in the walls of a house at En-Gedi were placed there as a protective measure.<sup>471</sup> However, based on all the above evidence, I believe that the coins placed under the floors or in the walls of ancient synagogues as well can be interpreted as apotropaic devices. But does this make these coins “foundation deposits”, as many scholars have concluded?

## 5.5 Are the coins “foundation deposits”?

As we discussed in chapter 1, most scholars who have recently explored the floor deposit phenomenon connected it to “foundation deposits” found in other Mediterranean cultures. However, to determine if scattered coins found under the floors of ancient synagogues can

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<sup>469</sup> The Roman numeral refers to one of the seven “firmaments/heavens,” or books into which the *Sepher* is divided. The Latin numbers refer to the text lines.

<sup>470</sup> For example, bowl BM 91715 ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_1881-0714-3](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1881-0714-3)), stored at the British Museum (Ford 2002, pp. 32–36).

<sup>471</sup> Meshorer 1976, repeated in 2007.

indeed be categorized as foundation deposits, I believe we must first consider the phenomenon of the “foundation deposit” as an inter-regional ritual practice and fully determine its characteristics. Only then will we be able to determine if synagogue floor deposits are indeed foundation deposits.

The performance of a so-called foundation ritual was common in the ancient Mediterranean world, including in Egypt,<sup>472</sup> Mesopotamia,<sup>473</sup> the Levant<sup>474</sup>, the Hittite Empire,<sup>475</sup> Greece,<sup>476</sup> Rome and Italy,<sup>477</sup> and Christian sites in the Near East and Europe.<sup>478</sup> In Egypt and Mesopotamia in particular, written and archaeological sources point to elaborate rituals that took place during the construction of sacred structures. The abundant evidence provided by these sources helps us to reconstruct the activities that took place during such rituals. For the purpose of this project, I explore different kinds of foundation rituals performed

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<sup>472</sup> Weinstein 1973; El-Adly 1981; Sakr 2005; Masson 2017; Müller 2018.

<sup>473</sup> Ellis 1968; Ambos 2004; Tsouparopoulou 2014.

<sup>474</sup> Reece 1988; Bunimowitz and Zimhoni 1993; Gitin and Golani 2001; Mansel 2003.

<sup>475</sup> De Pietro 2012.

<sup>476</sup> Weikart 2002; Wagner 2014; Hunt 2016.

<sup>477</sup> Donderer 1984; Crawford 2003.

<sup>478</sup> The phenomenon of foundation deposits was not restricted to the Mediterranean world but is a world-wide phenomenon that existed from the Neolithic Period until today. Extensive scholarship has been written on concealed deposits in architectural contexts, ranging from prehistoric Iraq (Garfinkel 1994) to medieval China (Knapp 2005) to the modern-day US (Manning 2012). However, it is difficult to determine which cultural traditions influenced each other, and the extent to which these ritual deposits had the same functions in different cultures. For this project, I have limited myself to the ancient Mediterranean world, chronologically and geographically closest to Late Roman and Byzantine Palestine. Nevertheless, choices had to be made about which examples to include and exclude and this overview is therefore not exhaustive.

in the eastern Mediterranean world to determine their socio-historical contexts and characteristics.

Foundation rituals are best known from ancient Egypt, where they are described in textual sources and depicted in art.<sup>479</sup> The sequence of the ritual act of the “ground-breaking”-ritual included: the fixing of the building’s plan, or “stretching the cord”; hoeing the earth; molding the first brick; scattering gypsum and sand over the construction site; digging the first foundation trench; and placing materials in the trench.<sup>480</sup> These materials could include small bricks or plaques made from various metals and stones,<sup>481</sup> miniature models, mortars and grinders, copper and iron tools, libation vases, offering cups, and others. These were usually laid in a pit and monumentalized with brick or stone lining. Generally, the deposits were placed near important parts of the building, for example, under the corners of the building or under the threshold.

In Mesopotamia, foundation rituals appear to have been less formalized, nevertheless, clear chronological and cultural patterns have been identified, and several aspects of the ritual were practiced from the Bronze Age through the Parthian period.<sup>482</sup> The intricate foundation rituals of Assyria and Babylonia contain elements similar to the Egyptian ones, including the purification of the building site, the ritual preparation of the building materials, the sacrifice of animals, and the burial of foundation deposits. These deposits included pegs, figurines,

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<sup>479</sup> Hunt 2016, p. 2; Karkowski 2016.

<sup>480</sup> When the building was complete, further rituals include purifying the temple and offering sacrifices.

<sup>481</sup> Including protective amulets (Weinstein 1973).

<sup>482</sup> Ellis 1968, pp. 5–33.



inscriptions, and small objects made of various materials including bone, stone, copper, silver, and lapis lazuli.<sup>483</sup> Sometimes the objects were placed in jars or other containers.

Mesopotamian foundation deposits were also placed in pits under the walls or floors but starting with the Ur III period (ca. 2112-2001 BCE), they were inserted into brick boxes built into the substructure or lower parts of the walls of a building.<sup>484</sup>

As for the Romans, the historian Tacitus describes a foundation ritual that took place when the emperor Titus reconstructed the ruined Capitolium:

“The charge of restoring the Capitol was given by Vespasian to Lucius Vestinus, a member of the equestrian order, but one whose influence and reputation put him on an equality with the nobility. The haruspices when assembled by him directed that the ruins of the old shrine should be carried away to the marshes and that a new temple should be erected on exactly the same site as the old: the gods were unwilling to have the old plan changed. On the twenty-first of June, under a cloudless sky, the area that was dedicated to the temple was surrounded with fillets and garlands; soldiers, who had auspicious names, entered the enclosure carrying boughs of good omen; then the Vestals, accompanied by boys and girls whose fathers and mothers were living, sprinkled the area with water drawn from fountains and streams. Next Helvidius Priscus, the praetor, guided by the pontifex Plautius Aelianus, purified the area with the sacrifice of the *suovetaurilia*, and placed the vitals of the victims on an altar of turf; and then, after he had prayed to Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, and to the gods who protect the empire to prosper this undertaking and by their divine assistance to raise again their home which man's piety had begun, he touched the fillets with which the foundation stone was wound and the ropes entwined; at the same time the rest of the magistrates, the priests, senators, knights, and a great part of the people, putting forth their strength together in one enthusiastic and joyful effort, dragged the huge stone to its place. A shower of gold and silver and of virgin ores, never smelted in any furnace, but in their natural state, was thrown everywhere into the foundations: the haruspices had warned against the profanation of the work by the use of stone or gold intended for any other purpose. The temple was given greater height than the old: this was the only change that religious scruples allowed, and the only feature that was thought wanting in the magnificence of the old structure.”<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Ellis 1986, pp. 46–144. Tsouparopoulou points out that in Egyptian foundation deposits the objects were generally symbolic but related to the construction of the building: miniature tools made of cheap materials and raw building materials. In Mesopotamian deposits, on the other hand, there were fewer objects with no relationship to the architecture of the building: instead, they were more costly and had a higher symbolic value (Tsouparopoulou 2014, p. 18, note 4).

<sup>484</sup> For example, at Mari (Ellis 1968, p. 59), Ur (Ellis 1968, pp. 63–64) and Tello (Tsouparopoulou 2014, p. 22).

<sup>485</sup> Tacitus, *Histories* IV, 53.

In other words, gold and silver ores and other pieces of metal were thrown into the foundations of a temple in Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.<sup>486</sup> No doubt similar rituals took place at many other buildings, although these are not described in written sources.<sup>487</sup>

For ancient Greece, no textual or representational evidence exists that directly describes foundation rituals.<sup>488</sup> However, foundation deposits have been discovered in buildings throughout Greece, including on Crete and Cyprus and in western Asia Minor.<sup>489</sup> They are primarily found in sacred buildings like temples, heroa, and treasuries, especially beneath walls or between their courses, below floors and thresholds, and in foundation trenches. Greek foundation deposits contain a great variety of finds including figurines, ceramics, remains of animal and vegetable sacrifices, jewelry and other luxury goods, and coins. The remains of (burnt) sacrifices and libation vessels suggest that in ancient Greece as well, the burial of foundation deposits was but one step in a longer dedication process.

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<sup>486</sup> A similar ritual could have taken place when a Roman town was founded: according to classical descriptions, after the axial orientation of the urban grid was set out, a hole or *mundus* was dug to receive foundation offerings, usually the first fruits. However, the *mundus* concept is not well understood. In any case, this did not seem to include large quantities of metals or coins (Woodward and Woodward 2004).

<sup>487</sup> For example, at Magdalensberg in Austria, where 42 coins were found in pits and foundation of non-sacred buildings at a 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Roman settlement (See Krmnicek 2018 for a summary and analysis of the coins, and references to other coin deposits found in Iron Age through Roman-period European settlements).

<sup>488</sup> Hunt 2016, p. 5.

<sup>489</sup> The first and perhaps most famous example was discovered in 1905-06 by David Hogarth at the Artemision of Ephesus (Hogarth 1908, Robinson 1951). Here, 24 early electrum coins and about 800 gold, silver, and electrum objects, including fibulae, earrings, pins, rings, and beads, as well as ivory and bone objects, amber, and cowrie shells were found. See for more examples of Greek foundation deposits: Orlandini 1957; Müller-Zeis 1994; Hoffman 1997; Crawford 2003; Wagner 2014; Hunt 2016; Lykke 2017.

Written sources mentioning Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Roman foundation rituals display certain commonalities which help us to establish basic definitions of the phenomenon:<sup>490</sup>

- First, placing deposits was part of an elaborate ritual with multiple steps to prepare the site for the construction of the building.
- Second, the items were brought in at one moment in time as part of the ritual.<sup>491</sup>
- Third, the ritual was supervised by religious leaders who knew the different steps and rules to follow.
- Fourth, the deposits consisted of a variety of materials, ranging from precious objects to figurines and ceramics.
- Fifth, the materials were not decorative or structurally useful to the building.
- Sixth, the materials were meant to stay in/under the building permanently.
- Seventh, the deposits were placed together in carefully selected spots such as under the threshold or the corners of the buildings.<sup>492</sup>

Based on these characteristics, I propose that coins found under the floors of ancient synagogues are not foundation deposits for the following reasons. As we have seen from neighboring cultures, priests and religious officials were involved in such ceremonies; if we

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<sup>490</sup> See Hunt 2016, p. 3.

<sup>491</sup> See also Hunt 2016, p. 18.

<sup>492</sup> Thus, my definition of a foundation deposit is more precise than that of Ellis, who states that true foundation deposits should have a clear spatial and temporal link to the beginning of the construction of the building, they should neither decorate nor be structurally useful, and they must be made with clear intention of permanence, that is, there should be no plan for reclamation (Ellis 1968, p. 1).

were to follow my definition of foundation deposits and extend this into ancient Judaism, priests or synagogue leaders would have to be involved (and not, for example, the local necromancer or other “magician”). However, we do not have any evidence for this: no texts were written with guidelines or examples of this practice, and no artistic depictions have been discovered illustrating it. It is true that we are not informed about all (or any?) the specifics of magical rituals (for example, we do not know how or where an expert would write a magical amulet), but in most cases, we at least have hints at their existence.<sup>493</sup> No such hints exist for a foundation ritual. Even if we do not follow this *argumentum ex silentio* (most likely because most rabbinic literature was formulated before this phenomenon started), there are other arguments to consider. The deposits found under the floors of ancient synagogues do not contain a variety of materials. Despite careful excavation methods including sifting, archaeologists have not found other objects buried under synagogue buildings: no gemstones, plaques, mirrors, jewelry, ceramic vessels, etc. only coins (and the aforementioned amulets). Why would Jews deviate from neighboring peoples in this regard? And why would specifically coins have been chosen?<sup>494</sup> Furthermore, coins as floor deposits also do not appear in specific locations placed together. Although groups of coins have been found in and around thresholds, they are usually scattered around, dispersed over a larger area. Unlike Aramaic incantation bowls, for example, coin deposits do not seem to have been placed carefully in certain strategic

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<sup>493</sup> Bamberger 2020. For example, we have references to the writing and burial of amulets in the synagogue in the Cairo Genizah, and the production of amulets by rabbis in the Talmud.

<sup>494</sup> Just as with the Aramaic bowls, it would have made more sense to place pottery in the foundations, or perhaps even ostraca with the name of YHWH, stone vessels, small menorot, miniature Temple vessels, or any other ancient Jewish symbols that we are familiar with.

locations.<sup>495</sup> Last, the coins are usually found high up, close to the surface of the floor, and not in deep pits or in the foundation trenches of the walls.<sup>496</sup> Therefore, we might conclude that coin deposits found under the floors of ancient synagogues are not foundation deposits according to the definition I have set forth, but instead are a different phenomenon that is unique to ancient Judaism.

## 5.6 Tithing money

If coins under the synagogue floors are not foundation deposits, what are they and how did they end up under the building? And why is this phenomenon found only in synagogues and not in churches or pagan sacred sites from the same period and region? I believe the answer lies in a specific Jewish tradition: floor coins were tithing coins that had been saved by the local population and then deposited during the construction of the building to be able to dispose of the sacred coins in a respectful way, to bless the building, ward off the evil eye, and simultaneously make an offering to God.<sup>497</sup>

Tithing first appears in the Torah not as a commandment but as a practice of the patriarchs, which has halakhic value and equals commandments, see, for example circumcision

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<sup>495</sup> By which I mean, as a group stacked together in one exact location. There does seem to be a higher favor for the larger area *around* the door openings, which might indicate that clusters of coins at the entrance could be linked to rites of passage and the transit between the profane and the sacred.

<sup>496</sup> With the exception perhaps of 'En Nashut (Deposit 2), where the coins were found "next to the foundations" of the western room. See appendix, case-study 6.

<sup>497</sup> This, and further ideas below are based on the article "Hoarding Consecrated "Second Tithe" Coins", by Amit Gvaryahu (<http://thegemara.com/hoarding-consecrated-second-tithe-coins/#fn-1047-7>). I would like to thank Amit for meeting with me in Israel and discussing our ideas further. And while I acknowledge my theory can only be an educated guess based on scarce archaeological evidence, I believe it is worth pursuing based on the socio-cultural and religious framework of Late Antique Palestine.

in Gen 17.<sup>498</sup> After Abram's military victory over the four kings who attacked Sodom, a priest of God brought out bread and wine and gave it to him as a tithe (Gen 14:18-20). Later, after the incident of Korach's rebellion, when the institution of priesthood was questioned by the rebels, God commanded Aaron the priest to give the *terumah* (the farmer's contribution to the priests of crops grown in the Land of Israel, also called a "heave-offering") and Moses to give a tenth of the remaining produce to the Levites. This tenth is called *ma'aser rishon*: the "first *ma'aser*." As the tribe of Levi did not receive a portion in the Land of Israel, these harvests would support them as they worked in the Tabernacle or the temple. Each Levite then had to separate for himself a *ma'aser* from the *ma'aser*, or a tenth of that which he received, which is called *terumat ma'aser*, and give it to a *kohen* or priest (Num 18:21-32). The "second *ma'aser*," *ma'aser sheni*, was a second tithe taken from the produce remaining after both the *terumah* and *ma'aser rishon* were taken. This second *ma'aser* was supposed to be taken in kind to Jerusalem where it was eaten by the owner and his family while in a state of ritual purity. If one was unable to bring the produce to Jerusalem immediately, it could be "redeemed" by bringing an equivalent sum of money to Jerusalem and spending it there on food and drink, provided they were consumed in a state of ritual purity (Lev 27: 30-31; Deut 14:22-29). In the third and sixth year of the seven-year *Shemittah* (Sabbatical) cycle, *ma'aser ani*, the *ma'aser* for the poor, was given instead of the *ma'aser sheni* (Deut 26:12-15). Following the third and sixth years, on Passover of the fourth and seventh years, a process called "*biur*

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<sup>498</sup> Pagolu 1998, pp. 171–191. Tithing was not unique to the ancient Israelites but was a ritual throughout the entire ancient Near East, where a yearly payment of agricultural good and animals was expected to be given to the temple(s), or the equivalent payment in precious metals (Stevens 2006, p. 6).

*ma'asrot*—removal of the tithes—would take place. All tithes that had not been distributed, eaten, or redeemed in the previous three years were dealt with then. If they were not given, eaten, or redeemed, the tithes had to be burned or otherwise disposed of so they could not be used in any way (Deut 14:22-29; 26:12).

Chambers in the Jerusalem temple stored all the contributions of the people – the tithes and holy things (2 Chr 31:4-6, 11). The tithes, whether animals, agricultural produce, or money (in the pre-rabbinic period “silver”), supplied sacrifices for the altar and food and clothing for the temple personnel. After the temple’s destruction and the disappearance of temple priests and sacrifices in Jerusalem, however, this situation changed.<sup>499</sup> Instead of bringing tithes to Jerusalem, Jews were now encouraged to burn the food or kill the animals locally (*m. Ma'aser Shenit* 1:5: “if there is no Sanctuary, it should rot”; *m. Ma'aser Shenit* 1:6: “And when there is not Temple, it must be buried together with its hide.”). As for the “silver” (now interpreted by the rabbis as money, seeing that legal tender was introduced in Judaea during the Second Temple period),<sup>500</sup> the Jerusalem Talmud encourages people to “throw it in the Salt Sea” (*t. Shekalim* 8:51b; *m. Tem* 4:2; *m. Tem* 4:3; *m. Naz* 4:4, *y. Šeqal* 8:4 [51b]).<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> We are talking here about the priests working at the Temple. Priests as a separate class did not immediately disappear after the destruction, but continued to be present in Palestine well into Late Antiquity, when they perhaps worked in local synagogues. See chapter 2.2.

<sup>500</sup> The rabbis further ruled that the second tithe was only to be sold (“redeemed”) for *current* money, not empty dies or un-coined silver (*m. Ma'aser Shenit* 1:2).

<sup>501</sup> Magness 2011, pp. 103–06: Over the past decades, thousands of coins have been found between Khirbet Mazin and 'Ein Feshka on the shore of the Dead Sea. According to Hanan Eshel and Boaz Zissu, these are consecrated vow, offering, and tithing coins thrown in the “Salt Sea,” a phenomenon that later made its way into the rabbinic literature.

For many farmers living after 70 CE, destroying so much food was unacceptable and thus they often chose to redeem the produce for money (*t. Ma'as Shen* 5:7: the House of Shammai already believed that Deut 14:25 requires any tithe produce that could not be eaten in purity in Jerusalem to be exchanged for money). However, because this money could not be used to purchase food to eat in Jerusalem after 70 CE, there were large amounts of tithe coinage that had to be kept out of circulation, as the coins were now earmarked as sacred. Thus, a whole field of Tannaitic law developed to deal with this money, including rules for hiding and discovering it (*t. Ma'as Shen* 5:8; 5:9; 5:11). For example, it seems that large amounts of sacred tithe money could be stored in the houses of individuals, as the following story suggests:

“A story of R. Simon b. Gamaliel and R. Judah and R. Jose who went to a householder in Keziv. They said: how do we know how this householder tithes his produce? He noticed and went and brought before them a purse full of golden denarii. They said to him: How do you tithe your produce? He said: this is what I say: “The second tithe in this object is redeemed by this as (a copper coin.” They said to him: go and use (=eat) your coins; you have profited in money and lost your soul.” (*t. Maas Shen*. 3:18)<sup>502</sup>

Over time, the goal of the second tithing changed from compensating real value money (the money needed by the pilgrim to purchase food in Jerusalem), to the permanent storage of large amounts of coins, to a more or less symbolic act performed with small coins: a small coin as *pars pro toto* for the total *ma'aser sheni*.<sup>503</sup> In late Antiquity, furthermore, when silver coinage

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<sup>502</sup> Note that gold coins have replaced the biblical silver: at this time, there was almost no silver anymore and bronze and gold coins had replaced the silver currency of the earlier periods. See also Sperber 1974, p. 31: “Probably the most common and important monetary term in Rabbinic literature is the *dinar*. In Tannaitic times the *dinar* when unqualified almost always refers to the silver *denarius*, whereas the *aureus* is called a *dinar zahav*, gold *dinar*. However, some time during the second half of the third century, we find a change in the usage of the word, and the unqualified *dinar* comes to refer to an *aureus* (or later, the *solidus*), the gold *dinar*, while the silver *denarius* is specifically so called.”

<sup>503</sup> This is still a custom in certain contemporary Jewish circles: it is practice to aside *terumah*, separate from this the *ma'aser rishon*, then separate either the second tithe or the poor tithe (depending on the year), and last (if



became scarce at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the silver tithe coin was replaced by the bronze coin.<sup>504</sup> No longer able to utilize the biblical “silver,” bronze coins became the symbolic representation of the harvest, to be set aside and designated as sacred.<sup>505</sup>

Coin hoards have been found in houses around Palestine. Some of these caches presumably are remnants of tithing money, taken out of circulation and stored for safekeeping. However, I also believe that some of this money made its way into synagogues, sprinkled in and under the building as a consecration.

When money is taken out of economic circulation and earmarked as sacred, it enters the divine realm. From there, it is just a small step to connect the money to the other sacred space in the village: the synagogue.<sup>506</sup> I propose that, since people felt a strong connection to their synagogue, and since synagogues were seen more and more as “small Temples” in Late Antiquity (see below), it would have been only a small step to link the stored tithing coins to the

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applicable) redeem the second tithe with a coin. This coin can be the minimal amount capable of purchasing food and need not be the value of the produce. When the value of the coin is “filled,” the coin can then be redeemed with a coin of higher value or discarded in a way that prevents its future use. The reason for discarding the money in such a manner is that the set-aside produce is still considered *mekudash* or sacred.

<sup>504</sup> Bijovsky 2012, p. 42: The minting of silver coins was abandoned by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and silver coins were almost non-existent in the Byzantine East. Thus, the tithing practice does not necessarily conform precisely to rabbinic instructions.

<sup>505</sup> Danny Syon points out that, according to the Jerusalem Talmud (*Ma’aser Sheni* 52.4), coins of the “first kings” were unacceptable to use as the second tithe. Of the 5,802 legible magico-religious coins in our database, 12% of the coins come from before the third century CE, while 88% dates to the year 300 or later. Does this indicate that this rabbinic law was followed, or not? (Syon 2015, p. 44).

<sup>506</sup> Additionally, the link between tithing, the synagogue, and the Jerusalem temple was established well before this period (Grey 2021, p. 118). We know from multiple sources, for example, that legal rights were granted to Jewish communities in Judea and the Diaspora to collect tithes, first fruits, the annual temple tax, and other consecrated gifts, to store them in their synagogues, and from there to send them to Jerusalem (e.g., Philo, *Leg.* 155–158, 216, 311–316; *Spec.* 1.76–78; *Flacc.* 74; Josephus, *B. J.* 2.285–292; 7.110, 412; *A. J.* 14.213–216, 225–264; 16.162–173; Cicero, *Flac.* 67–68; *CPJ* 2:153). Philo also suggests it was local priests who brought the funds to Jerusalem.

synagogue. Placed inside the building, the coins were consciously positioned in a space where people anticipated that God was more likely to interface with earthly spaces and its supplicants.<sup>507</sup> We can compare this practice to (the secular) tossing of coins in a well, or to offering precious objects to the gods by throwing them in a river or spring, thereby destroying them. This is also brought up by Ahipaz and Leibner as a reason for why they do not believe these “floor deposits” are tithing coins: they argue that the discovery of hundreds of low-value bronze coins in springs, wells, and baptismal fonts in Palestine indicates that this was a widespread phenomenon also among pagans and Christians, and that the ritual was thus not connected to tithing.<sup>508</sup> I do not agree with this statement. First, the many coin deposits found at pagan and Christian sites seem to be older than the synagogue floor deposits. At the Te’omim Cave in the western Jerusalem mountains, for example, 33 bronze coins and many oil lamps from the second to fourth centuries CE were discovered, and have been connected to the worship of Persephone and Demeter.<sup>509</sup> The coins found at Mamre (see above) date primarily to the fourth and early fifth centuries. Almost none appears to postdate the reign of the emperor Arcadius, suggesting a steep decline in or possibly a change in the character of the

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<sup>507</sup> Bloch and Parry articulate this concept when they describe the cycles of long and short-term order as “a series of procedures by which the goods which derive from the short-term cycle are converted into the long-term transactional order” (Bloch and Parry 1989, p. 25).

<sup>508</sup> Ahipaz and Leibner 2020, pp. 224–226.

<sup>509</sup> Zissu *et al.* 2012. Oil lamps seem to have been favored objects to the Romans to deposit at ritual sites as well as in foundation deposits. See, for example, the latest discovery in Jerusalem (<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/305594>). Perhaps the iconography and symbols on the lamps made them perfect artifacts for communicating certain intentions. It is unclear if the same sentiment was felt by Jews in Late Antiquity; oil lamps have never been found under the floor of an ancient synagogue.

sacred life of the site in the mid-fifth century.<sup>510</sup> Second, the pagans and Christian coin deposits are almost always linked to water sources,<sup>511</sup> while we have no evidence of Jews throwing in coins in wells or springs. Third, the phenomenon of depositing coins under the floor of Christian churches and baptisteries is not known in Palestine at all.<sup>512</sup> In fact, among the hundreds of churches that have been excavated in Israel/Palestine, in only one place might a similar phenomenon be noted: at the church of Khirbet Fa'ush in central Israel.<sup>513</sup> The church was excavated in 2005 by Binyamin Har-Even, who dated a refurbishment and expansion of the transept of the church to the third quarter of the fifth century (level IIIb). Underneath the floor of this expansion, 153 coins of the fourth and fifth centuries were found, dispersed over four locations: in the center of the nave (83 coins), on the edge of the northern aisle (34 coins), and on the edge of the southern aisle (12 and 24 coins). The latest of the 96 identifiable coins is dated to 457-474 CE. However, this is the only example of coins found under the floor of Christian sacred spaces in the eastern Mediterranean. The fact that the church is located in central Israel, and not in the Golan or Galilee, where the Jewish synagogue phenomenon seems

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<sup>510</sup> Kofsky 1997; Leatherbury 2019.

<sup>511</sup> For example, at Mamre or the Fountain of the Lamps in Corinth. While oil lamps with Jewish iconography have been found at Mamre, there is no possibility to prove that Jews also threw coins in the well. In any case, there are no specific Jewish water spaces in which coins have been found, making it doubtful that this was a common Jewish practice.

<sup>512</sup> We have a couple of examples from Europe. For example, at the fourth-century basilica at the site of Torre de Palma in Portugal, ten coins minted during the reign of Constantine were found embedded within the plaster of the floor (so not under the floor), with their loose arrangement suggesting that each coin was offered separately (Huffstot 1998; Leatherbury 2019, p. 255). In Malta, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Ukraine, coins have also been discovered in water systems used for the administration of baptism in the early Church (Perassi 2017). However, these examples are far removed from Israel/Palestine and I do not believe it has any connections to our phenomenon.

<sup>513</sup> Har-Even and Shapira 2012; Bijovsky 2012c; Ahipaz and Leibner 2020, p. 221.

to be located (see below), makes me believe this example is not connected to the Jewish magico-religious tithing deposits. Taken together, I believe the floor deposits are found in synagogues because they were unique to Judaism:<sup>514</sup> it was the only religion that had a halakhic tithing tradition connected to their sacred space.<sup>515</sup>

As noted in the catalogue, most of the coins found scattered under synagogue buildings are low value denominations, often very worn, and include imitations. This indicates that it was not as much about the monetary value of the donation but about the symbolic act of offering.<sup>516</sup> But what was the goal? As I stated in my introduction to this chapter, I believe different participants attached different meanings to this ritual. As we already saw, I believe some donors placed the coins in the building for apotropaic reasons; to call upon supernatural powers to manipulate the natural world, or, in our case, to call upon God to protect the donors and the larger community. The coins were in this sense used in what Bloch and Parry label “the long-term cycle of exchange”; to reproduce and reinforce the social and cosmic order of the Jewish world.<sup>517</sup> By providing gifts, supernatural entities would protect the building (and its

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<sup>514</sup> As mentioned in chapter Five, Christians did not embrace the phenomenon of preserving ritual or sacred objects after they went out of use. Perhaps the tithing coins were interpreted as a sort of votive offerings by the Jews, and thus preserved, but a similar sentiment concerning sacred money was not felt among the early Christians?

<sup>515</sup> In contrast to, for example, treasuries and charity hoards, practices that probably existed among pagans, Christians, and Jews alike. Of course, Jews would still hold on to their tithing coins even after the synagogue building was already constructed/renovated. Perhaps many of the bronze coin hoards that have been found in houses are these tithing collections?

<sup>516</sup> Indeed, Crawford stated in his 1983 article that “In general, of the circulating medium, hoards are likely to contain high value pieces, site finds to consists of low value pieces” (Crawford 1983, p. 202). Our deposits contradict this statement, indicating that they deviate from the “standard” hoards.

<sup>517</sup> In opposition to short-term exchanges, which are transactions concerned with the arena of individual competition (Bloch and Parry, 1989, p. 24).

users) from evil forces, such as the evil eye, as well as earthly catastrophes like fire and earthquakes. The coins were ad hoc contributions to the transcendent being in exchange for future protection from the *'eyn ha-ra*.

To other individual donors, the deposit perhaps meant entering into a more personal relationship with the supernatural power in the hopes it would have the consequences s/he was looking for. In this way, the donor entered a *do ut des* relationship with the supernatural deity and the coins fulfilled the same function as protective amulets: they were meant to bless the individual and keep him/her safe.<sup>518</sup> In this sense, they were not apotropaic coins, but can be interpreted as “blessing coins,” as part of the Jewish concept known as *Berakhah*.

A third function could take this “donation” of coins to a more literal level. Based on Malachi 3:10,<sup>519</sup> some individuals might have hoped that prosperity given (tithes) would mean prosperity received (much blessing). This is a frequently used concept in modern Prosperity Gospel and could have potentially influenced some ancient Jews as well.<sup>520</sup>

Last, to some, perhaps, “donating” of coins was seen as a necessary sacrifice. No longer able to use, sacrifice, or donate the tithing money in Jerusalem, the synagogue came to be

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<sup>518</sup> As we have seen, because of the frequent discovery of amulets with prayers, and protective decorations and graffiti within the synagogue building, Karen Stern critiques the artificial divide between magical devices and other common components of the synagogue building. If we follow this reasoning, then there is nothing “magical” about our coins either; instead, they fit into the very normal activities of (some) synagogue communities.

<sup>519</sup> Malachi 3:10: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

<sup>520</sup> For more on Malachi 3:10 and its influence on Prosperity Theology, see, for example, Baker 2006, p. 290; Hackworth 2012, pp. 40–45.

considerate as the appropriate replacement for donations.<sup>521</sup> As Joan Branham has pointed out, the ancient synagogue building had a perpetual bond to the temple; over time, the sanctity of certain temple traditions became transferred to the synagogue, in a concept called “vicarious sacrality.”<sup>522</sup> In this sense, it is no surprise that the synagogue was perceived as the perfect space to deposit the coins. Whatever economic value these coins once had, they were now transferred to a realm outside of human control, and thus depositing tithing money in a synagogue became similar to an animal sacrifice, where an animal is destroyed and its life and flesh are given to God.<sup>523</sup> This “sacrificial practice” of depositing second tithe money thus continued for many centuries after animal sacrifice had long since disappeared from the Jewish world.<sup>524</sup>

And thus, each individual might have had their own reasons and hopes for their donation, but collectively, the community showed their loyalty to God and the temple. According to rabbinic literature, congregational offerings (*qorbanot tzibur*) were preferred over individual offerings (*qorbanot yahid*). This was also true for the yearly half-shekel payment to

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<sup>521</sup> The fact that we do not find coin deposits under the floors of private residences in the Byzantine period in northern Israel may also contribute to this interpretation: tithing money was seen as sacred and magical, and thus belonged to the appropriate sacred space.

<sup>522</sup> Branham 1995. Levine 2000 calls this the *Imitatio Templi*: the application of forms derived from the Jerusalem temple to synagogues. See also chapter 5.13.

<sup>523</sup> For an introduction to sacrifice as a metaphysical concept, see Weddle 2017, pp. 9-24. His definition states “Religious sacrifice is a costly act of self-giving, in denial of natural inclinations, that is offered in suspense, under conditions that threaten failure, for the purpose of establishing a relation with transcendent reality.” For an introduction to the treatment of sacrifice in (early) rabbinic literature, see Balberg 2017.

<sup>524</sup> If my interpretation is correct, then here we have an example of a physical remnant of temple sacrifice in Late Antiquity: one of the only examples of post-70 CE Jewish sacrifice besides the immaterial sacrifice of the study of Torah (*b. Menahot* 110a), prayer (*b. Berakhot* 32b), and the acts of loving kindness (*Avot de Rabbi Natan* 4).

the Temple, even after the Second Temple Period.<sup>525</sup> Congregational offerings were not only meant to be made *on behalf of* the community as whole, but also *by* the entire community. Statements in the Mishnah attest that it was preferred that (tithing) offerings made to the temple in kind were to be sold for money, in this way standardizing the form of currency, and thereby unrecognizably swallowed into the anonymous greater repository of money over which the donor had no control.<sup>526</sup> This offering similarly was thus made by no one in particular and would tie into our hypothesis about the scattering of the coins: instead of each individual offering their own coins in a separate container, the coins were mixed and sprinkled under the floor of the building as a communal sacrifice.<sup>527</sup> Placing the coins in the groundwork of the building, often fused in the mortar bedding itself, formed a so-called “magical foundation” for the building. Congregational sacrifices by the community were meant to maintain the prosperity and protection of the space and thereby the well-being of the community as a whole; it was a ritual by and for the local individuals.<sup>528</sup> In this way, the deposition of the synagogue coins can give us a rare glimpse into the activities of the common users of the synagogue buildings; a population frequently overlooked in ancient synagogue contexts. Donor inscriptions only refer to the people who were wealthy enough to make a substantial donation

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<sup>525</sup> Balberg 2017, pp. 109–141.

<sup>526</sup> *m. Sheqalim* 4.8.

<sup>527</sup> In this way, they are thus different from amulets, which were requests for personal, and very specific fulfillments. Coins, on the other hand, were an expression of collective and general requests to the Divine. The use of coins as a sacrifice could also explain the lack of similar deposits in early Palestinian churches (see below): for Christians, Jesus was the sacrifice, and there was thus no need to offer a substitute.

<sup>528</sup> If this is true, then the public assumed tasks that were originally only conducted by the priests, thus perhaps democratizing the ritual?

to the synagogue. Sprinkling low-value coins, however, could be done by people from any social or economic status. Thus, individuals of lower social class could participate in this ritual as well, giving us unique insight into the lives of the common people. The coins tangibly preserved the voices of individuals whose hopes, dreams, and deeds are often left silent in the study of ancient synagogues.<sup>529</sup>

In conclusion, this overview has made it clear that archaeological artifacts were not only shaped by particular, stable meanings but were also capable of evoking new and unpredictable frameworks of meaning that are not necessarily always discursive, conscious, or documented: in our case, the pragmatic, economic coins converted into thaumaturgical instruments that left their mark in the archaeological record.<sup>530</sup>

It is now also apparent why a similar phenomenon cannot be observed in ancient churches: a tithing “for the priests” tradition did not exist among early Christians in the eastern Mediterranean. Christianity gave up on the idea of the second tithe after the death of Jesus when Paul no longer emphasized tithing, instead using cultic language like “sacrifice,” or “offering.”<sup>531</sup> Furthermore, since there was no temple, many early Christians believed it was no longer necessary to give tithes. Additionally, since the New Testament does not explicitly

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<sup>529</sup> See also Stern 2021.

<sup>530</sup> See also Bonnie *et al.* 2021, pp. 19–21. A last theory on these coins I want to state for the sake of completeness, is the idea that these coins were left over from construction donations. When building a synagogue, funds would have been sought from the community. If not all the funds ended up being used, perhaps the “extra” coins were simply thrown into the foundations of the building, instead of divided up and given back to the individual or added to the synagogue treasury. Maybe these coins were seen as designated for the synagogue infrastructure and could not be used for any other function, or perhaps the individual donors wanted to make sure that their donations also ended up being “useful” or “contributing” to the sacred building, so that God was aware of their intention.

<sup>531</sup> Paul orders his communities to collect money for the poor in the Jerusalem community (1Cor 8-9; Gal 2:10), but this is a surrogate not for the second tithing but for the temple tax. See also Longenecker 2010.



mention giving tithings (except when Jesus addresses people who were under the old Torah laws), many Christians thought it was a demand that was no longer requested from God.<sup>532</sup> Last, the emphasis on charity in early Christianity and giving coins to the poor overshadowed the tithing demand.<sup>533</sup> It was only in 6th century Europe that tithing became Ecclesiastical law again. In addition to tithing, early Christians also gave up on sacrifices, as the crucifixion of Jesus became seen as the final sacrifice for human sin. Jesus was declared “the end of all sacrifice” (Gal 3:24-25; Rom 10:4) and sacrifices never became ecclesiastical law.<sup>534</sup> In fact, as part of the anti-pagan campaign, sacrifice was officially outlawed in 390 CE under emperor Theodosius I.<sup>535</sup> Ecclesiastical authorities in Late Antiquity also focused on outlawing magical practices.<sup>536</sup> In the 380s, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote that “Taking the auspices, divination, omens, amulets, writing on leaves, the use of charms or other spells— such things are the devil’s worship.”<sup>537</sup> Kahlos states that “the canons of church councils produced lists of forbidden rituals and practices, often judged as magical, in the fourth to seventh century and onwards, thus defining the proper

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<sup>532</sup> Another interesting point is brought up by Klawans 2006, pp. 238–241: the story of Jesus overturning the tables of the money-changers at the Temple (Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, and John 2:13-16) might have been a protest since Jesus believed that the poor should not have to pay for the sacrifices they could not easily afford. Instead, one should enact a communitarian ethic, sharing among all whatever anyone happened to have. Thus, sacrifice and tithing were no longer needed to be given by all.

<sup>533</sup> See, for example, Longenecker 2010; Caner 2013; Downs 2015. The strong prominence of giving money to the needy in early Christian circles also could have deterred people from putting coins under their sacred spaces, since it would make the funds inaccessible and useless. Although, of course, the coins in synagogue deposits seem to have had had little or no monetary value.

<sup>534</sup> Klawans 2006, pp. 213–245; Weddle 2017, pp. 100–154; Kahlos 2020, pp. 144–147. The eucharist may be interpreted as the ongoing sacrifice of Jesus to all his people.

<sup>535</sup> *CTh* 16.10.10 (February 391) and *CTh* 16.10.11 (June 392).

<sup>536</sup> Kahlos 2020, pp. 140–144, 197–203.

<sup>537</sup> Cyr. Hieros. *catech. myst.* 1.8.

Christianity by way of exclusion.”<sup>538</sup> This, of course, does not mean these phenomena did not happen (in fact, there would be no reason to outlaw them if they did not!), but it does show that clergy were discouraged from participating by a higher ruling authority (an institution that did not exist for the ancient Jews), that many people were probably adhering to these laws to some extent, and that these practices were not allowed on the grounds of churches.<sup>539</sup> Thus, in early Christianity, tithing did not exist, coins were not collected for the temple, and coins were not placed under the floors of churches as part of a magico-religious phenomenon: hence we do not find them at church sites in Palestine.<sup>540</sup>

And thus, I believe Zvi Ilan and Yehoram Kentman were correct when they stated, “Perhaps the coins underneath Meroth’s floor were *ma’aser sheni* coins which were forbidden for use.”<sup>541</sup> The coins in this category, low in value,<sup>542</sup> scattered around the building, deposited in

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<sup>538</sup> Kahlos 2020, p. 141.

<sup>539</sup> In fact, no amulets or other magical devices have been found in churches either, although they did exist in Christian communities in the eastern Mediterranean, contributing to our theory that any use of magic was taboo in the church space (de Bruyn 2017; Stern 2021, p. 232). Perhaps this says more about the personnel who ran a church versus that of a synagogue: while clerics might be less inclined to practice magic, synagogue leaders (probably local honoratiorees) might have been closer to their local populace and perhaps more prone to tolerate popular religious practices extending into the synagogue space, especially if they overlap with common ideas about participating in and manipulating divine power (and especially as they were seen as normal religious practices). It is also true that the early Christian church was much more organized and had a centralized authority, whereas Judaism in Late Antiquity did not. In this regard, it could have been more effective to control clergy and their usual procedures in the church building, whereas it was not as easy to control what was going on in every synagogue building, especially in smaller villages.

<sup>540</sup> Of course, it may also be that many of the churches in Palestine/Israel have not been carefully excavated (most churches in this region were excavated in the earlier and mid-twentieth century) or small finds not carefully documented, however, I assume that both synagogues and churches have been excavated according to the same standards.

<sup>541</sup> Ilan 1989a, p. 28.

<sup>542</sup> Again, if we follow most numismatists’ assessment that bronze coins were low in value in Late Antiquity.

irretrievable spots, are very likely to be tithing money preserved by the local community over decades or even centuries before they made their way into the building.<sup>543</sup> This further explains the wide date range in the coins as well as the large numbers: they were not collected from the local villagers *ad hoc* but over many years and then deposited in the building in tertiary use.<sup>544</sup> Bijovsky already remarked in her 2012 analysis that “most of the coins date to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and decreasing numbers of coins towards the date of deposition of the coins.”<sup>545</sup> While this is probably an indication of the long circulation of 4<sup>th</sup> century coins, it may also point towards a long collection process: although deposited in the late 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century, the coins has been stored in their original location over decades.<sup>546</sup>

## 5.7 Why “magico-religious” coins?

If the floor deposits cannot be considered foundation deposits, then what should we call them? I propose the term “magico-religious” coins. The Oxford English Dictionary defines magic as: “The use of ritual activities or observances which are intended to influence the course of events or to manipulate the natural world, usually involving the use of an occult or secret body of knowledge.”<sup>547</sup> Recently, some scholars have chosen not to use the term “magic” in connection

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<sup>543</sup> This would, for example, explain Arslan’s observation on the coins from L812 at Capernaum, which have a very broad date span and seem to “have been ‘accumulated’ in a different place and then brought there to be included in the sub-foundation of the pavement (Arslan 2011, p. 149).

<sup>544</sup> Thus, the coins can only provide us with a very general *terminus post quem* for the date of the synagogue’s construction or its renovation.

<sup>545</sup> Bijovsky 2012, p. 90.

<sup>546</sup> For why the coins only started to be deposited in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, see chapter 5.12.

<sup>547</sup> “Magic, n.,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, OED Online (OUP), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112186>.

with religion-studies based on its derogatory history.<sup>548</sup> They argue that in the past, the term has been used as opposite to religion and/or science, heavily influenced by Eurocentrism, Christian superiority, and racism. Religion was understood as a higher expression of spirituality, while magic was disregarded as superstition or a form of expression of illogical, primitive societies. However, I use the term magic here only as a heuristic tool, a working definition to more easily facilitate our understanding of the coin deposits. Following the definition from the OED, I follow the opinion that magic is *a part of* religion. In this sense, when magic is understood as “the use of ritual activities or observances which are intended to influence the course of events,” every religion incorporates magical practices.<sup>549</sup> Thus, with the term “magico-religious,” I indicate that the coins were brought in not as utilitarian tools, but as otherworldly instruments to obtain a metaphysical outcome, as integral parts of Jewish religion. As Karen Stern also critiqued in her work on graffiti in the ancient synagogue, the divide made between magical devices and other common elements of the synagogue building is artificial. In her opinion, inscriptions and other apotropaic devices should not be isolated as “magical” but instead should be included in the list of (common) ancient prayer activities that were once conducted inside the synagogue building, whether they were recited, sung, inscribed, or deposited.<sup>550</sup> I believe the same can be said about the floor coins. Although the reasons behind

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<sup>548</sup> Guerra, 2017, p. 9.

<sup>549</sup> Guerra 2017, p. 10.

<sup>550</sup> Stern 2021, p. 231.

their deposition may be multiple and diverse, they were a common part of the “magical aspects” of Jewish “religion.”

## **5.8 Coin agency**

In 2011, Fleur Kemmers and Nanouschka Myrberg stated in their article “Rethinking Numismatics. The archaeology of coins” that coins, through their integration of text, image, and existence as material objects, offer profound insights not only in the ‘big history’ of issuers and state organizations, but also in ‘small histories’, cultural value, and the agency of humans and objects.<sup>551</sup> Although coins had a value assigned by the mint, individuals or communities used them differently based on their own standards of value, producing “irrational” usage patterns. Coins as active agents can be used to make certain statements, and when they end up in contexts outside their primary context of production or use, they can also become motors of change. The authors point out that users of coins are able to make (political, social, religious) statements about the authorities that minted the coins through a particular use or non-use of these objects.<sup>552</sup> Kemmers demonstrated this theoretical idea in another article where she looked at the use of Severan coins in three distinct functional contexts: military contexts, civilian contexts, and ritual contexts.<sup>553</sup> Here, she pointed out that a disproportional large number of Severan bronze coins could be found in Western-European ritual contexts of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century, compared to military or civilian contexts. Thus, a conscious pre-selection of coins

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<sup>551</sup> Kemmers and Myrberg 2011, p. 87.

<sup>552</sup> We already saw this relationship through the fabrication of medals or amulets out of specific “potent” coins.

<sup>553</sup> Kemmers 2009.

seems to have been made when dealing with religious functions. Even more surprising, a deliberate selection also seems to have been made in coin types. Dividing the Severan coins up into 6 types (Jupiter, Mars, Providentia, Sol, Spes, and Other), Kemmers was able to demonstrate that Mars coins were considerably more common in military contexts than civilian or ritual contexts, whereas Sol coins were more dominant in civilian and ritual contexts. In fact, in ritual contexts, Sol is by far the most dominant type. One theory that could explain these discrepancies could be that people adhered different “feelings” to different coin imagery, making certain types more or less suitable for certain functions.<sup>554</sup>

Can something similar be observed for our magico-religious coins? In order to examine this question, I divided all synagogue coins up into 27 different types (Angel, Big E, Big I, Big K, Big M, Camp-Gate, Constantinopolis, Cross, Emperor, Emperor dragging Captive, Emperor on Galley, Fallen Horseman, Jupiter, Monogram, Roma, Securitas, She-Wolf, Sol, Three Emperors, Two Emperors, Two Soldiers One Standard, Two Soldiers Two Standards, VOT(A), Victory, Victory dragging Captive, Victory on Prow, and Other).<sup>555</sup> Then, I compared the coin types that could be found in each specific context (Votive, Charity, Treasury, Emergency, Post-Destruction, and Magico-Religious). For the ease of overview, I removed the Other category (by far the largest category, containing coins from the Hellenistic period to the Medieval Period), so that

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<sup>554</sup> Kemmers and Myrberg 2011, pp. 94–96. Similar studies were performed by Kaczynski and Nüsse, who looked at the numbers of antoniniani coins found in specific sanctuary contexts in Germany, and concluded that coin types with military symbols were less often chosen in these contexts (Kaczynski and Nüsse 2009), and by Nathan Elkins, who looked at the circulation of Nerva coins to determine of some of his imagery was targeted to specific geographic audiences (Elkins 2017).

<sup>555</sup> Of course, these are artificial classifications. There is no textual nor material evidence that the ancients would have viewed coin images in such categorical fashion (See also Elkins 2009). However, these categories form a starting point in trying to see internal similarities and differences between the different functional coin groups.

differences between the other categories would be more visible. The graphs can be found at <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/coin-agency/>.

When looking at all synagogue coins (7,396 in total), Fallen Horseman coins form the biggest category (1,346 coins or 18% of total). However, when combining Victory coins (second largest with 1,214 coins) with Victory dragging Captive (third largest with 938 coins), this category forms the largest group with 34,5% of the total coins. Cross coins and VOT coins close off the top five. However, a caveat in this overview needs to be mentioned. The Caesarea deposit, interpreted by me as Treasury, is solely responsible for 1,142 of the 1,346 total Fallen Horseman coins, thus heavily skewing our graphs. When removing Caesarea from the total deposits, the Fallen Horseman type is actually only the 11<sup>th</sup> largest category of the assemblage and 'Big M' coins round off our top five.

More important, however, are the differences that can be seen when comparing the coin types found in our different functional contexts. When dividing the coins up in these categories, it becomes clear that Votive deposits follow our total assemblage the closest. Here, the top five coins types are Victory dragging Captive, Victory, VOT, Emperor, and Fallen Horseman. The two Victory types form 39% of the total assemblage. A totally different picture emerges from the Charity coins. Here the top five consists of Two Soldiers Two Standards, Two Soldiers One Standard, Camp-Gate, Victory on Prow, and She-Wolf. However, just as Caesarea is an outlier, so is Beth She'arim, which is responsible for 204 out of the 205 Two Soldiers Two Standards coins and all 169 Two Soldiers One Standard coins. This rare instance of large numbers of Two Soldier coins is intriguing. A possible explanation might be that this deposit was perhaps not a charity hoard that can be associated with the synagogue building, but a

shipment of coins that still needed to be distributed and was temporarily stored in the basement of a building when it collapsed. A future die study of these coins could perhaps indicate if they were minted in the same batch or not, although none of the coins look freshly minted. If they do not come from the same die, then someone was clearly collecting these rare coins for an unknown reason.

When removing Caesarea from the Treasury deposits, Big M coins form the biggest category in this group, followed by Victory, Cross, Victory with Captive, Monogram, Angel, and VOT, for a total of 21 different types. We've already pointed out that Treasury coins have the largest range in date, but it now also seems that they have one of the largest ranges in types. A pretty similar picture can be observed in the Emergency deposits, which contains 18 different types. The top five, however, consists of Big M coins, followed by Two Soldiers Two Standards, Big K, Two Soldiers One Standard, and Camp-Gate. If we assume that this category is the most reflective of what people had on hand at any given time, then it seems that all the other categories show clear indications of pre-selection, as none of them have many Two Soldiers, Big K, or Camp-Gate coins in them. The very low number of Victory coins in this group clearly contradicts what we can observe in all the other categories.

The two deposits that could be interpreted as Post-Destruction coins only contain two types: Emperor (3) and Victory (44) coins. Since, however, this is our only group containing solely gold coins, this would explain the lack of many other types that were only minted in bronze.

Our last category is then the magico-religious coins. Here, the top five consists of Victory, Victory dragging Captive, Cross, VOT, and Emperor types. However, the category



contains 25 different types, giving us a cross section of almost all bronze types that were around in Late Antique Palestine/Israel, perhaps indicating that people threw in what was around or that arbitrary coins were chosen to collect as tithing coins. Victory/Victory dragging Captive, however, form 42% of the total assemblage, possibly indicating that these particular coins were the preferred types to include in the tithing/ magico-religious deposits, especially since these types are almost lacking in the emergency deposits.

It would be very useful to compare our synagogue coin types to non-synagogue coin types, in order to see if our categories follow or deviate from the standard excavated coins from sites in Israel/Palestine. Unfortunately, no overview could be found on the distribution of types found at all, or a select group, of Late Antique sites in Israel/Palestine. I did, however, browse the bronze coins as preserved in the American Numismatic Society (ANS) collection, dating from 250 to 700 CE.<sup>556</sup> Here, 28,511 bronze coins from all over the Roman/Byzantine Empire and beyond could be found. Of these, Big M coins make up 16.5% (4714 coins), Victory with/without Captive/on Prow 10.5% (3,012 coins), Fallen Horseman 6% (1,769 coins), VOT 6% (1,684 coins), Jupiter 4% (1,238 coins), Sol 3.5% (985 coins), camp-gate 3% (925 coins), Two Soldiers Two Standards 3% (868 coins), Roma 2% (640 coins), Monogram 2% (618 coins), She-Wolf 1% (342 coins), Constantinopolis 1% (341 coins), Two Soldiers One Standard 1% (296 coins), Securitas 0.3 % (96 coins), Angel 0.1% (25 coins). Unfortunately, I was not able to search for Cross coins, Big E/I/K coins, or any Emperor coins, as the parameters could not be refined in this way. The database can also not be narrowed down to coins only found in the Eastern

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<sup>556</sup> <http://numismatics.org/search/>, as accessed on 09/18/2021.

Mediterranean or Israel/Palestine (mostly because the origin of most of the coins in public and private collections are unknown). In how far we can thus compare synagogue coins to the Late Antique “average assemblage” is thus debatable. Perhaps a future targeted search in the IAA database would make for a better comparison. In any case, according to the ANS database, Big M coins make up the largest group of bronze coins minted between 250 and 700 CE (16.5%). In the magico-religious synagogue deposits, however, they only make up 1.2% of all coins. Does this mean that people wanted to keep the follis in economic circulation and preferred not to discard them? Was their value too high to be used as a symbolic gift? This hypothesis may be correct, as M-folles also only do not appear in the Charity deposits, and only form 0.68% of the Votive coins. In contrast, Big M coins are the majority in the Emergency hoards and the third largest category in the Treasury deposits, indicating that their value was appreciated in economic contexts.

### **5.9 Who was involved in the placement of these coins?**

As we saw in chapter 2.2, many officials could have been involved in the deposition of the magico-religious coins inside synagogue buildings, although no evidence exists for any official ritual. Unfortunately, almost no research has been done on the relationship between tithing and the rabbis, priests, or other synagogue officials in post-70 Judaism. This is a difficult task indeed, especially for the post-rabbinic period for which written sources are scarce.<sup>557</sup> So, aside from the community as a whole, who might have been involved?

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<sup>557</sup> See for example Weistuch and Rosenfeld 2014.

According to Matthew Grey, one prominent aspect of priestly privilege that continued for at least several centuries after the temple's destruction was the reception of heave offerings (*terumah*, תְּרוּמָה) and other consecrated gifts.<sup>558</sup> Both Josephus and early rabbinic literature indicate that the practice continued after 70 CE, and this is attested in archaeological remains at Masada and in the Bar Kokhba caves.<sup>559</sup> However, we do not know if this *terumah* money was to be spent on food and living expenses after receipt, or if some priests stored the coins as sacred money until the Temple would be rebuilt. Furthermore, most of our written and archaeological sources date to the first centuries CE; we do not know if this practice continued in Late Antiquity, long after the Temple was destroyed. We are also poorly informed about priestly involvement in synagogue activities; could they have been responsible for placing the coins under the synagogue floors at all? Was the ritual performed for the people *by* the people, or was it performed *for* them? For now, it is impossible to say.<sup>560</sup>

What about the rabbis? We already saw that over the last decades most scholars have argued that the involvement of the rabbis in the synagogue was minimal, at least until late Talmudic times.<sup>561</sup> Furthermore, literature written by the rabbis themselves states that there could be no additional holy places aside from the Jerusalem temple.<sup>562</sup> By so declaring, the

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<sup>558</sup> Grey 2012, pp. 171–182. Priests continued to live outside of Jerusalem through Late Antiquity (see below) and perhaps were still being clothed and fed by the general population.

<sup>559</sup> For example, Josephus *Antiquities* 4.68-74; *Sifre Numbers* 119; *Sifrei Zuta Korah* 18.21. For archaeological evidence, see Yadin and Naveh 1989, pp. 32–33 (Pl. 26.441), and Yadin *et al.* 2002.

<sup>560</sup> See, for example, Irshai 2003, 2004, and 2006; and Miller 1999, 2007.

<sup>561</sup> Levine 2009, Lapin 2010.

<sup>562</sup> Ben-Eliyahu 2019, pp. 126–127. Does this mean that they did not acknowledge the synagogue as an *imitatio Templi*?

rabbis were attempting to prevent the decentralization of holiness. Thus, they discouraged the Jews of Late Antiquity from seeing synagogues as sacred spaces.<sup>563</sup> Based on this interference, it seems unlikely that the rabbis were directly responsible for, or involved in, the deposition of the coins. As for the archisynagogoi, the archons, the hazzans, the elders, and other officials involved in the daily activities of the synagogue, we have no literary or archaeological evidence connecting them to the coin deposits. The only other option might be the phrontistes, who were responsible for overseeing the building of the synagogue structure. However, since the two inscriptions in which they are named come from Greece, it is impossible to say if this position (construction foreman? engineer?) existed in Palestine.

In conclusion, we do not know if someone oversaw the deposition of the tithing coins, and who it might have been, just as we also do not know if this practice was institutionalized or not, nor if any ritual acts accompanied these offerings. What we can say is that the practice must have been condoned, at least in places with examples of this phenomenon, since the building constructors left the coins in place. We can perhaps even say that the coins must have been seen as sacred or dedicated, as the (often low-paid) workers as well as the people living in the vicinity left them in place throughout the construction.<sup>564</sup> We also know that the synagogue became more and more sacred or “ideologically-articulated” over time and that it even started to adopt features that before 70 only the Jerusalem temple was allowed to have

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<sup>563</sup> The fact that they discuss it, of course, means there were alternative attitudes towards the synagogues among the general population.

<sup>564</sup> Again, think about the low-value coins dropped in contemporary fountains or pools.

(“Templization”).<sup>565</sup> Could the synagogue have been a place where tithes were offered? And, as in the temple, was it the priests that received this money, but instead of using it, oversaw their deposition within the *hagios topos*?

### **5.10 Characteristics of Magico-Religious deposits**

Based on the assessments above, I believe there are five characteristics a synagogue coin deposit needs to have in order to make it a magico-religious or tithing deposit:

- 1) The deposit is found in an irretrievable place (mostly under the floor),
- 2) the coins are found scattered (under the whole surface of the floor, or behind the length of benches, etc.),
- 3) the number of coins is high (a low number of coins can indicate accidental losses),
- 4) the coins are low in value (indicating that depositing the coins was foremost a symbolic action),
- 5) the coins have a long date range (indicating that they had been stored over a long time before their secondary deposition).

Let us now take a look at our catalogue and determine which deposits can be interpreted as magico-religious deposits.

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<sup>565</sup> Bloch and Parry 1989, p. 26; Fine 1996, p. 31. See also the article by Evyatar Marienberg on “temple-like” behavior in the synagogue by women in the Medieval and Early-Modern period (Marienberg 2004).

### 5.11 Deposits categorized as magico-religious deposits

Based on the characteristics above, I have identified thirty deposits in fourteen separate synagogues that can be categorized as tithing deposits:<sup>566</sup> Dabiyye (Deposit 1), Dabiyye (Deposit 2), Deir 'Aziz (Deposit 3), Deir 'Aziz (Deposit 4), 'En Nashut (Deposit 1), 'En Nashut (Deposit 2), Horvat Kanaf (Deposit 1), Horvat Kanaf (Deposit 2), Qasrin (Deposit 1), Bar'am (Deposit 1), Bar'am (Deposit 2), Bar'am (Deposit 3), Meroth (Deposit 1), Korazin (Deposit 1), Korazin (Deposit 2), Korazin (Deposit 3), Capernaum (Deposit 1), Capernaum (Deposit 2), Capernaum (Deposit 3), Capernaum (Deposit 4), Capernaum (Deposit 5), Capernaum (Deposit 6), Capernaum (Deposit 7), Horvat Kur (Deposit 1), Horvat Sumaqa (Deposit 1), 'En Gedi (Deposit 3), Sardis (Deposit 1), Sardis (Deposit 2), Sardis (Deposit 3), and Ostia (Deposit 1). A map can be found at <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/placing-the-tithing-phenomenon/>.

At Capernaum, seven different deposits fall under this category. The first deposit was discovered as a cluster in Stratum C (a layer of white mortar on top of the synagogue platform, onto which the synagogue building and its benches were set) in the southern part of the west aisle: 2922 bronze coins were found underneath just one floor paver that was lifted by the excavators. Many of these coins were stained with the white mortar of the stratum, indicating that they were placed in the soft foundation mortar before the stone pavement was placed on top of it. The second deposit consists of 67 bronze coins and five gold coins found under several side benches of the prayer hall. Six coins were embedded in the foundation of the benches; the others were lying on top of the bench foundations. The five gold coins were found together

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<sup>566</sup> As one notices, this is by far our largest category, making it not a marginal phenomenon, but the most prominent one among synagogue coin practices.

under the eastern benches, near the doorway leading from the synagogue hall to the courtyard.<sup>567</sup> The third deposit are multiple coin groups found in Stratum C in various locations in the synagogue building where the stone pavement was missing. A total of 178 coins were collected here. The fourth deposit consists of coins found in the courtyard area in Stratum C; 20 bronze coins were found here in various locations under the stone pavers, some with traces of mortar stuck to them. A fifth deposit consists of 236 bronze coins found together in the southwest corner of the synagogue hall but at a deeper level than previous deposits: these coins were embedded in Stratum B, an artificial platform circa 3 meters high that leveled the synagogue area, immediately beneath the white mortar layer. The coins were found dispersed throughout this stratum, mixed with dirt, ash, basalt stones, and a large number of broken vessels. The sixth deposit was found underneath a staircase built against the outside of the south wall of the synagogue building. Here, Stratum C was missing, but 570 bronze coins were found in the fill of Stratum B and 10 more in the fill of the steps themselves. The last deposit consists of a clustered group of coins discovered in the northeast corner of the courtyard, underneath eleven adjacent pavers. This group consists of 20,323 bronze coins found together on and between two layers of mortar. In total, the excavators noted 24,280 bronze coins discovered underneath the synagogue of Capernaum, either in areas where stone pavers were missing, or where stones were lifted in test trenches.

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<sup>567</sup> A possible distinction could thus be made between the 67 bronze coins from the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the 5 gold coins from the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the gold coins were an emergency hoard. More detailed publications on their stratigraphical context in the future might help clarify this.

At Dabiyye, a test trench excavated in the middle of the west aisle of the synagogue building revealed two separate deposits. The first consists of 312 bronze coins in a compact brown layer of dirt just below the stone pavement floor. A few of the coins still adhered to the underside of the flagstones. The second deposit of 24 bronze coins was found in the fill layer beneath that, interspersed between small stones and compact earth. These deposits were the only sealed clusters excavated at the site, but a total of 750 coins was eventually discovered inside the building in areas where the pavers were missing, indicating that the coin deposits are only a small part of a “coin carpet” underneath the entire synagogue building.

At Bar’am, multiple coin deposits were found in different areas under the floor of the main hall of the building. In Area A, along the south wall of the synagogue between the central and eastern door opening, 12 bronze coins were discovered under the stone floor pavers. In area B, along the south wall between the central and western door opening of the building, 25 bronze coins were found under the floor pavement. Last, 32 bronze coins were found under the stone floor pavement in Area D, in the northwest corner of the hall. All the coins were discovered in a dark-brown layer of fill overlying a layer of field stones that made up the bedding for the stone pavers. The coins were found only in areas where the stone pavers were still *in situ*; in areas where the pavers were missing no coins were detected. It is important to note that these three areas were excavated as test trenches: most of the pavers of the hall were never lifted to check for more coins and it is possible that all three deposits are part of a “coin carpet” that extended over the entire hall of the synagogue.

At Deir ‘Aziz, two deposits of this category were found under the floor of the building. The first was found in front of the northern side benches of the main hall. Here, 346 bronze and



two gold coins were spread out over an area that ran from the second northern column from the west to the northern benches, in an area where the floor pavers were missing. All these coins were found close to the surface. An additional 348 coins were found in a deposit in the western half of the synagogue, next to the northern pillars and benches, about a meter above the pit containing the 2027 coins. These coins were spread out over the surface as well, close to the surface of the floor pavement. Both deposits could have been part of a larger “coin carpet” spread just below the pavement in the western half of the synagogue hall; several flagstones were also lifted in the eastern half but no coin deposits were discovered.

At ‘En Nashut, a hole in the pavement floor of the portico area of the synagogue building was discovered. The hole was located in front of the main entrance to the synagogue building, on its south side, and had been dug by robbers who discovered coins and dug a trench of about 3.5 meters wide and 1 meter deep. During the excavations, the soil of the pit was sifted and more coins were found. It is unclear how many coins were originally part of this deposit as visitors and local kibbutz members had been removing coins from the hole for years, but in the end, 446 bronze coins made their way to the IAA depot. No other portico pavers were lifted to check for more coins. A second deposit at ‘En Nashut was discovered next to the foundations of a room west of the synagogue. Here, 51 (?) bronze coins were excavated, 32 of which could be dated to 300-455 CE.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> This is a difficult deposit to assess since it was not found in the synagogue but in the foundation trench of a small room/building annexed to the building, which may or may not have been a part of the synagogue complex. Since the coins are low in value, have the same date range as Deposit 1, and were found in the (inaccessible) foundations, I have given them the same function as a deposit. However, it is possible that this deposit belongs to an individual and has nothing to do with the ritual space.

At Horvat Kanaf, two coin deposits were found spread in two different layers over the surface of the synagogue hall. The first deposit was encountered in a layer of loose, sandy soil that was almost black in color, below the modern floor of the granary that now stands on top of the synagogue building. In this layer, 234 bronze coins were found in four areas where the floor had been broken by the archaeologists. Below this black layer was a compact layer of reddish soil, probably the original foundation fill of the synagogue building, which was placed there to level the natural bedrock. In this layer, 289 bronze coins were found in the same four areas where the modern floor had been lifted. Since these four sections were the only places where the floor was removed, it is impossible to say if more coins belonging to these “coin carpets” are still hidden under the rest of the modern floor.

At Qasrin, 125 bronze coins were found behind the northern side benches of the main hall of the synagogue. The coins were dispersed among the rubble that filled the space between the lower stone blocks of the benches and the wall behind it, but below the upper block of the two-tiered bench. The coins were detected only because the upper block was missing in this area, which allowed archaeologists to excavate the space.

At Meroth, 361 bronze coins were found under the flagstone pavement of the main hall in three different areas (although there is some unclarity about the exact number of coins found). It is also unclear where exactly these areas are, as only L157 is indicated on an excavation map found in the IAA archives: this trench is located in the middle of the north part of the synagogue hall.

At Korazin, three different coin deposits were found under the floor of the synagogue building. The first was discovered in a test trench just inside the southern doorway to the

western aisle of the building, next to and under the threshold. Here, 311 bronze coins were found by the excavators. Over the course of the following decade, another 550 bronze coins were found by a visiting archaeologist close to the surface “in the south west quarter of the synagogue,” and according to rumors another 1200 to 1500 coins were found by UN visitors. In total, however, only 861 bronze coins were partly published, 311 of which are stored at the IAA. Besides this trench, another sounding was made along the southern doorway leading into the eastern aisle where 34 coins were found under and next to the threshold. Last, a test trench running along the inside of the south wall was dug, connecting the two soundings. Here, below the layer of dirt in which the first two deposits were found was an accumulation of small flat stones. This is interpreted as construction or quarry debris brought in to level the area. Below this layer was a bedding of large basalt blocks. In these two layers, 1063 more bronze coins and 2 gold coins were discovered, most of them in the western part of the building. Unfortunately, the deposits also include two Islamic coins and even a modern Israeli coin, showing that this area was disturbed or contaminated. It is unclear which coins come from which level as this was not recorded during the excavations.

At Horvat Kur, 839 bronze coins were retrieved from the western portico area of the synagogue building. The coins were found in two layers on top of each other: a hard, grayish dirt layer of about 5-10 cm containing over 15,000 tesserae and 87 coins, and above that a soft, brownish dirt layer of circa 5 cm, containing almost 10,000 tesserae and 752 coins. According to the excavators, this rubble was brought in to level and construct the portico of the synagogue. The rubble may have come from a destroyed mosaic floor that once covered the synagogue hall, meaning that the coins originally would have been placed under the mosaic floor, probably

(but not certainly) scattered over the surface of the building. Or the coins might have been brought in from somewhere else and were added to the mixture to form the portico floor.

At Horvat Sumaqa, a total of eleven bronze coins was found between the stone pavers of the floor of the second Phase of the synagogue building, in the northern area of the eastern narthex of the building. A section of this floor to the north was left *in situ* and it is thus unknown if more coins could be found there. No other coin deposits were found in or under the rest of the synagogue's stone pavement, which survived only in patches above an older plaster floor.

At 'En Gedi, 150 bronze coins were found under the floor of a northern side room of the synagogue building. The coins were found as a group and were not scattered over the surface of the room. No deposits were found under the floor of the main hall of the building.<sup>569</sup>

At Sardis, hundreds of bronze coins have been found under the floor of the synagogue building. Around 400 were discovered under the mosaic pavement of the forecourt of the building, although the exact location of each coin is confusing. Ca. 123 of these coins were reliably located beneath unbroken mosaics or were sealed in the mortar bedding for the fountain, but it is uncertain if they were discovered immediately beneath the mosaics, in the mortar bedding of the mosaics, or next to or under the water pipes that provided water to the forecourt fountain, and which according to the excavators, were laid in at a later stage. A group of coins, however, was discovered in one location and was labelled by the archaeologists as

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<sup>569</sup> This would be the only tithing deposit with the coins placed together. However, the fact that it was found under the flagstone pavement of a synagogue building (and was thus inaccessible), containing mainly *minimi* from a longer period, makes me put this deposit under this category.

Hoard B. This deposit contained 248 bronze coins found in an interval depth of 0.5 meter but only three have been identified. 65 coins were found under the mosaics of the main hall of the synagogue building, at different spots where the mosaic panels were lifted. The exact location and context of the coins, however, are unknown.

At Ostia, 51 bronze coins were found underneath a mosaic floor in a side room of the synagogue. The deposit was found in the northern half of this room, 0.60 m from a marble table installed in the southwest corner of the room in a later Phase. The coins were found stuck in a layer composed of the lime setting for the mosaic, about 13 cm above an older *cocciopesto* surface.

When we consider the common attributes of these deposits, some observations can be made. First of all, almost all the tithing coin deposits were found close to the surface of the floor. In some cases, they were even embedded in the bedding of the floor, mixed with the plaster (Capernaum, Ostia and possibly Sardis and Horvat Kur), or placed in between the stones of the floor itself (Horvat Sumaqa and presumably Umm el-Qanatir). This shows that the deposits are not “foundation deposits” buried deep in the foundation trenches of the building, but “floor deposits,” placed just under or in the floor itself, producing some sort of “magical mortar” base.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Some scholars have stated that all magico-religious coin deposits have been found under mosaic or pavement floors and that no magico-religious deposits have ever been identified under plaster floors (Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 211). Ahipaz and Leibner attribute this to the fact that the phenomenon was only dominant during a time when synagogues were constructed with mosaic or pavement floors (= after 70 CE). However, synagogues such as Horvat Kur, for example, show that some Late Antique synagogues had plaster floors — and no coins were found under them. The possible example of the deposit found at ‘En Gedi below a dirt floor (see below) would also contradict this statement.

Within the building, a greater emphasis seems to have been placed on the areas around door openings (Capernaum, Bar'am, 'En Nashut, Korazin, Sardis) or in and around benches (Capernaum, Qasrin, Deir 'Aziz),<sup>571</sup> the Torah shrine or the *bemah*. This underscores our understanding of the coins as performing critical functions to their depositors: they were buried in spaces upon which their targets stood, sat, or traversed, or around the most powerful place of the building: the place of the Torah scrolls. So, the same conclusion Karen Stern makes about synagogue amulets is also applicable here: "their location was not only metaphorical, nor incidental, but physically instrumental to their efficacy: they did not only bless the building, but also its visitors."<sup>572</sup> By placing the coins beneath the spaces where visitors spent most of their time or where the Torah scrolls were kept, they became activated and empowered.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Also at Umm el-Qanatir (Dray, Gonen and Ben-David 2017, p. 216, p. 225). However, most synagogue buildings have not been systematically dismantled and thresholds, benches, or stylobates are almost always kept in place, although smaller pieces might be moved to museums. Thus, there is a chance that more coins could be found in these areas.

<sup>572</sup> Stern 2021, pp. 231–232, pp. 240–242. She explores how the sacredness of synagogue space could influence and enhance the power of certain "requests", like prayers or amulets: "For instance, both Rabbinic texts and the study of piyyutim reveal the importance of ancient synagogues for conducting acts of scriptural recitation, interpretation, and prayer. But attention to vernacular inscriptions – on lamellae and on doorways – offer insights into the ranges of prayer practices once considered to be possible or normative in these spaces...Attention to various genres of vernacular inscriptions thus illuminates a wide range of precatory practices in ancient synagogues that many specialists inadvertently overlook...Sanctity, in many parts of the ancient and medieval worlds, however, was something physical, tactile, and transferable (and translatable). Jews who clustered their amulets around Torah scrolls (such as at Nirim) might have done so to help compile a sacred graveyard. But they also might have done so to accelerate the efficacy of healing amulets by positioning them inside or beside a room with objects of consummate sanctity and connection to Divinity (which might, in turn, also accelerate their efficacy)." I believe the same observations hold true for the synagogue coins.

<sup>573</sup> Compare, for example, this phenomenon to the subsequent and related emplacement of the *mezuzah* on the doorframe of a room or building.

## 5.12 Dating the Magico-Religious coin phenomenon

As we have seen, deposits of coins stored in *genizot*, charity hoards, treasuries, and emergency hoards are found in synagogues constructed and used ranging from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, with a more-or-less equal spread throughout these centuries. However, trying to pinpoint when the phenomenon of the magico-religious coin phenomenon started and ended is more difficult. To date the origin of the practice, we must take into account three factors vis-à-vis coins: first, the date of minting, second, the date of the (first and possibly second) deposition, and third, the possibility of residuality.<sup>574</sup> “Residual” can refer to a coin that remained in circulation long after it was minted and even after it had lost its monetary value. It can also refer to the re-deposition of coins in a secondary context (coins that were once already lost or mixed in with debris, but now disturbed again), which is the definition I use here.

As for the date of minting, tithing deposits usually contain mostly coins of the final quarter of the fourth century, few coins of the fifth century, and rarely some from the beginning of the sixth century CE.<sup>575</sup> The following table gives an overview of the *terminus post quem* of each deposit, in chronological order:<sup>576</sup>

Capernaum (deposit 5)	Unknown
Capernaum (deposit 6)	Unknown

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<sup>574</sup> Based on Lockyear 2012, p. 195.

<sup>575</sup> However, we need to keep in mind that large number of coins from any given hoard found in Palestine are illegible and these mostly include fourth-fifth century coins which cannot be precisely dated because of poor minting and preservation. Therefore, our deposits surely include many more fourth-fifth century issues which cannot be identified (Bijovsky 2012, pp. 75–77).

<sup>576</sup> Here I dropped the later, clearly intrusive coins and coins that only have a general Late Roman date. One will also note that the end dates are different from Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, due to fact that they only used the published coin reports, while I corrected these publications using the IAA database.

Bar'am (deposit 1)	341-346
Capernaum (deposit 4)	341-346
Ostia (deposit 1)	337-347
Capernaum (deposit 3)	383-387
Bar'am (deposit 2)	367-395
Dabiyye (deposit 2)	395-408
Korazin (deposit 2)	395-408
'En Gedi (deposit 3)	395-408
Dabiyye (deposit 1)	402-408
'En Nashut (deposit 1)	395-450
Bar'am (deposit 3)	425-450
'En Nashut (deposit 2)	337-455
Capernaum (deposit 1)	457-475
Horvat Kanaf (deposit 1)	409-498
Meroth (deposit 1)	507-512
Horvat Kanaf (deposit 2)	512-518
Qasrin (deposit 1)	498-518
Deir 'Aziz (deposit 3)	527-565
Deir 'Aziz (deposit 4)	527-565
Horvat Kur (deposit 1)	527-565
Capernaum (deposit 7)	475-575



Sardis (deposit 1)	565-578
Korazin (deposit 1)	602-610
Horvat Sumaqa (deposit 1)	610-613
Sardis (deposit 2)	612-613
Sardis (deposit 3)	615-616
Capernaum (deposit 2)	650-700
Korazin (deposit 3)	683-750

The *terminus post quem* of each building is the following, in chronological order:

Ostia	337-347
'En Gedi	395-408
Dabiyye	402-408
Bar'am	425-450
'En Nashut	337-455
Meroth	507-512
Qasrin	498-518
Horvat Kanaf	512-518
Deir 'Aziz	527-565
Horvat Kur	527-565
Horvat Sumaqa	610-613
Sardis	615-616

Capernaum	650-700
Korazin	683-750

If we follow this table, the earliest example of a magico-religious deposit can be found in the Diaspora synagogue at Ostia. This would mean that the phenomenon started outside of Palestine in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>577</sup> However, since the many Ostia excavation reports are confusing, often contradicting themselves on matters of architecture or dating of the specific features surrounding this deposit, this early date might be incorrect.<sup>578</sup> In Israel/Palestine, the earliest examples are found at Dabiyye and 'En Gedi, with a date of the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. However, all of this is based on the date of the minting of the coins. As Bijovsky has indicated, coins from the 4<sup>th</sup> century were in circulation for a long time. Fifth-century coins, on the other hand, are rarer and give a better indication of the residuality of the coins.<sup>579</sup> Thus, another methodology needs to be followed to better identify the inception of the magico-religious floor deposit.

When we look at the construction date of the (floors) of the synagogues in which floor deposits have been found in combination with an assessment of the residuality of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century coins, we get a different picture. A total of 30,675 coins were found in floor deposits. Of these, 5,802 could be dated, with most of them belonging to the second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> If indeed true, perhaps the long distance to Jerusalem made the urge to somehow “get rid” of these coins in a different way more palpable?

<sup>578</sup> See appendix, case-study X.

<sup>579</sup> Or at least, fewer of them have been identified. See Bijovsky 2012, pp. 75–77.

century to the fourth quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (see

<https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/deposits-categorized-as-magico-religious-deposits/>).

After this, there is a sharp drop-off at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>580</sup> However, since 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century coins remained in circulation much longer than 6<sup>th</sup> century ones, we need to take into account the latest coins in each deposit. Based on this assessment, I am placing the beginning of this phenomenon in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

To better understand what happened in this period that could have sparked this phenomenon, we need to take a deeper look at the geographical area in which the custom was performed.

### **5.13 Placing the Magico-Religious coin phenomenon**

Aside from the two Diaspora synagogues, almost all sites in which magico-religious coin deposits have been found are restricted to a small geographical region in north-eastern Israel (the Golan Heights, Upper Galilee, Lower Galilee, and the Carmel region, see <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/placing-the-tithing-phenomenon/>). This is the area which Aviam has designated as the “Mountainous Galilee.”<sup>581</sup> According to Aviam, synagogues in this region are characterized by a plethora of architectural decoration, mosaic or flagstone pavements, architectural influences of Roman public architecture and art, and the widespread use of spolia. The second area he distinguished, the “Northern Valleys,” located to the south of the Mountainous Galilee, does not have any synagogues in which floor deposits have been

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<sup>580</sup> This holds true, even if we remove the large number of coins from Capernaum.

<sup>581</sup> Aviam 2019, pp. 299–305.

found. This makes the phenomenon exclusive to northern Galilee.<sup>582</sup> Only the site of 'En Gedi, located in the Judean Desert, seems to be an anomaly. The fact that this site also contains the only magico-religious deposit in which the coins were not scattered but instead clustered, with no coins found under the floor of the main hall, and that the coin deposit was found under a "dirt" floor,<sup>583</sup> might indicate that this is either a different phenomenon, or that the "rules" for a floor deposit were interpreted differently here.<sup>584</sup>

What was it about Galilee and the Golan that prompted Jews to place tithing coins in their synagogues; what made this region so special? I believe that (one) reason might be that this area was the central "hub" for rabbinic studies during the third and fourth century, which undoubtedly left its traces throughout Late Antiquity. In the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, after Jerusalem was destroyed and Jews were barred from entering it, Tiberias became the most important Jewish spiritual center in Palestine. The Mishnah was completed in this region in 210 CE under the supervision of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi ("Judah the Prince"). The Sanhedrin, the Jewish court, also fled from Jerusalem during the Great Jewish Revolt against Rome, and after several attempted moves in search of stability, eventually settled in Tiberias in about 150

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<sup>582</sup> To be fair, many more synagogues have been excavated in the northern parts of Israel than in the central area or the South, providing a higher chance of finding examples of this phenomenon here. Nevertheless, of the dozens of synagogues that have been excavated in Israel/Palestine outside of the Galilee and the Golan, not one contained floor deposits (see also the map on <https://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/>).

<sup>583</sup> This is mentioned by Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 222, note 35. It is unclear where they get this information from, but if true, then this is vital in understanding this specific deposit. If this is indeed a magico-religious deposit, this would be the only example of such a deposit below a beaten earth floor.

<sup>584</sup> This would not be far-fetched: the synagogue at 'En Gedi is in many other regards an exception as well: its mosaic floor, for example, does not have any biblical scenes or references to the Temple, but instead long inscriptions, making some scholars believe that the congregation was much more "conservative" than Jews elsewhere in the country (Levine 1981b).

CE. When Johanan bar Nappaha (also known as Rabbi Yochanan) moved to Tiberias, the city became the focus of Jewish religious scholarship in Palestine: it was here, for example, that the writings of the Jerusalem Talmud were compiled before the project was abandoned sometime in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century. Rabbinic influence undoubtedly impacted the surrounding Galilean communities.<sup>585</sup> For example, at the synagogue of Huqoq in the Galilee, floor mosaics were discovered depicting biblical and non-biblical scenes, preliminary dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup>-early 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>586</sup> The exact interpretation of some of the mosaics, like the “Elephant Mosaic,” is still debated,<sup>587</sup> but one scene clearly portrays the Pharaoh’s Soldiers Drowning in the Red Sea.<sup>588</sup> According to Magness *et al.*, this particular scene of the Red Sea was popular among rabbinic circles in Late Antiquity: “The predatory fish in the panels at the two sites [Huqoq and Wadi Hamam] likely were intended to embody the sea’s power to consume and then disgorge the drowning soldiers, a theme that may be alluded to in the Babylonian Talmud (and is made explicit in the medieval rabbinic commentarial tradition).”<sup>589</sup> They also point out that “several rabbinic sources link the punishment of the Egyptians at the sea to a series of other groups or individuals from whom God also exacts measure-for-measure punishment for their hubris,

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<sup>585</sup> In this time period and beyond. In fact, even in the 6th century Tiberias was still the seat of Jewish religious learning; we know that Bishop Simeon of Bet-Arsham urged the Christians of Palestine to seize the leaders of Judaism in Tiberias, to put them to the rack, and to compel them to command the Jewish king, Dhu Nuwas, to desist from persecuting the Christians in Najran (Assemani 2002, i. 379).

<sup>586</sup> Magness *et al.* 2014; Britt and Boustan 2017; Magness *et al.* 2018; Magness 2021.

<sup>587</sup> Britt and Boustan 2017; Erlich 2018; Fine 2018; Gordon and Weiss 2018; Talgam 2018.

<sup>588</sup> Magness *et al.* 2018, pp. 102–106.

<sup>589</sup> Magness *et al.* 2018, p. 106. Here, the authors refer to *b. Pesah* 118b.

including notably the generation of the flood and those who built the tower of Babel,”<sup>590</sup> panels that also appear on the Huqoq floor. In the end they conclude “If approached with caution, these and other correspondences between visual and textual evidence may enable scholars to make progress regarding the vexed question of how to understand the relationship between rabbinic literature and late antique synagogues.”<sup>591</sup> Another example of possible rabbinic influence on local art and architecture can be found at Sepphoris, where the early 5<sup>th</sup> century synagogue depicts a basket of the first fruits on its mosaic floor. This basket, however, contains items not mentioned in the biblical commandment on the first fruits (Deut 26), but instead shows species that are mentioned in the rabbinic traditions.<sup>592</sup> In the synagogue at Wadi Hamam a floor mosaic depicts a maritime scene with a temple structure next to chariots and horses drowning in the Red Sea. According to the excavator, this temple could be a depiction of Ba’al-Zephon, a place where, according to the rabbinic traditions, the Egyptians worshipped Ba’al.<sup>593</sup> Last, the mosaic floor discovered in the synagogue at Rehob displays a 29-line halakhic inscription, while the columns further had halakhic writings painted on them.<sup>594</sup> Thus, while we previously stated that rabbis might not have much involvement with synagogue

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<sup>590</sup> *t. Soṭah* 3:6–19; *Mek. R. Ish. Shirata* 2; *Mek. R. Sim. b. Yoh.* 28.1.

<sup>591</sup> Magness *et al.* 2018, p. 106. In another article from 2018, Adi Erlich further interprets the arcade on the Elephant Panel, depicting a Jewish leader seated on a throne in the central arch flanked by eight young men, as the seminary of Rabbi Judah the patriarch seminary or his court, further linking the mosaic to the rabbis of early Antiquity (Erlich 2018, pp. 554–555).

<sup>592</sup> Weiss 2000; Leibner 2016, p. 143.

<sup>593</sup> Leibner 2016, pp. 146–151. This scene is also mentioned by Magness *et al.* in comparison with the Huqoq Red Sea scene (Magness *et al.* 2018, pp. 105-106.), indicating that, according to them, there existed a shared visual culture in the broader Galilean region.

<sup>594</sup> Sussman 1982; Vitto 2015.

life in Late Antiquity on a practical level, people living in this region were clearly familiar with rabbinic sources, rabbinic stories, and rabbinic laws that were being redacted in their region (and the other way around).<sup>595</sup> As Uzi Leibner states, “Rabbinic literature, therefore, cannot be seen as a reflection of the world of a marginal and isolated elite only, but also contains many traditions that were shared with wider Jewish society.”<sup>596</sup> Thus, if the destruction or removal of the tithing coins from circulation is indeed a Tannaitic halakhic tradition, Galilee would have been the ideal fertile ground for this new synagogue tradition to take root.<sup>597</sup>

But why at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century? While it is true that the main corpus of rabbinic literature was written between the first and fourth century CE, including references to the changed attitudes concerning tithing, and the tradition could thus have started much earlier, many of the classical Midrashim (such as *Genesis Rabbah*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, *Pesiqta de-Rab Kahana*, etc.) were only compiled in the middle to late 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>598</sup> These later texts contain multiple references to synagogues containing the *shekhinah*, or God’s presence, reflecting the idea that the buildings were sacred and on par with the Temple; a process called *templization*

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<sup>595</sup> As for the Diaspora synagogues: we know that the rabbis had pupils who would travel outside of the country to teach the halakhic traditions. Perhaps some of these pupils ended up in Ostia or Sardis, influencing the local Jewish congregation with their opinions on tithing. This is, of course, very speculative.

<sup>596</sup> Leibner 2016, p. 141.

<sup>597</sup> To confirm our theory, it would of course be ideal to find floor deposits in ancient synagogues in Tiberias itself. Unfortunately, since Tiberias has been inhabited continuously, most remains from Late Antiquity have been destroyed. The only ancient synagogue that has been intensively excavated here, Hammath Tiberias, had multiple phases with several repairs to the mosaic floor, making it unknown if coins were placed under the floor.

<sup>598</sup> Wilfand 2014, p. 13, no. 34; Leibner 2016, p. 142.

or *Imitatio Templi*.<sup>599</sup> As Fine states: “The relation between synagogues and the Temple became so basic to Jewish conceptions that sources go as far as to treat the biblical Tabernacle as a kind of big synagogue and the Ark of the Covenant as a Torah Shrine.”<sup>600</sup> Thus, coin deposits reflect the development of a concept connecting the synagogue and temple. Perhaps this idea of sacredness also became more prominent because of the growing competition with Christianity during this period. While Christians had, of course, been around for many centuries, it was only during the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries that Palestine went through a process of Christianization of space.<sup>601</sup> Connections between Christian traditions and specific sites in Palestine were made which established the pilgrimage routes in Galilee. Churches and monasteries were built, attracting Christians from around the Mediterranean to visit the region. Starting in the late 4<sup>th</sup> to early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, this also included the eastern Galilee and around the Sea of Galilee.<sup>602</sup> This process happened before the eyes of the Galilean population and undoubtedly impacted their attitudes concerning “sacred sites.” Seeing Christian holy spaces pop up around the region might have influenced their attitudes towards their own spaces of prayer and religious learning: synagogues. As Levine states:

“The fact that churches were also being referred to as “holy” or compared to a temple generally, and to the Jerusalem temple in particular, may have motivated Jews to make similar assertions regarding synagogue sanctity ... The synagogue would have provided a setting for the Jewish community to

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<sup>599</sup> Branham 1995; Fine 1996, 2005; Levine 2000, p. 246; 2005. References to the Shekhinah are found in older rabbinic literature but appear with much greater frequency after the 4<sup>th</sup> century. See, for example, *Deut. Rabbah* 7:2; *Lev. Rabbah* 11:7; *Midrash Tehillim* 84:4-6; *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* 28:8.

<sup>600</sup> Fine 1996, p. 32.

<sup>601</sup> Levine 2000, pp. 242–248; Ben-Eliyahu 2019, pp. 145–147.

<sup>602</sup> Aviam 1999, pp. 297–298, in which he states that by the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, the status quo [between Christians and Jews] changed as “in the Lower Galilee, no border between Christians and Jews could be distinguished.”



express whatever disappointment and despair it felt, on the one hand, and its longings and hopes, on the other. What they were powerless to realize in the political realm, Jews might have hoped to achieve within the confines of their synagogues, albeit in an associative and symbolic vein.” (Levine 2000, pp. 245–246)

Thus, the floor deposit tradition was the result of the collective commemorative attitude towards the sacredness of the space and halakhic choices concerning tithing sparked by particular groups in Northern Galilee and the Golan.

Late antiquity was also the era when the new literary genre of the *piyyut* flourished.<sup>603</sup> These poems were created to substitute for, adorn, or preface a passage from the Jewish liturgy or a liturgical rite and were meant to be read out loud in the synagogue. *Piyyutim* display deep familiarity with rabbinic traditions of interpretation and their rhetorical characteristics. Recent scholarly work by Laura Lieber and Michael D. Swartz has been exploring the connections between *piyyutim* and magic.<sup>604</sup> According to them, poetry recited in synagogues could possess intrinsic power. The poet Yannai, for example, who lived in the Galilee in the late 5th-early 6th century, and who is considered the father of *piyyut*, offered his community potent conceptual magic by praying to contain and purge the dark impulses of humankind.<sup>605</sup> The language in his poems echoes the phrasing of the magical language on the Aramaic magic bowls and amulets. In other words, synagogues were the perfect environment for religion, sacredness, and magic to come together at this exact moment.

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<sup>603</sup> On *piyyutim*, their development and recitation, see also Münz-Manor 2013.

<sup>604</sup> For example, Lieber 2018, 2019 (a forthcoming article seems to go even deeper into this topic, entitled: “Late Antique Liturgical Poetry at the Intersection of Ritual, Magic, and Art,” in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*) and Swartz 2018.

<sup>605</sup> Lieber 2019.

Finally, the Jewish Patriarchate, the leading Jewish institution in the Late Roman Empire, was abolished by emperor Theodosius II in 429 CE.<sup>606</sup> Scholarship is divided on when the Patriarchate emerged as a prominent communal institution, but we know that by the third century CE, the patriarchal authority was extended to various spheres of Jewish society in Palestine as well as in the Diaspora communities, including a measure of involvement in synagogue affairs.<sup>607</sup> The 4th century witnessed a dramatic rise in the prestige and standing of the office, reaching its peak in the late 4th–early 5th centuries.<sup>608</sup> During this time, the Patriarchate and urban aristocracy were often in close alliance, dominating Jewish communal affairs.<sup>609</sup> Imperial laws of the 390s recognized the patriarch’s jurisdiction over the *primates* (leaders) of the Jews throughout the empire, who in turn were authorized to legislate and judge in matters of Jewish religious, but not civil, law.<sup>610</sup> Decrees issued by several Late Roman emperors attest to the authority of the patriarchs in a wide range of synagogue matters as well.<sup>611</sup> At the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Patriarchate disappeared, perhaps in connection with the growing power of the church. Unfortunately, there is no formal declaration

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<sup>606</sup> Levine 2000, pp. 454–465; 2018.

<sup>607</sup> Levine 1979, pp. 654–659, 2013; Schwartz 2001, pp. 112–116.

<sup>608</sup> Levine 1996.

<sup>609</sup> This alliance can be seen in the Hammath Tiberias synagogue, where the patrons of the building are identified in the Greek inscriptions (which contain Greek and Latin names, e.g., Iouillos, Zoilos, Maximos). As some of the most wealthy and acculturated residents of Tiberias, these men also held official positions in the synagogue or community. The main donor to this building, for example, one Severus, is identified twice as “a protégé (θρηπτικός) of the Illustrious Patriarchs” (Dothan 1962, 1963a, 1963b, 1968, 1983, 2000; Levine 2018).

<sup>610</sup> Schwartz 2001, p. 117.

<sup>611</sup> For examples, see Levine 2000, pp. 461–463.

of its abolition,<sup>612</sup> but a law dated to 429 CE indicates that the Patriarchate had already ceased to exist and stipulates that all funds previously collected by the patriarch were now to be given to the two Sanhedrins of Palestine.<sup>613</sup> Not much research has been conducted on the consequences of the disappearance of the Patriarchate in Galilee, but one result could have been the loosening grip of Jewish leaders and elites on the synagogue and its rituals. Perhaps this lack of oversight opened up space for new traditions to arise. More scholarship on the direct and indirect consequences of the abolition of the Patriarchate on the synagogue and its rituals could shed more light on this in the future.

But what about the synagogues in Galilee where no floor deposits have been found, such as Gush Halav, Nabratein, Huqoq, Meiron, Khirbet Qana, or H. Shema' in the Lower Galilee; in Magdala, Wadi Hamam, Horvat Amudim, and Hammath Tiberias in the eastern Lower Galilee; and in Gamla and Majduliyya in the western Golan Heights?<sup>614</sup> There are several explanations possible for the lack of such deposits in these particular sites. The first one is chronological. If the phenomenon only started in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, then these synagogues were established (long) before this period: from the Second Temple period (Magdala, Gamla, and probably Majduliyya) until the Late Roman period (the other sites), before the practice appeared. And while it is true that we have evidence of repairs or

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<sup>612</sup> The only thing we know is that Gamaliel VI, the last nasi, died in 425 CE without leaving a son as an heir.

<sup>613</sup> Levine 2018 (online source). The Theodosian Code 16.8.29 states: "The Primates of the Jews, who are nominated in the Sanhedrins of either of the provinces of Palestine or stay in other provinces, shall be forced to pay all that they had received as tax since the cessation of the Patriarchs." (Translation by Linder 1987, no. 53, pp. 320–323).

<sup>614</sup> See also Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, pp. 223–224.

renovations at some of these sites, these probably happened when the practice was already in its decline or had disappeared, such as the later phases of Nabratein<sup>615</sup> and Hammath Tiberias.<sup>616</sup> Another possible explanation is that different communities adopted these beliefs to varying degrees – some abstaining from them, perhaps because they (or a local synagogue leader) did not agree with the magical connotation of the coins, or because they believed tithing coins should not be disposed of in this matter. Palestine in Late Antiquity was a complex sociopolitical and religious melting pot, with different forms of Judaism inhabiting the same territories: perhaps some clung to rabbinic instructions, while others did not.<sup>617</sup> However, due to the lack of direct archeological or textual evidence these theories must remain speculative. What we do know is that there does not seem to be a link between the *type* of synagogue building and the presence of floor deposits: they appear in Galilean-type synagogues (like Capernaum), as well as in Transitional synagogues (like Hammath Tiberias), and Byzantine synagogues (like Beth Alpha).<sup>618</sup>

Pinpointing the end of the phenomenon is difficult due to the lack of archaeological evidence. To date, no synagogues have been excavated in Israel/Palestine that can be dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, or post-Muslim conquest. Whatever may have been the reason(s), it seems that

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<sup>615</sup> Dated to 564 CE (Meyers and Meyers 2009, pp. 63–67).

<sup>616</sup> Dated to the late 6<sup>th</sup>-early 7<sup>th</sup> century (Magness 2005a, p. 10).

<sup>617</sup> See, for example, Neusner 1994; Satlow 2006.

<sup>618</sup> These groups are based on the latest typological division made by Magness (Magness 2021).

synagogue construction came to a halt at the end of Late Antiquity and with that, synagogue floor deposits ceased as well.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

This study began as an exploration of coin deposits found under the floors of ancient synagogues from Late Antiquity in Israel/Palestine, as well as in the diaspora. Why were these coins placed there? Can we come up with possible hypotheses that would explain their function? When did this phenomenon start and when did it end? Can we see specific geographical clusters? Unsatisfied with the explanations that had been offered in the past, as well as with the lack of a cohesive overview of the different deposits under discussion, the main focus of my project quickly became the building of a comprehensive database that would assemble all the buildings in which any kind of coin deposit has been found, as well as the assembling of an in-depth written overview of all the deposits and their individual coins. In the end, I was able to compile a corpus or catalogue of all known synagogue coin deposits, collected in the appendix, which served as a basis for further inquiry.

In order to select which deposits to include, and which ones to discard, however, I first had to set up certain parameters. First, it was important that the deposits were found in a *synagogue*. Seeing that the identification of an archaeological building as a synagogue is not always as straightforward as one would hope, this required a chapter on what a synagogue is, how it can be recognized in the archaeological record, and what its main architectural features are. Second, in order to be able to date the placement of the deposits, it was also important to

correctly *date* our synagogue buildings. A separate subchapter was devoted to an overview of past and present scholarship concerning the dating of ancient synagogue buildings, and my methodology used in this project to assess these dates (and correct them). Third, I had to decide what we mean by *deposit*. For this project, I discarded the single coins that can be found at any archaeological site from Late Antiquity, but instead focused only on deposits that had 10 coins or more, found in the same locus.<sup>619</sup> This meant I had to discard certain “deposits” that had been identified by other scholars, like Rachel Hachlili, as synagogue deposits, as they did not adhere to my criteria.

After I choose which deposits to keep, and thus which coins to look at, I thought it important to describe what coins are, how they can be read, how they tend to be excavated, and how they are cleaned, preserved, analyzed, and published. As I consider myself a public humanist, and this project will be placed on an open-access website, it was crucial to me that anyone could follow my story, no matter their academic background. Thus, a separate chapter was dedicated to a (very brief) history of coin and hoard studies and a survey of how to read and interpret coins. After this was established, however, some issues that I encountered in my research had to be acknowledged, like the lack of coherent excavation techniques across excavation sites, which influenced the amount of coins that could be found at a certain site; the difficulty in analyzing certain coins (especially small bronze ones from the Byzantine period), which influenced how many coins could be read and published in the past; and the lack of a systematic publication method concerning coins, which influenced the amount of information

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<sup>619</sup> With the exception of Sumaqa, Deposit 2 which only contained 3 coins, but these were found in a unique context of a possible *genizah*.

about the context and content of the deposits that could be discerned from the excavation reports. Especially for older excavations, these problems could not always be overcome, despite a close reading of all published reports, checking the IAA database, and/or talking to the original archaeologists and excavators.

Despite these obstacles, in the end, I was able to compile a substantial database of information, which now contains 24 buildings, 57 deposits, and 44,254 coins, and which can be found online at [www.anciensynagoguecoins.com](http://www.anciensynagoguecoins.com).

The next step in my analysis was trying to group the separate deposits according to certain criteria. As it soon became clear that one overarching theory would not be able to explain the many different deposits I encountered, I decided to split the deposits up according to three different attributes: the arrangement of the coins within the deposit (*descriptive*), the permanency of the deposit (*retrievability*), and its function (*interpretative*). Thus, each deposit was analyzed in three different ways, creating a new mix-and-match method, which I hope will allow future researchers to more easily place their discovered deposit into a distinctive category. Determining the description and the retrievability of each deposit was (relatively) easy and could often be efficiently established through a close reading of the excavation reports or the published maps and plans of the site. The problem, however, lay in the interpretation. After spending considerable time looking at the deposits, I decided to split the 57 deposits up into six different categories (with the seventh category being accidental losses, which I did not include in my catalogue): votive offerings and *genizot*, charity hoards or *tzedakah*, treasuries, emergency hoards, post-destruction offerings, and magico-religious deposits connected to tithing money.



My last goal of this project was to then place these different categories in their specific historical context of Late Antique Judaism and explore the different roles coins and coin deposits could have played within the synagogues of Palestine and the diaspora. Chapter Four provided an in-depth overview of the first five (or six) categories while Chapter Five was entirely dedicated to the final category, coin deposits connected to magico-religious practices, seeing that this is the category that contains the floor deposits that have been mostly discussed in synagogue coin deposit scholarship, and was the initial impetus for this project. In these two chapters, I explored each functional category in detail by looking both at written sources and archaeological remains in order to better understand the purpose of the specific deposits. I ended each category by laying out the specific characteristics I believe a deposit needs to have in order to fall under the specific category, and I then placed every deposit from my catalogue under one of the categories. Finally, I developed interactive statistical graphs and tables to go along with each category, which users can manipulate on the website to get more specific information about each grouping.

This project's main question *What was the function of the coins found under the floors of certain ancient synagogues?* is difficult to answer because of a lack of textual sources describing the phenomenon. Nevertheless, based on careful research of Jewish attitudes concerning magic and apotropaic devices in Late Antiquity, and a historical analysis of tithing habits after the Second Temple destruction, I believe I was able to answer the question: the coins were symbolic tithes, taken out of economic circulation and set aside as sacred. They were added to the synagogue building during construction as a way of giving back to God what

belongs to God, simultaneously blessing the building and its visitors, and protecting the building against natural or supernatural harm.

## APPENDIX: THE CATALOGUE

As there are so many buildings in this study, a system of categorization had to be established. I choose to organize the different synagogue buildings according to their region, as this seems to be the least controversial method.<sup>620</sup> For the purpose of this study, I divided ancient Palestine into 10 distinct regions from north to south: the Golan Heights, Upper Galilee, Lower Galilee, the Carmel Region, the Beth She'an Valley, the Coastal Plain, the Judean Shephelah, the Judean Desert, the Jordan Rift Valley, and the Negev.<sup>621</sup> I have also included two Diaspora synagogues: Sardis in Turkey and Ostia in Italy.

For each region, I provide an overview of each coin deposit found in a synagogue building. Each case is approached in approximately the same manner. First, grid references and coordinates for each synagogue are given. All map grid references are based on the *New Israel Grid (NIG)* and listed by latitude and longitude.<sup>622</sup> The standard global coordinates, also listed by latitude and longitude, are accurate to within one second and can be accessed using Google Earth. I

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<sup>620</sup> I could also have chosen to organize the synagogues chronologically, starting with the oldest buildings and working my way up to the latest ones. However, the exact dates for the construction of most ancient synagogues are still debated (see chapter 2.4).

<sup>621</sup> These regions have been chosen by me for the purpose of this study. Ancient Palestine is generally divided into three north-south zones: the coastal plain in the west (next to the Mediterranean Sea), the Jordan Rift Valley in the east (forming the border with Jordan), and the Shephelah in the middle (the "corridor" between the coastal sand zone and the base of the hill country to the east). Within these zones, there are smaller clusters of regions, mostly focused on a mountain range or desert, with the Golan Height mountains in the north and the Negev desert in the south.

<sup>622</sup> See Stern 1993-2008: vol. 5.

have also implemented these global coordinates in the database to produce accurate site maps for this study.

Then, I briefly discuss each individual synagogue building. This discussion includes a short overview of the excavation history of the site, an attempt to determine the construction date of the building (and its sub-phases), and an overview of the layout of the building (including a map or drawing) in its different phases. The main features of the synagogue hall are outlined to give readers an idea of the context of the coin deposit(s). I also provide a full bibliography for each building. Following this, I present an overview of each coin deposit found in the synagogue building. The date of the discovery is provided, and the context of the coin deposit is described in as much detail as possible. This is the first time that all details of each deposit in synagogue buildings are brought together; every text published on a deposit has been consulted to form as complete a picture as possible picture.

The final part of each case takes a deeper look at the contents of the deposit. Here, I focus on the individual coins, discussing their descriptions, and when and where they were minted, illustrated by a graphic table. The specifics of the coins will be provided through links to the online database on the website. The advantage of using an external database is that it frees up space in this study: links to the full online database can be provided where needed, while in this dissertation only tables and conclusions are given.<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> Some of the tables might be hard to read in the paper dissertation because of their size: the tables can also be found on the website, where the reader can zoom in on any particulars.

For this project, I have consulted all available and published information relevant to the deposits discussed below. In most cases, the research was aided by synagogue and site catalogues that have become increasingly standard over the years, including: Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger's *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea* (1916), Frowald Hüttenmeister and Gottfried Reeg's *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel* (1977), Marilyn Joyce Segal Chiat's *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture* (1982), Zvi Ilan's *Ancient Synagogues in the Land of Israel* (1991), Claudine Dauphin's *La Palestine Byzantine: Peuplement et Populations* (1998), David Milson's *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine* (2007), Chad Spigel's *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities. Methodology, Analysis and Limits* (2012), Rachel Hachlili's *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art: New Discoveries and Current* (2013), and Steven Werlin's *Living on the Edge: Ancient Synagogues of Southern Palestine, 300-800 CE* (2015). I have also consulted the Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website (<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/>), which provided me with further bibliography and images.

Preliminary and final publication reports on each synagogue building supplement these catalogues. In some cases, numismatists have published specialized articles on all coins discovered at the site or the synagogue; these articles have proven to be of utmost importance for this study and one can only hope that in the future all excavations will make the effort to publish their coins in full.

In the fall of 2019, I travelled to Jerusalem where I was granted full access to the IAA Coin Department's digital database, which stores detailed information on about 90% of the coins

included in this study.<sup>624</sup> I was also able to visit to the IAA scientific archive at the Rockefeller Museum, where I had access to the IAA's written materials, which contain archival documents on excavations conducted in Israel since the time of the British Mandate. In some cases, these documents provided me with information or maps and plans of the synagogue buildings and their coin deposits that have never been published before. These documents have also been added to my catalogue.<sup>625</sup> Finally, I conducted in-person interviews with some of the excavators and I emailed scholars who are or have been working on the synagogue materials; their insights have been included in this overview.

## 1. The Golan Heights

### A. Dabiyye

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/dabiyye>

**Longitude:** 33.00758383892228 **Latitude:** 35.7275390625

**Bibliography:** Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 271–272; Ma'oz Z. 1983, "Dabiyye," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, Vol. 83, p. 2 (Hebrew); Ariel D. 1991, "Coins from the Synagogue at Dabbiye," in: *'Atiqot*, Vol. 20, pp. 74–80; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, p. 80 (Hebrew); Killebrew A. 1991, "Pottery from Dabiyya," in: *'Atiqot*, Vol. 20, pp. 66–73; Ma'oz Z. 1991, "Excavations in the Ancient Synagogue at Dabiyye," in: *'Atiqot*, Vol. 20, pp. 49–65; Urman D. 1995b, "Public Structures and Jewish Communities in the Golan Heights," in: Urman D. and Flesher P. (eds.), *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, pp. 447–452; Dauphin C. 1998, *La Palestine Byzantine*, Vol. 3, p. 652; Urman D. 1995, "Public Structures and Jewish Communities in the Golan Heights," in: *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Vol. 2, pp. 447–452; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 341–342;

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<sup>624</sup> This three-month stay in Israel/Palestine was pivotal for my study and I wish to thank Donald Tzvi Ariel, Gabriela Bijovsky, and Yaniv Sfez for their assistance: these numismatists not only helped me to access and process the coin data from the database but also provided me with unpublished internal reports, which often turned out to be central to the coin deposit's analysis. Without their help, this project would not have been possible.

<sup>625</sup> I would like to thank Johann Najjar at IAA scientific archives for his time and effort by helping me to find the documentation I needed during my many visits to the archives.

Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 181–185; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 111–112, 177, 544, 561; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 43–46 (Hebrew)

**Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/dabiyye/>

- The Archaeological Survey of Israel:

[http://www.antiquities.org.il/survey/new/default\\_en.aspx?pid=5734](http://www.antiquities.org.il/survey/new/default_en.aspx?pid=5734)

**Date Excavated:** 1982

**Excavator:** Zvi Uri Ma'oz

**Date of Construction of the Building:** (early) 5<sup>th</sup> century <sup>626</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** The settlement occupies two hills; the synagogue is located on top of the larger, but less settled southern hill, outside the village proper. The synagogue is the southernmost building at the ancient site. <sup>627</sup>

**Description of the Building:** <sup>628</sup> In Phase II of the building's history, the complex was a basalt synagogue with a basilical layout and two rows of probably four columns each. <sup>629</sup> The main entrance was in the south wall (slightly off center to the east), and a smaller door was located in the north end of the west wall. There might have been two-tiered benches along the northern, eastern, and western walls. <sup>630</sup> The synagogue had a basalt flagstone floor, which is preserved only in the west aisle and along the south wall. Some decorative motifs were carved

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<sup>626</sup> The building originally was dated to the late fifth or early sixth century by Zvi Ma'oz, based on his limited one week-long salvage excavation in August of 1982. However, after Killebrew and Ariel examined the pottery and coins from the excavations more closely, they concluded that "The sherds and coins recovered from the construction fills at Dabiyye would indicate a *terminus post quem* of the early fifth century CE or later for the construction of the synagogue" (Killebrew 1991, p. 67 and Ariel 1991, p. 78).

<sup>627</sup> Ma'oz 1991, pp. 49-50. The site had already been surveyed by Dan Urman in 1968 and 1972, during which remains of the synagogues still standing up 2-3 courses high were discovered (Urman 1995, p. 447)

<sup>628</sup> All descriptions in this catalogue are mainly based on Spigel 2012a, with additions and remarks from excavation reports published by the excavators of each site.

<sup>629</sup> Ma'oz 1991: in Phase I, the synagogue was in use as a stable, probably beginning in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE until 1967. Phase III was an orthogonal system of walls with unclear function pre-dating the synagogue building. It must be noted, however, that the building has only been excavated in an "explorative" manner: the entire building has yet to be excavated, and any conclusions on layout and dates must thus be tentative. In fact, it has been suggested that the building was not a synagogue at all and that no conclusions on the function(s) of the building should be made before the structural complex is excavated in its entirety (Urman 1995, p. 452).

<sup>630</sup> Urman doubts this suggestion as he sees no evidence for this in Ma'oz's reconstructed plans and observations (Urman 1995, p. 450). However, I believe Ma'oz's interpretation is correct.

on stones and doorways. Two inscribed seven-branched menorahs were also discovered, carved into a stone block found outside the synagogue. There may have been a wooden Torah shrine west of the southern door.<sup>631</sup> The layout of the building and the possible Torah shrine suggest an orientation towards Jerusalem in the south wall. Many coins were discovered in the foundation fill beneath missing segments of the flagstone pavement (especially in L 108, 114, 115, and 117, where the excavations penetrated deeply into the fill), but two sealed and thus undisturbed loci filled with coins were also excavated at the site: L 124 and 129.<sup>632</sup>

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1982

**Deposit Location:** In the middle of the western aisle, hidden under floor flagstones, in a compact brown earth layer

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 124 in the Phase II synagogue (Basket 1089)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** In the middle of the west aisle of the synagogue, four flagstones each measuring 0.35 X 0.90 m were removed for a test probe, for a total area of 0.70 X 1.50 m.<sup>633</sup> Directly below the flagstones was a compact brown earth layer a few centimeters thick, which contained 312 coins.<sup>634</sup> A few of these were stuck by corrosion to the underside of the flagstones. Among the group was a gold issue of the emperor Gratian, dated 367-375 CE. Underlying the earth layer was a fill of rounded stones and compact earth (Locus 129), which contained 24 more coins.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The coins found in Locus 124 were published in 1991 by Ariel.<sup>635</sup> Of the 312 bronze coins that were discovered in this context, he identified 68, meaning that

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<sup>631</sup> Urman is skeptical about this hypothesized shrine and accuses Ma'oz of inventing an imaginary wooden ark, a modification Ma'oz also made to the synagogue of 'En Nashut, which he had excavated a couple of years prior.

<sup>632</sup> See Ariel 1991 for a published overview of 705 cleaned coins found at the site. It thus seems that the two deposits described here are not separate clusters but belonged to a "coin layer" that probably was spread out over a much larger surface under the flagstone floor of the synagogue.

<sup>633</sup> Ma'oz 1991, p. 55. The dirt was sifted but no metal detector was used (Ahipaz 2015, p. 46).

<sup>634</sup> Hachlili 2013, p. 544: she mentions 336 bronze coins in total, thus combining L 124 and 129 (see below) as if they are one group.

<sup>635</sup> Ariel 1991, p. 75.



234 of them were, according to his published analysis, unidentifiable. In his catalogue, the coins range in date between 335-341 CE and 395-408 CE. However, in the IAA database, a total of 206 coins are listed as coming from Locus 124 and have been identified. This leaves us with 105 coins that were not, or could not be identified, and are missing from the database.<sup>636</sup> Another problem is that the dates and descriptions of the coins in the IAA database are dissimilar from the ones published in the 1991 report. Thus, the published catalogue seems to be unreliable. In the database for this project, it has been decided to follow the IAA records and not the 1991 report.<sup>637</sup> The reader must use caution when using the information about this deposit.

Fig. 3 summarizes the coins from Dabiyye, Locus 124.<sup>638</sup> The coins range in date between 337-341 CE and 402-408 CE, or a short span of half a century (Late Roman I). The minting places of most of the coins could not be read but the analyzed coins came from Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Cyzicus and Thessalonica. Most of the coins could not be read in full, but where possible, LRBC parallels have been provided by the IAA.

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<sup>636</sup> The IAA database also lists three coins as coming from Dabiyye, but without a locus number. It is possible that some of these three coins came from L 124 or 129, however, the order of the index cards in the system makes it more likely that they came from L108.

<sup>637</sup> Decided after personal communication with Donald Ariel: he does not know what went wrong either and does not remember how he came up with the exact analyses of the published coins.

<sup>638</sup> The conspectus tables in this study have been made in black-and-white for easy printing and to accommodate people with color blindness. If you would like to use any of the tables provided here, or would like the tables in color, please feel free to get in touch with me. The tables can also be found on the website, where they can be made larger, and manipulated to either show the Locus or the Emperor, and the End Date or the Full Date of each coin.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place					Unknown	Total
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Thessalonica		
124	Null						105	105
	341						2	2
	346						2	2
	350						1	1
	354			1				1
	361						13 2	13 2
	364						1	1
	375	1	2		1	1	11 2	16 2
	383		2	1	1		5	9
	386					1		1
	392		1			1	12 1	14 1
	395	1	3 1	2 1	1		18 1	25 3
	408						5 108	5 108
Grand Total		2	8 1	4 1	3	3	70 219	90 221

**Date Certainty**  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 3. DABIYYE, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF DABIYYE, LOCUS 124. 312 COINS ARE BRONZE, ONE IS GOLD**

## **2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1982

**Deposit Location:** In the middle of the western aisle, hidden under floor flagstones in a fill layer of rounded stones below Locus 124.

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 129 in the Phase II synagogue (Baskets 1097, 1102)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** In the middle of the west aisle of the synagogue, four flagstones each measuring 0.35 X 0.90 m were removed for a test probe, for a total area of 0.70 X 1.50 m.<sup>639</sup> Directly below the flagstones was a compact brown earth layer a few centimeters thick.

<sup>639</sup> Ma'oz 1991, p. 55.

Underlying the earth layer was a fill of rounded stones and compacted earth (Locus 129), which contained 24 coins. Underneath this, a system of walls belonging to Phase III was found.

**Container Present?** No.

**Description of Coins:** The coins found in Locus 129 were published in 1991 by Ariel.<sup>640</sup> Of the 24 bronze coins discovered in this context, he identified eight, meaning that 16 were, according to his published analysis, unidentifiable. In his catalogue, two coins could be dated to 367-375 CE, one coin to 375-392 CE, two coins to 383 CE, two coins to 383-395 CE, and one coin to 393-395 CE. However, in the IAA database, a total of 20 coins are listed as coming from Locus 129 and all 20 have been identified. This leaves us with only four coins that were not or could not be identified and are missing from the database.

Fig. 4 summarizes the coins from Dabiyye, Locus 129. The coins range in date between 341-346 CE and 324-408 CE, similar to Deposit 1. Only two minting places could be identified in this deposit: Alexandria and Antioch; however, only four coins were in such a condition that a minting place could be read. The identified coins are issues of Constantius II, Valens, Valentinian II, Theodosius I, and Arcadius. The index cards at the IAA do not provide full descriptions of the obverse and reverse sides of most coins; these were most likely illegible. When possible, however, LRBC parallels have been provided.

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<sup>640</sup> Ariel 1991, p. 75.

Locus/..	End Date..	Minting Place			Total
		Alexandria	Antioch	Unknown	
124	408		1		1
129	Null			4	4
	346			1	1
	361			1	1
	375			2	2
	378			1	1
	383		1		1
	392			1 1	1 1
	395	1	1	2	3 1
	408		1	7	8
Grand Total		1	1 3	8 12	10 15
<b>Date Certainty</b>					
■ Certain					
■ Uncertain					

FIGURE 4. DABIYYE, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF DABIYYE, LOCUS 129. ALL 24 COINS ARE BRONZE.

## B. Deir 'Aziz<sup>641</sup>

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/deir-aziz/>

Longitude: 32.86420345822077 Latitude: 35.71246737962893

**Bibliography:** Oliphant L. 1886, "New Discoveries," in: *Palestine Exploration Fund. Quarterly Statement*, January 1886, pp. 77–78; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 286–287; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, p. 81–82 (Hebrew); Ma'oz Z. 1995, *Ancient Synagogues in the Golan, Art and Architecture*, pp. 149–152 (Hebrew); Urman D. 1995, "Public Structures and Jewish Communities in the Golan Heights," in *Ancient synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Vol. 2, pp. 541–545; Ma'oz Z. Uri Z. and Ben-David H. 2003, "Deir 'Aziz 2000–2001," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, Vol. 115, pp. 10–11; Ma'oz Z. and Ben-David C. 2006, "New Finds in the Golan: A Synagogue at Deir Aziz," in: *Qadmoniyot*, Vol. 39, pp. 25–31 (Hebrew); Ahipaz N. 2007, "A Hoard of Byzantine *Solidi* from the Deir 'Aziz Synagogue," in: *INR*, Vol. 2, pp. 157–165; Ben-David C. 2007, "Golan Gem: The Ancient Synagogue of Deir Aziz," in: *BAR*, Vol. 33, No. 6, pp. 44–51; Ma'oz Z. and Ben-David C. 2008,

<sup>641</sup> I am grateful to Zvi Ma'oz, Chaim Ben-David, and Nili Ahipaz for helping me collect more information on this site. All were generous with their time, not only sharing their stories from the excavations with me, but also providing me with additional photos, maps, and even lists of coin analyses.

“Deir ‘Aziz,” in: *NEAEHL, Supplemental Volume*, pp. 1691–1692; Ma’oz Z. 2011, *Deir Aziz and Kanaf: the Architecture of Two Ancient Synagogues*, pp. 5–54; Spigel C. 2012, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 185–188; Ahipaz N. 2013, "Floor Foundation Coin Deposits in Byzantine–Period Synagogues," in: *Hoards and Genizot as Chapters in History*, pp. 63–70; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, p. 111–112, 186–187, 544–545, 584, 597; Maoz Z. 2013, "The Genizah in the Deir Aziz Synagogue on the Golan Heights," in: *Hoards and Genizot as Chapters in History*, pp. 70–75; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis (Hebrew); Ahipaz, N. and Leibner U. 2021, “Floor Deposits in Ancient Synagogues,” in: *Zion*, Vol. 86, No. 2, pp. 211–230 (Hebrew), Zingboym O. and Ben-David C. *Forthcoming*, “Deir ‘Aziz – Ancient Synagogue,” in: Levine L. *et al.* (eds.), *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Vol. 2

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/deir-aziz/>

- Hadashot Arkheologiyot, Vol. 123 (2011):

[http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1830](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1830)

**Date Excavated:** 1998-2004

**Excavators:** Zvi Uri Ma’oz and Chaim Ben-David

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: mid-6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>642</sup>  
Phase II: late 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>643</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** On a slope, halfway between the top of the village ruins and a spring in the valley.<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> Ma’oz and Chaim 2008, p. 1691 and Ma’oz 2011, p. 46 based on the coins found in the foundations (see below). However, this date has now been challenged by Oren Zingboym and Chaim Ben-David, based on renewed excavations at the site in 2014-2016 (Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 217: this new interpretation will be published in: Oren Zingboym and Chaim Ben David, “Deir ‘Aziz – Ancient Synagogue”, in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Vol. 2, Levine L. *et al.* (eds.) (in preparation)). The new theory is that the foundation of the basilica should be dated to the fourth century CE (perhaps to the years 358-368 CE, based on a Greek inscription that was found on fragments of a decorated arch that belonged to the Torah shrine and has been interpreted as representing the number of years since the destruction of the Second Temple (Ben-David 2007, p. 49)). This inscription has not been published yet.

<sup>643</sup> Ma’oz 2011, p. 47: based on the 14 gold coins found in the juglet buried in front of the “wall”/bemah (Deposit 2, see below). Ahipaz calls this building Stage 4 in her MA thesis, or the third phase of the building in her 2021 article: possible restorations after the earthquake of 551 CE (Ahipaz 2015, p. 33; Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 218). This date is based on the coin deposits found in the foundations of the floor in the western part of the building (Deposits 3 and 4, see below).

<sup>644</sup> Ma’oz and Ben-David 2008, p. 1691. This building was already discovered by Sir Laurence Oliphant, who visited the site with a Bedouin guide in 1885 (Oliphant 1886, pp. 76-77). It was surveyed by Urman who found the building

**Description of the Building:** The synagogue is an east-west hall with two rows of four columns in an east-west direction. The building had at least two phases in the Byzantine period.<sup>645</sup>

**Phase I:** The synagogue had two entrances to the building on the east side. Three rows of benches lined all the walls except between the Torah shrine and the southeast corner on the south wall.<sup>646</sup> Nine steps were found along the northern wall, which could have led to an upper gallery. The floor that currently occupies the eastern side might belong to this phase.<sup>647</sup> At the south edge of this side of the hall, the pavement does not reach the outer edge of a small “wall” that runs parallel to the south wall of the synagogue. This gap in the floor might indicate the existence of benches here in the first Phase, which were replaced by a “wall.” The “wall” does not serve any structural function and the excavators have suggested it was a *bemah*.

**Phase II:** a semi-circular apse was added to the west side of the southern wall with a diameter of 1.95 m and extending out of the wall for about 1.25 m. The floor of this niche consisted of 5 cm thick solid plaster and had a small (25 cm diameter) impression of a column, perhaps a base for a menorah or decoration for a Torah shrine. A platform was constructed in front of this apse, perhaps as the base for a wooden staircase going up to the apse.<sup>648</sup> At the interior right-hand corner of the apse was a tiny cabinet; as the cabinet was found empty, its function is unknown.<sup>649</sup> At this point, the synagogue had only one door in the eastern wall, slightly off center to the north. The stone slabs currently occupying the western side of the synagogue hall probably belonged to this phase.<sup>650</sup>

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 2004

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robbed of stones to serve as construction material for the nearby Arab-Syrian village and again by Ma'oz in 1979 (Ma'oz 2011, p. 5).

<sup>645</sup> Hachlili 2013, p. 113: Hachlili summarize the six different Phases in the synagogue building's history in total, as well as an earlier synagogue that was built on the same spot in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century: “Phases 1–2 served as a synagogue in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE; in Phase 3 parts of the building, especially the columns, were destroyed by the earthquake of 749; Phase 4 shows the rebuilding of the structure in the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and it still served then as a synagogue, according to Ben David, while Ma'oz suggests that the structure was turned into a church or monastery in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE (Ma'oz and Ben David 2006, p. 27). The last two Phases (5 and 6) continued in use, with various building changes, until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

<sup>646</sup> Ma'oz 2011, p. 24-25 suggests that the benches were made of *spolia* and were retrieved from an earlier synagogue in the village or from a synagogue in a nearby village.

<sup>647</sup> Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 218.

<sup>648</sup> Ma'oz 2011, p. 29.

<sup>649</sup> As far as I could tell, no excavation has been conducted underneath the plaster floor of the stone pavers of this apse.

<sup>650</sup> Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 218.

**Deposit Location:** Next to the benches along the northern wall of the synagogue, in the western half of the building.

**Archaeological Information:** Phase 1 of the synagogue building, Locus 175 (Basket 2002)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Unknown

**Deposit Type:** I?4

**Deposit Description:** In some areas of the western side of the synagogue's main hall no floor flagstones survived.<sup>651</sup> Thus, the excavators decided to dig below the floor level in these areas. In a trench dug next to the benches along the northern wall of the building, between the second northern column from the west and the northern bench, 2027 bronze coins were discovered as a group in a small, hewn pit covered by stone slabs.<sup>652</sup> The pit reached a depth of about 0.95 m below the floor level and was sealed off from the layer above it (which also contained coins; Deposit 3) by the stone blocks. Possibly, the deposit belonged to the first phase of the synagogue building.<sup>653</sup> This was the only pit covered by stones found in the building. Since the stone paving of the first synagogue was not preserved, it is unknown if the deposit could have been accessed by the users of the building.<sup>654</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The coins from this deposit were never published in full, but a preliminary report can be found in Nili Ahipaz's MA thesis of 2015.<sup>655</sup> According to her, 504 of the 2027 coins were legible.<sup>656</sup> Of those, 2% were Roman, 92% date to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and 6% could be dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> It should be noted that five stone slabs were also removed from the eastern half of the synagogue, but except for one worn and unidentifiable coin, no coins were found in the eastern part of the main hall (Ahipaz 2015, p. 14, p.31; Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 216).

<sup>652</sup> Ahipaz 2013, p. 64.

<sup>653</sup> Or to an additional phase preceding the second phase (Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 218).

<sup>654</sup> During later excavations at the site in (2014-2015, directed by Oren Zingboym as part of the preparation of the site to open it to the public) another 12 coins, similar in shape and size were found in this pit (Ahipaz 2015, p. 16). These coins were not cleaned yet when Nili Ahipaz wrote her MA thesis on the Deir 'Aziz coins in 2015 and they have, as far as I know, still not been published. I have tried several times to contact Oren Zingboym to get more information on these coins, but never heard back from him.

<sup>655</sup> Ahipaz 2015, pp. 22-25. Ahipaz told me that she is still working on the full publication.

<sup>656</sup> Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 216, however, states that 514 coins are legible.

<sup>657</sup> Ahipaz 2013, p. 64.

In the fall of 2019, Ahipaz gave me two lists of coins coming from L175, for a total of (only) 301 coins. Each list represented a different basket from in L175: one of them contained coins from Basket 1997 and the other from Basket 2002. This divide was made by Yehoshua Dray, the excavator of the coins, creating two groups: the coins found in Basket 2002 were discovered deeper in the ground than the coins in Basket 1997. However, after excavation it was determined that all these coins probably belonged to the same deposit, and they have been treated as one group in all further publications. In this dissertation project, the 301 identified coins provided by Ahipaz have been included (so 1726 coins have not been identified). However, none of these coins has been analyzed in full; we are not informed, for example, about the size, weight, axis, and obverse and reverse descriptions of most of the coins. The full publication rights still lie with Zvi Ma'oz, Chaim Ben-David, and Nili Ahipaz. Fig. 5 summarizes the coins from Deir 'Aziz, Locus 175. The coins range in date between 250-300 CE (Valerian) and 457-474 CE (Leo I).<sup>658</sup> Of the 301 coins, 1 comes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (250-300 CE (Valerian)), 208 are from the 4<sup>th</sup> century (69%), and 92 from the 5<sup>th</sup> century (30.5%). No coins of the 6<sup>th</sup> century could be identified, making this deposit older than the other coins deposits found at the site.

Most of the coins come from eastern mints (predominantly Antioch), with the exception of one coin dated to 316 CE (Constantine I) from Arles and one coin coming from Rome dated to 314 CE (Constantine I). One coin has been identified as a "Vandalic" imitation coin, dated to 408-498 CE: this coin is not mentioned in the MA thesis. On the other hand, the MA thesis mentions another coin that was not found in the lists (and thus has not been included here): a small issue bearing an image of Anastasius I, dated to 491-518 CE.

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<sup>658</sup> Ahipaz 2015 and Ahipaz and Leibner 2021 also mention a coin minted by Agrippa II in Tiberias in 84/85 CE, but this coin could not be found in the lists provided. Ahipaz writes "It is possible that this coin was in circulation for a long time, and integrated in the coin circulation of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE because of its shape and size." It is unclear what happened to this coin or if it should still be included in this locus.



Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place												Unknown	Total					
		Alexandria	Antioch	Antioch (?)	Arles	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nicomedia	Nicomedia (?)	Rome	Thessalonica	Tyre							
175	Null														1,726	1,726				
300												1				1				
314										1						1				
316					1											1				
335	1						1		2							4				
337			1													1				
341			1												2	3				
346			2												52	72				
350									1							1				
354							1									1				
361	1						2								14	17				
375												1			15	16				
382															1	1				
383	1		2	1			4	2	1						10	17				
386			1						2			1			4	8				
387					1											1				
388															1	1				
392			1			2	1					3			5	12				
395			12	1		2	2			1		1			78	96				
400			1												3	4				
402			1				1								4	6				
408			1			1	4		2						55	63				
423						1	1								1	3				
450			1			1	1								6	9				
454			1													1				
455															2	2				
457							1								1	2				
474															4	4				
498															1	1				
Grand Total		2	1	25	1	1	2	7	19	2	2	5	1	1	6	1	212	1,738	284	1,743

Date Certainty  
# Certain  
# Uncertain

**FIGURE 5. DEIR 'AZIZ, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF DEIR 'AZIZ, NEXT TO THE NORTHERN BENCHES. ALL 2027 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1998-2003

**Deposit Location:** In the interstices of the southern wall of the synagogue.

**Archaeological Information:** Phase 2 of the synagogue building, Locus 129.

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA4

**Deposit Description:** 14 gold coins were found in a pottery juglet without a neck in the dirt fill in the interstices of the repaired south wall of the synagogue.<sup>659</sup> This is the eastern area where the pavement was missing, in front of the “wall-*bemah*.” In this gap, broken molded

<sup>659</sup> Ahipaz 2007, pp. 157-158. In 2011, Ma’oz mentions only 11 coins found in this juglet. However, since Ahipaz identified 14 coins in her report and Ma’oz affirms in his 2013 article that there were 14 coins, Ma’oz’s number in his 2011 article should be understood as an error.

and decorated architectural fragments were also found, as well as fragments of a decorated arch with a Greek inscription. Ma'oz labels this deposit as part of an architectural *genizah*.<sup>660</sup> The juglet thus was discovered in an unsealed context. Perhaps it had been placed in the foundation for the benches in the first phase, and in the area for a portable *bemah* in the second phase of the synagogue building.<sup>661</sup>

**Container Present?** Yes: a pottery juglet without a neck

**Description of Coins:** This deposit of 14 gold solidi was published in 2007 by Nili Ahipaz. All the coins were dated to Justinian I (527-565 CE) and were minted in Constantinople.<sup>662</sup> The coins are classified into three chronological types: coins from the beginning of the reign of Justinian I (527-538 CE), coins dated to the middle of Justinian I's reign (538-545 CE), and coins dated to the latter part of Justinian I's reign (545-565 CE or 542-565 CE). The coins are well preserved, but a large number (coins 1, 3-4, 6, 8-9, 13-14) appear to have been intentionally bent, possibly to check the quality of the gold. All coins are the same VICTORIA AVCCC-type. Although all the coins come from the same mint, no die links could be discerned, indicating a collection over a longer period. The weight of the coins ranges from 4.26 grams to 4.51 grams, with an average of 4.37 grams.<sup>663</sup>

The deposit was stored at the IAA as a group under number 2008-511. The juglet was also kept, and pictures of it can be found in the IAA database under numbers B-125565 and B-125566.

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<sup>660</sup> Ma'oz and Ben-David 2008, pp. 1692-1693; Ma'oz 2013, pp. 71-72. In this last article, Ma'oz says that the "collection of architectural objects were buried beneath the bimah on which the Torah was read." He describes this (fixed) *bemah* as an elongated surface measuring 1.25 X 6.50 meters, demarcated by a row of stones, with just one course of stones on the floor, parallel to the southern wall. Besides the juglet, a decorated piece of an aedicular was discovered with a Greek inscription on it.

<sup>661</sup> Ahipaz 2007, p. 158: Ahipaz believes that the area where the bench was not preserved could have been the foundations for a *portable* *bemah*. Placed this way, the *bemah* would create an architectural symmetry with the Torah niche in the north wall. Whenever the portable *bemah* would be moved, the juglet underneath would become accessible. If true, then this would be a unique indication of a movable *bemah* in a synagogue space. We are familiar with portable Torah shrines, or chests (תִּבְיָה, *tevah*), from the early Tannaic writings (*m. Meg.* 4:3; Levine 2000, pp. 351-356), but we are less informed on movable *bemot*. Perhaps it was a wooden stage that could be brought in, or moved around, as mentioned in *Neh* 8:2.

<sup>662</sup> Ahipaz 2007, pp. 158-159. All coins have a CONOB mint-mark. Three coins show graffito marks, but their meaning is unknown. Graffiti on coins found in hoards became more common in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Bijovsky 2002, pp. 178-180).

<sup>663</sup> Bijovsky 2002, p. 178: Most scholars agree that the theoretical weight of the Byzantine solidus of 4.55 grams was generally not taken into consideration. 4.37 grams is a measurement that arrived from the Attic drachm, which was also 4.37 grams, and was used as a standard to control the weight of gold coins in circulation.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Constantinop..	Total
129	538	3	3
	545	3	3
	565	8	8
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Certain			

**FIGURE 6. DEIR 'AZIZ, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND IN A JUGLET IN AN INTERSTICE IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF DEIR 'AZIZ. ALL 14 COINS ARE GOLD.**

### **3. Deposit 3:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1998-2003

**Deposit Location:** In front of the niche in the southern wall.

**Archaeological Information:** Phase 2 of the synagogue building, Locus 134

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 234 coins were found in a deposit next to the niche that was probably intended for the Torah ark in the southern wall.<sup>664</sup> The coins were spread out over the surface and were found down to a depth of about 1 meter inside the floor foundation.<sup>665</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The coins from this deposit have not yet been published in full but are being prepared by Nili Ahipaz. A preliminary report of this deposit was given in her 2015 MA thesis in which she analyzed 104 legible coins. According to her, the deposit consists of low-denomination bronze coins, some dated to the fourth century (18%), most to the fifth (53%), and the latest to the mid-sixth century (24%).<sup>666</sup> In the fall of 2019, Ahipaz gave me a partial, preliminary list of analyzed coins coming from Locus 134. In this list, 223 coins were identified, giving us a larger collection of coins than in her MA thesis.

Fig. 7 summarizes the 234 coins from Deir 'Aziz, Locus 134. In this new report, the dates of 92 coins were given. From this, it can be calculated that 14% of the coins are dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, 38% to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and 43.5% to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The latest coin is dated to

<sup>664</sup> Ahipaz 2013, p. 64; Ahipaz 2015, p. 17.

<sup>665</sup> Personal communication Zvi Ma'oz. He calls this layer just below the floor pavement a "carpet" of coins.

<sup>666</sup> Ahipaz 2015, p. 23; Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 216.

“498-700” CE and is identified as a possible lead coin. Two other coins are dated to 527-565 CE (Justinian I). This deposit thus has the same *terminus post quem* as the gold coin hoard also found at the site. Distinctive here are two coins of Alexander Jannaeus (dated 80-76 BCE) and a Roman provincial coin from the third century CE minted by Alexander Severus in Bosra. 21 coins have been indicated as cast coins, dated generally to 450-550 CE. One coin (Basket 1817/2) was cast in an octagonal shape.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place							Unknown	Total
		Bosra	Carthage	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica		
134	Null								142	142
	235	1								1
	341					1			2	3
	361								3	3
	383								1	1
	392							1		1
	395								5	5
	408				1				4	5
	423								1	1
	450								7	7
	457								3	3
	474								2	2
	484		1							1
	491								3	3
	498			1					91	101
	500								2	2
	512			3						3
	518								5	5
	530		3							3
	539		4				1			5
	541		1							1
	545		2							2
	550								19	19
	565								2	2
	700								1	1
	-76								2	2
Grand Total		1	11	4	1	1	1	1	71	143

Date Certainty  
 ■ Certain  
 □ Uncertain

**FIGURE 7. DEIR 'AZIZ, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF DEIR 'AZIZ, IN FRONT OF A NICHE IN THE SOUTHERN WALL. ALL 234 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

#### 4. Deposit 4:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1998-2003

**Deposit Location:** Next to the northern pillars and benches, in the western half of the building.

**Archaeological Information:** Phase 2 of the synagogue building, Locus 138

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 348 coins were found in a deposit in the western half of the synagogue, next to the northern pillars and benches, about a meter above the pit containing the 2027 coins (deposit 1).<sup>667</sup> The coins were spread out over the surface and this “coin layer” was close to the surface of the floor pavement.<sup>668</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The coins from this deposit have not yet been published in full but are being prepared by Nili Ahipaz. A preliminary report of this deposit was given in her 2015 MA thesis in which she analyzed 50 legible coins. In this thesis, she states that a total of 343 coins was found, but this turned out to be a typographical error: an actual total of 348 coins was found in the deposit. According to her preliminary analysis, the deposit consists of low-denomination bronze coins, with 62% of the coins dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, 10% to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and 26% dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>669</sup>

In 2019, Ahipaz gave me a partial, preliminary list of analyzed coins coming from Locus 138. In this list, 348 coins were identified, giving us more information on the coins than in her MA thesis, however only the dates of 51 coins could be read.<sup>670</sup> The earliest coin dates to 54 CE and was minted in Jerusalem in the days of Felix, the procurator under Claudius. The latest coins are two gold tremisses dated to 527-565 CE (Justinian I), forming a chronological bridge between Deposit 2 and Deposit 3 from the site. An interesting find in this deposit is a possible Axumite coin depicting a “Maltese cross” in a circle, dated to 450-550 CE. When breaking down the dates of the deposit, 35% of the coins are from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, 35% from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and 27% from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. 4 coins were minted in Antioch, 4 in Carthage, 8 in Constantinople, and 1 in Jerusalem.

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<sup>667</sup> Ahipaz 2013, p. 64 mentions 345 coins, while her 2015 MA thesis mentions 343 coins. However, the coin list that Ahipaz provided me with during my stay in Israel gave information on 348 coins. After a short conversation with Ahipaz it became clear that the 345 and 343 coins were typographical errors and the real number of coins is 348.

<sup>668</sup> Personal communication Zvi Ma’oz and Chaim Ben-David. Ma’oz calls this layer just below the floor pavement a “carpet” of coins. Ben-David mentioned that although also some stones were removed from the eastern half of the synagogue, no coins were found there! Thus, all the coins found as a carpet under the floor level were limited to the western half of the building.

<sup>669</sup> Ahipaz 2015, p. 22.

<sup>670</sup> In her list, Ahipaz indicates one coin (Basket 1356) as “No currency!” This might indicate that this object is in fact not a coin, and that we only have 347 coins. The article by Ahipaz and Leibner mentions 343 coins of which 52 were identifiable (Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 216). The final publication should give us more insight in this.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place				Total		
		Antioch (?)	Carthage	Constantinop..	Jerusalem		Unknown	
138	Null					297	297	
54				1			1	
337						1	1	
341						1	1	
346						1	1	
361	1					1	2	
383	3					2	5	
386				1			1	
392						1	1	
395				1		5	6	
408				1		12	13	
423						1	1	
425						1	1	
450						1	1	
498						1	1	
500						1	1	
512				2		1	3	
518						3	3	
530			1				1	
537				1			1	
539			3				3	
550						1	1	
565				2			2	
Grand Total		4	4	8	1	34	297	51
<b>Date Certainty</b> ■ Certain ■ Uncertain								

**FIGURE 8. DEIR 'AZIZ, DEPOSIT 4. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF DEIR 'AZIZ, NEXT TO THE NORTHERN BENCHES, ABOVE DEPOSIT 1. 346 COINS WERE BRONZE, TWO WERE GOLD.**

### C. 'En Nashut

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/en-nashut/>

**Longitude:** 33.01304635109268 **Latitude:** 35.69206127722141

**Bibliography:** Hüttenmeister F. and Reeg G. 1977, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, pp. 114–115; Ma'oz Z. 1979, "'En Nashut (Golan)," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, Vol. 69–71, pp. 27–29 (Hebrew); Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, p. 276; Ariel D. 1987, "Coins from the Synagogue at 'En Nashut," in: *IEJ*, Vol. 37, pp. 147–157; Ma'oz Z. 1988, "Ancient Synagogues of the Golan," in: *Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 121–124; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 101–102 (Hebrew); Ma'oz z. 1993, "En Nashut," in: *NEAEHL*,

pp. 412–414; Ma'oz Z. 1995, *Ancient Synagogues in the Golan, Art and Architecture*, pp. 73–104 (Hebrew); Urman D. 1995, "Public Structures and Jewish Communities in the Golan Heights," in: *Ancient synagogues: Historical analysis and Archaeological discovery*, Vol. 2, pp. 439–447; Dauphin C. 1998, *La Palestine Byzantine*, Vol. 3, p. 531; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 346–347; Ma'oz Z. 2010, *En Nashut: the Art and Architecture of a Synagogue in the Golan*; Ariel D. & Ahipaz N. 2010, "Coins from Excavations at 'En Nashut," in: *En Nashut: the Art and Architecture of a Synagogue in the Golan*, pp. 138–186; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 191–194; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 112, 113–114, 159–160, 177–178, 545–546, 597; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 39–42 (Hebrew)

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/en-nashut/>

- Israel Antiquities Authority:

[http://www.iaa-conservation.org.il/Projects\\_Item\\_eng.asp?subject\\_id=10&site\\_id=72&id=162](http://www.iaa-conservation.org.il/Projects_Item_eng.asp?subject_id=10&site_id=72&id=162)

**Date Excavated:** 1978-1979

**Excavators:** Zvi Uri Ma'oz

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum II<sup>671</sup>

**Date of Construction of the Building:** around 475 CE<sup>672</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** At the edge of the site, on its northwestern slope, near a circular structure built over the spring.<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Consists of Stratum II(B), the construction of the synagogue in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and Stratum IIA, modifications to the synagogue, possibly in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. For a full architectural overview, see Ma'oz 2010, pp. 26-49.

<sup>672</sup> Ma'oz 2010. In earlier publications Ma'oz preferred a construction date of the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century based on the coins found in probes below the floor level (Ma'oz 1988 and 1993). However, if some of the youngest coins found in the hoards can indeed be dated to 425-450 CE and even 474-491 CE (see below), then a construction *terminus post quem* date of 475 CE, as he states in later publications, seems more likely. Urman 1995 p. 443 disputes these late dates: "perhaps the structure at 'Ein Nashot was built at an early period — second, third, or fourth century C.E. — and in the fifth century was restored or had its floor replaced." However, this interpretation would also mean that the southern pavement with its floor slabs must have been added to the building only in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (based on the youngest coins found in Locus 109, see below) and that the room to the west of the building, in which coins dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century have been found next to the foundations (see below), was built later than the synagogue building, and not earlier. I would agree that a *terminus post-quem* of 475 CE is correct.

<sup>673</sup> Ma'oz 1993, p. 412. The site was first identified as a synagogue by Sami Bar-Lev and Moshe Hartal in 1971, who were members of the "Villages Survey" headed by Dan Urman. According to Zvi Ma'oz, the two returned to the site at some point and removed around 270 coins from a pit (which was later labeled Locus 109) and gave them to the Department of Antiquities (Ma'oz 2010, pp. 14-15).

**Description of the Building:** A basilical synagogue with two rows of three columns. The main entrance to the building was in the short south wall, and a smaller door at the southern end of the east wall was discovered leading to an eastern annex room. A small, covered portico to the south of the building might have been built at a later stage. This portico was paved with fine ashlar.<sup>674</sup> The synagogue features numerous animal sculptures, and Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew dedicatory inscriptions were found on plaster and architectural features inside the building. Along all the walls were three tiers of benches. Next to the south wall, an impression in the floor and a stone step indicate the location of a platform. The building had a plaster floor with a bedding of basalt gravel mixed with plaster. The building was robbed of its architectural elements after it went out of use so that especially the south side is hard to reconstruct.

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1978

**Deposit Location:** Under the paving outside the threshold of the main entrance to the synagogue; south of the southern wall of the building (in the portico).

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 109, south of W1, stratum IIB (Baskets 1070, 1070/2, 1070/3, 1047, 1053, 1135, and 1136.<sup>675</sup>

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes (?)

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IIB6

**Deposit Description:** 193 coins were found during official excavations under the pavement in front of the south, main entrance to the synagogue (in the portico area). The locus was identified as a "robber's pit": robbers supposedly had destroyed a large section of this pavement and created a pit measuring 3.50 X 1.65 meters and 1.00 meters deep.<sup>676</sup> The coins were mostly found during sifting and had been scattered around the width and depth of the pit. According to Ariel and Ahipaz, another 224 coins were found and retrieved from this same pit by Sami Bar-Lev and Muni Ben-Ari during their visit to the site in 1970 (cf. fn. 673).<sup>677</sup> Last, local inhabitants of the Kibbutz Merom Golan visited the site between 1970

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<sup>674</sup> Ma'oz 1993, p. 413.

<sup>675</sup> Every day, the excavators made a new Basket as more and more coins popped up.

<sup>676</sup> In the pit, pieces of plastic were found, which indicated to the excavators that the robber's pit was modern, possibly from the 1960s (personal communication Zvi Ma'oz).

<sup>677</sup> Ariel and Ahipaz, 2010, p. 138; Ahipaz 2015, p. 40. Bar Lev and Ben-Ari were Staff Officers for Archaeology for the State of Israel. Unfortunately, they did not leave any records of their excavations, but handed the coins over to Donald Ariel in 1966-1977. Among these was one dated to Zeno (474-491 CE), which would push the construction of the pavement and thus the synagogue to 475 CE or later.



and 1978 and removed hundreds of small coins from this pit.<sup>678</sup> In total, about 500 coins eventually made their way to the Israel Antiquities Authority, where they are stored today.<sup>679</sup> It is important to note, however, that the excavators did not remove any additional pavement stones from the portico beyond this pit. Thus, many more coins might still be *in situ* under the rest of the portico floor.

**Container Present? No<sup>680</sup>**

**Description of Coins:** 115 identifiable bronze coins from this locus were published by Ariel in 1987 and by Ariel and Ahipaz in an updated report in 2010. According to them, the deposit ranges between 307 CE and 423 CE (Constantinian dynasty). The latest coin could be dated to the emperor Honorius (408-423 CE).

However, after going through the IAA database, 186 identified coins were found as coming from 'En Nashut, Locus 109. It is unclear why not all these coins have been published in the final report or why there are so many discrepancies between the published lists and the IAA database. It is also unclear what happened to the 317 coins that could not be found in the IAA database under Locus 109.<sup>681</sup> After consultation with Ariel, for this project it was decided to follow the analysis of the coins according to the IAA information. The reader should thus use caution comparing this database to the original publications.

Of the 186 identified coins, only 118 could be dated: they range from 330-335 CE (Constantine I) to 408-423 CE (Honorius I), with a majority minted under Theodosius I and Arcadius. Almost all the coins come from eastern mints, with the exception of a coin minted in Trier (337-341 CE, Constantius II) and two coins from Rome (341-346 CE, Constans I and 383-387 CE).

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<sup>678</sup> The members of the kibbutz saw coins falling from the edges of the pit and collected them. As far as Ma'oz knows, all the coins were handed over to the IAA (personal communication). However, it is unknown how many more coins might have been removed by hikers, tourists, and other people passing by the site between 1971 and 1978.

<sup>679</sup> Ma'oz 2010, p. 15; Ariel and Ahipaz, 2010, p. 138; personal communication Donald Ariel.

<sup>680</sup> Ariel 1987, p. 151: "The deposit was not found in any preserved container. From their distribution, it seems likely that they did not come from some friable container which later disintegrated, but rather that they were deposited together during the construction of the synagogue."

<sup>681</sup> According to Ariel, locus numbers were not always made for random coin finds on site, so the coins are probably in the IAA depot but the connection between coin and locus is lost. For example, a small bag of coins that did not have L109 written on it was given another unidentified registration number when the coins came in.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place								Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica	Trier		Unknown
109	Null									382	382
	335				1						1
	337		1								1
	341		1						1		2
	346	1					1			11	31
	354									2	2
	361	1		1						2	4
	375		1							1	2
	378							1			1
	383	1	22	1						51	93
	387						1				1
	392	31	3	5	1			1		9	221
	393			1							1
	395		42	42	4	1				53	187
	408		1	3	2					44	95
	423			1		1				1	3
	425	1								15	16
	450									3	3
	500	1	1							1	3
Grand Total		63	126	162	8	2	11	2	1	28412	76424

Date Certainty  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 9. 'EN NASHUT, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF 'EN NASHUT, JUST OUTSIDE THE MAIN ENTRANCE. ALL 500 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## **2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1979

**Deposit Location:** Next to the foundations of the room west of the synagogue, adjacent to wall 4 on its northern exposed edge.<sup>682</sup>

<sup>682</sup> Ma'oz 1988, pp. 25-26 and 124: he believes this room precedes the synagogue stratum II building and might have been part of an older synagogue construction. If this room is indeed older than the synagogue building of Stratum II, then this synagogue could not have been built earlier than the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The youngest coin in the Locus 133 hoard dates to 425-450 CE and the coins were found next to the foundations of the room: common sense dictates that the room would have stood in use for at least a little while before it was demolished to build the new synagogue. If the room was a small storage room or shed built against the wall of the stratum II synagogue from the outside, however, it would be younger than the synagogue building proper and this would push the date of the construction of this building to an earlier period. Ma'oz, however, believes this is not the case because of architectural arguments: the walls (W2, W3, and W4) are built out of fieldstones, as opposed to the ashlar of the synagogue building, and they stand in a diagonal angle against the western wall of the building (W8). Unfortunately, this room is not fully depicted on the published plan (only W3 has been drawn in),

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 133, west of W4, end of stratum III or beginning stratum II (Baskets 1164, 1164/5)

**Certain association with the building itself?** No

**Deposit Retrievable?** unknown

**Deposit Type:** II?6

**Deposit Description:** Outside the western wall of the synagogue, on the south side, the foundations of three walls were recovered: W2, W3, and W4. The axis of W4 was diagonal to the synagogue's western wall (W8). The synagogue wall 8 itself was missing in this area and therefore there is no visible connection between W4 and the synagogue building. However, the masonry of W4 is different from that of the synagogue, as is its orientation. The excavators thus believe that the three walls represent a small structure that stood here before the synagogue was constructed.<sup>683</sup> This room was not sealed, but was "covered by a robbers' dump of about 1.5 meters high."<sup>684</sup> West of W4, a trench was dug on the northern edge (Locus 133). In this locus, a deposit of 51 coins was discovered. It is unclear if this deposit can be connected to the synagogue. It is possible that the structure to the west was a side room or shed used at the same time as the synagogue (see footnote 682).<sup>685</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** 34 identifiable bronze coins from this locus were published by Ariel in 1987 and by Ariel and Ahipaz in an updated report in 2010. According to them, the deposit ranged between the third century CE and 425-450 CE (Theodosius II or Valentinian III). However, the IAA database revealed 42 coins coming from 'En Nashut, Locus 133. It is unclear why not all coins were published in the final excavation report.

Of the 42 coins at the IAA, 32 could be dated. They range from 341-346 CE (Constantius II) to 425-450 CE. Most coins come from eastern mints, but some coins were minted in Rome and Trier, and one in Arles. Thus, both in chronology and minting places, this deposit found in a room next to the synagogue follows the deposit found just outside the threshold of the synagogue main entrance.

The "100-300 CE" coin published by Ariel could not be found at the IAA. According to the

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nor are there photographs of the walls. The exact relationship between the room and the synagogue is thus unclear.

<sup>683</sup> Ma'oz 2010, p. 25.

<sup>684</sup> See the notes of Ma'oz in the IAA archives, dated to April 28, 1980.

<sup>685</sup> During the excavations, probe pits were also made inside the synagogue building, mainly in spots where the plaster floor or parts of the benches were missing, usually because of stone robbing. Although some coins were found in those areas, no clusters could be discerned which would count as coin deposits (this could of course be explained by robbers taking any coins that they encountered). No metal detector was used on site to search for more coin groups and it is possible that more deposits are still *in situ* (Ahipaz 2015, pp. 41-42).

publication, the coin depicts a hexastyle temple on the reverse side, but no precise date or emperor could be given. The coin has been included in this project, but the reader should be aware that its current location is unknown.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place								Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Arles	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Rome	Trier		Unknown
133	Null									10	10
	300									1	1
	346							1			1
	354						1			1	2
	361									11	11
	375		11						1	5	26
	383				1	1	1			1	4
	388							1			1
	392		2		1					1	31
	395		11				1			2	41
	408		1					1		11	31
	425			1						2	3
	450					1				12	13
	455									1	1
133?	361									1	1
Grand Total			52	1	2	11	3	2	2	824	2328
<b>Date Certainty</b>											
■ Certain											
■ Uncertain											

FIGURE 10. ‘EN NASHUT, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF ‘EN NASHUT, FOUND IN A SIDE ROOM WEST OF THE BUILDING. ALL 51 COINS ARE BRONZE.

#### D. Horvat Kanaf (Khirbet Kanaf, Mazra’at Kanef)

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/horvat-kanaf/>

Longitude: 32.87115320638647 Latitude: 35.68610429763794

**Bibliography:** Oliphant L. 1886, "New Discoveries," in: *Palestine Exploration Fund. Quarterly Statement*, January 1886, pp. 75–76; Sukenik E.L. 1935, "The Ancient Synagogue of El-Hammeh," in: *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, pp. 174–178; Hüttenmeister F. and Reeg G. 1977, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, pp. 308–310; Ariel D.T. 1980, "Coins from the synagogue at Horvat Kanaf. Preliminary Report," in: *Israel Numismatics Journal*, Vol. 4, pp. 59–62; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 265–267; Ma’oz Z. 1982, "The Art and Architecture of the synagogues of the Golan," in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 98–115; Naveh J. and Shaked S. 1985, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, pp. 24, 44–54, nos 2,3; Ilan Z.

1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 89–90 (Hebrew); Ma'oz Z. 1993, "Kanaf, Horvat," in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 847–850; Ma'oz Z. 1995, *Ancient Synagogues in the Golan, Art and Architecture*, pp. 130–148 (Hebrew); Urman D. 1995, "Mazra'at Kanaf," in: *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Vol. 2, pp. 534–541; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 388–389; Ma'oz Z. 2011, *Deir Aziz and Kanaf: the Architecture of Two Ancient Synagogues*, pp. 56–93; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 236–239; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 112, 114, 195, 247, 438, 463, 537, 547, 598; Ma'oz Z. 2015, *Horvat Kanaf: Excavations in 1978–1980 and 1985, Final Report* (Archaostyle Scientific Research Series 14); Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 34–38 (Hebrew), Zingboym O. "Horvat Kanaf – New Excavations of the Synagogue: Was a Third–Fourth Century Synagogue Uncovered?", in: *Mikhmanim* (in print, Hebrew)

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/kanaf/>
- Bible Walks:  
<https://biblewalks.com/sites/Kanaf.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1978-1980 and 1985

**Excavators:** Zvi Uri Ma'oz

**Archaeological Information:** Area A, Stratum IIIA-Stratum IIIB-Stratum II<sup>686</sup>

**Date of Construction of the Building:** beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>687</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** In the middle of a settlement, at the apex of the hill, at the southwestern end of a ridge.<sup>688</sup>

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<sup>686</sup> Ma'oz 1993, p. 847: Stratum IIIA: Middle Byzantine Period (beginning of the sixth century CE): construction of a synagogue. Stratum IIIB: Late Byzantine Period (second half of the sixth century CE): reconstruction of the synagogue following an earthquake (?), construction of a platform in front of the synagogue on the west. Stratum II: Mamluk to Ottoman periods (thirteenth – sixteenth centuries): dwellings next to the synagogue; (undefined) use of the synagogue and its front platform. The early 6<sup>th</sup> century construction date is based on the discovery of a follis of Anastasius I (498) under the floor.

<sup>687</sup> This *terminus post quem* date is based on pottery and coins found in the fill below the floor, in the foundation level of the synagogue.

<sup>688</sup> The building was already discovered by Sir Lawrence Oliphant in 1885 and described by Eleazar Lipa Sukenik after he visited the place in 1932. After 1967 the site was surveyed several times by Shmaryahu Gutman, Claire Epstein, and others (Ma'oz 1993, p. 847; Urman 1995, pp. 534-535, Ma'oz 2011, pp. 60-61; Ahipaz 2015, p. 34).

**Description of the Building:** An east-west trapezoid-shaped basilica with two rows of four columns.<sup>689</sup> The building had a door in the center of the western wall and another at the east side of the north wall. Several steps led down from this entrance onto the synagogue floor, which apparently was made of basalt slabs but has not been preserved. Possibly, there was a gallery above the aisles. Carved reliefs and an Aramaic inscription on a stone block were found around the synagogue and reused in nearby houses. The building was transformed into a granary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, using the synagogue's foundations and lower walls. A new pavement was installed, made of large stone blocks.<sup>690</sup>

**1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1978-1979

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor, in the foundation fill

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum IIIA: L114, L121a, L135, L151 (sandy upper layer)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** To date the synagogue, blocks from the pavement of the building were removed in four probes: in the north-eastern part of the hall, along the northern row of columns, and above the westernmost column in the south row.<sup>691</sup> Underneath the pavement, a layer of loose, sandy soil was discovered that was very dark, almost black in color (L114, L121a, L135, L151).<sup>692</sup> This layer was about 0.15 m deep and was completely sieved: 234 coins, as well as modern objects such as shell casings stamped in 1949, were discovered.<sup>693</sup> The excavators suggest that this layer is a mixture of the foundation fill of the

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<sup>689</sup> Ma'oz 1993, p. 848 mentions two rows of eight columns, but published maps of the building only show two rows of four columns (Ilan 1991, pp. 89-90; Spigel 2012a, p. 239; Hachlili 2013, p. 112).

<sup>690</sup> Ma'oz 2011, p. 60.

<sup>691</sup> Ma'oz 2011, p. 89.

<sup>692</sup> In this layer, the soil was dense and hard to excavate, and visibly different from the loose dirt above it. Therefore, the excavators concluded there were no later disturbances in these loci and that this layer belonged to the foundation of the synagogue building (Ahipaz 2015, p. 36, footnote 7). However, the Mamluk coin found in L135 indicates some disturbance.

<sup>693</sup> Hachlili 2015, p. 36, Ma'oz 2015, pp. 180-181. Because the synagogue building was incorporated into a modern construction with a roof, it was too dark inside to see any coins *in situ*. Hence, all soil was hauled out in buckets and sifted outside the building. It is thus impossible to say where the coins came from exactly, but they were dispersed over the entirety of the surface where the pavement stones were removed. 58 coins from the site were

synagogue with soil brought in more recently to stabilize the new granary floor. The original synagogue floor appears not to have survived. Underneath this sandy layer, a compact layer of reddish soil was found.

#### **Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** In a 1980 preliminary publication, Ariel published a summary of 339 coins found at Horvat Kanaf, representing all coins from the 1978 excavations and a handful of coins from the 1979 season. However, as it is unclear which belonged to the upper, dark layer (deposit 1) and which to the lower, reddish layer (deposit 2), all the coins are presented together. In 2011, Ma'oz published a detailed analysis of the architecture of the building, but no further details on the coins are provided. He mentions that "all in all about a thousand coins and tokens were found, about 500 of which were identified."<sup>694</sup> However, in her MA thesis, Ahipaz states that the upper layer contained 234 coins and the lower layer 278 coins, for a total of 512 coins.<sup>695</sup> So instead of the 58 broken coins (see footnote 693), were 500 coins discarded and did Ahipaz only see the 500 coins that were kept? Finally, in 2015, Donald Ariel published all the synagogue coins in Ma'oz's final excavation report. He identified 234 coins coming from this deposit, for which he provides dates and minting places.

In the IAA database, information could be found on 126 coins from this deposit (meaning that 108 coins were not legible and thus were not entered into the database system). The coins range from 218-222 CE (Elagabalus) to 457-474 CE (Leo I). One coin was a clipped Mamluk coin, dated to 1250-1517 CE. Another coin, indicated in the database as a "problem" coin, can be dated to 1300-1400 CE. These later coins presumably are later intrusions. Not taking into account these intrusions, there is one coin dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, 56 to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (44.5%), and 67 to the 5<sup>th</sup> century (53%). Almost all the coins came from eastern mints, except for three minted in Rome.

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also discarded on the spot because they were broken, heavily eroded, or crumbled (personal communication Zvi Ma'oz). Unfortunately, no pictures were taken.

<sup>694</sup> Ma'oz 2011, p. 91.

<sup>695</sup> Ahipaz 2015, p. 36. Approximately this same quantity is given by Ariel in his 2015 analysis, in which he states that "in fact 523 [coins] were excavated from all of the excavations inside the synagogue" (Ariel 2015, p. 179).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place							Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Rome	Ticinum	Tyre		Unknown
114	341			1					1	
	375		1						1	
	383							1	1	
	395		1					1	2	
	408							13	13	
	497							1	1	
121a	316					1			1	
	341					1			1	
	346		1			1			2	
	361			1				2	3	
	383		4	1				23	73	
	386							1	1	
	392	1		1				2	4	
	395		22	2	1			58	812	
	408	1	11	21	1			236	639	
	423							1	1	
	425							2	2	
	450							3	3	
	457			2					2	
	474							1	1	
	498							2	2	
135	222							1	1	
	327						1		1	
	346		1						1	
	392		1						1	
	395		2					31	51	
	408		1	1				1	12	
	423							1	1	
	498							1	1	
	1400							1	1	
	1517							1	1	
151	450							1	1	
Unkn..	Null							108	108	
Grand Total		11	126	93	2	3	1	1	19176	48186

Date Certainty  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 11. HORVAT KANAF, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT KANAF, FOUND IN THE SANDY, UPPER LAYER. ALL 234 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1978-1979

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor, in the foundation fill

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum IIIA: L116, L121b, L168, L169 (red, lower layer)



**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** To date the synagogue, blocks from the pavement of the building were removed in four probes: in the north-eastern part of the hall, along the northern row of columns, and above the westernmost column in the southern row.<sup>696</sup> Underneath the pavement, a layer of loose, sandy soil was discovered that was very dark, almost black in color. Underneath this sandy layer, a compact layer of reddish soil was found (L116, L121b, L168, L169). This is the original foundation fill of the synagogue building, deposited and pressed to level the natural bedrock. The fill slopes from the center of the nave to the north and south and surrounds foundation stylobates made of fieldstones.<sup>697</sup> In this layer, the excavators found 289 coins.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** As mentioned under Deposit 1, Ariel published a coin catalogue of the Horvat Kanaf coins in 1980, but did not distinguish between Deposit 1 and Deposit 2, so it is impossible to say here which coins came from which locus or layer. In 2011, Ma'oz published a small booklet on the architecture of the Horvat Kanaf synagogue, and mentioned that "in Locus 166, this layer contained 148 coins, the latest of which dated to Emperor Anastasius I (491-518 CE). This is also the latest coin in the foundation fill."<sup>698</sup> However, in her 2015 MA thesis, Ahipaz does not mention a Locus 166; only Loci 116, 121b, 168, and 169.<sup>699</sup> So, were the 148 coins part of her analysis, or not? Finally, Ariel published the coins in more detail in the Horvat Kanaf final excavation report from 2015. He gives information on 289 coins from Loci 116, 121b, 168, and 169, but again, no coins are mentioned from Locus 166.

At the IAA, information on 275 coins can be found from these loci (suggesting that 14 coins were illegible). The coins range from 276-282 CE to 512-518 CE, with most of the coins dating to the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, all coming from eastern mints, except 4 from Rome, giving a similar profile to the coins from Deposit 1.

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<sup>696</sup> Ma'oz 2011, p. 89.

<sup>697</sup> Ahipaz 2015, p. 36.

<sup>698</sup> Ma'oz 2011, p. 91.

<sup>699</sup> Ahipaz 2015, p. 36.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place									Total			
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica	Unknown				
Null	Null									14	14			
116	361	1									1			
	378			1							1			
	383									2	2			
	408									1	1			
121b	346	1									1			
	383				1						1			
	395									2	2			
	408						1			2	12			
168	282									1	1			
	341		1					1			11			
	361									2	2			
	383		3	1	1	3				24	95			
	392	1	1	1			1		1	3	71			
	395		1	3	3	1	1			11	12	14	18	
	408			1						5	29	5	30	
	425									3	3			
	450		1	1	1					28	49			
	455							2				2		
	457			1							2	3		
	497	1									29	30		
	498										1	1		
	518		1									1		
169	361									2	2			
	375	1								2	3			
	383		2					1		45	75			
	387							1			1			
	392	2	1			1			1	10	15			
	395	2	2	3	3		1			11	14	20	19	
	408	1	1							6	17	8	19	
	423									2	2			
	425									4	4			
	450		1							1	2			
	497									7	7			
	498									1	1			
	507			1								1		
Grand Total		65	128	75	81	41	32	31	2	62	159	107	182	
Date Certainty														
■ Certain														
■ Uncertain														

**FIGURE 12. HORVAT KANAF, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT KANAF, FOUND IN THE RED, LOWER LAYER. ALL 289 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## E. Qasrin (Qazrin, Katzrin)

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/qasrin/>

**Longitude:** 32.98905668870832 **Latitude:** 35.70404291152954

**Bibliography:** Hüttenmeister F. and Reeg G. 1977, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, pp. 357–358; Ma'oz Z. 1980, "Qasrin," in: *The Jewish Settlement and Synagogues in the Golan*, pp. 22–25 (Hebrew); Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 267–269; Ma'oz Z. and Killebrew A. 1985, "Qasrin," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 289–293; Ma'oz Z. and Killebrew A. 1988, "Ancient Qasrin: Synagogue and Village," in: *Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 5–19; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 10–11 (Hebrew); Killebrew A. and Ma'oz Z. 1993, "Qasrin," in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 1219–1224; Urman D. 1995, "Public Structures and Jewish Communities in the Golan Heights," in: *Ancient synagogues: Historical analysis and Archaeological discovery*, Vol. 2, pp. 463–481; Ariel D.T. 1996, "A Hoard of Byzantine Folles from Qasrin," in: *'Atiqot*, Vol. 29, pp. 69–76; Dauphin C. 1998, *La Palestine Byzantine*, Vol. 3, pp. 653–654; Ariel D.T. 2002, "The Coins from the Surveys and Excavations of Caves in the Northern Judean Desert," in: *'Atiqot*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 298; Killebrew A. Grantham B. and Fine S. 2003, "A 'Talmudic' House at Qasrin: On the Use of Domestic Space and Daily Life During the Byzantine Period," in: *Near Eastern Archaeology*, Vol. 66, No. 1–2, pp. 59–72; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 447–452; ; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 288–293; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 79–111, 135, 137, 159, 181, 195, 465, 478, 552, 595–597; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 47–52 (Hebrew)

### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/qasrin/>

- Virtual World Project:

<http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/Qasrin/site.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1. 1971

2. 1972-1978

3. 1982-1990

**Excavators:** 1. Dan Urman

2. Muni Ben-Ari and Shmuel (Sami) Bar-Lev

3. Zvi Uri Ma'oz, Ann Killebrew, and Rachel Hachlili

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum V- Stratum IVA-B

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: late 4<sup>th</sup> century -early 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>700</sup>  
Phase II: early 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>701</sup>  
Phase III: early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>702</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** On the edge of the village, at its lowest point.<sup>703</sup>

**Description of the Building:**

Phase I or Synagogue A (Stratum V): This is a basilica with two rows of three columns and two engaged pillars attached to the northern interior wall. Foundations for a raised platform were found by the south wall. The main entrance was in the north wall and on the south side of the east wall there was a door leading into an annex. Around the walls were two tiers of benches and the floor was covered with white plaster (Floor 1). 30 cm below this floor, remains of a beaten earth surface were found (Floor 0), occasionally with a white wash, probably to level the surface for the synagogue building.

Phase II or Synagogue B (Stratum IVA): The building was lengthened on the north side to a trapezoidal shape with two rows of four columns. Benches of inferior quality were added along the new walls. The entrances in the north and east walls were kept, and there might have been another entrance in the west wall.<sup>704</sup> By the south wall was a Torah shrine and *bemah* on a raised platform with two steps leading up to it. Behind the *bemah* was a narrow space that could be entered by two doors each 70 cm wide, possibly a *genizah*. The floor of the building was covered in colorful mosaics (Floor 2). The central nave may have been two stories high, with a clerestory with rectangular windows. The gabled roof was covered with terracotta roof tiles.

Phase III or Synagogue B (Stratum IVB): The mosaic floor was replaced by a white plaster floor (Floor 3). Three low walls were built directly on top of the mosaic floor, probably to provide

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<sup>700</sup> Based on pottery found between Floor 0 and Floor 1 (see below).

<sup>701</sup> Based on the dates of the coins found behind the added benches inside the synagogue hall (see below).

<sup>702</sup> Based on the coins found deposited directly below Floor 3 (see below). However, this would assume that the deposit was placed inside the synagogue *before* Floor 3 was put in. Ariel wonders if this deposit could have been placed there *after* the floor was laid: that Floor 3 was disturbed at this spot by the later deposition of these coins. If this is the case, then the coin deposit is not a good indicator for the exact date of Stratum IVB. (Ariel 1996, p. 71). Furthermore, it also changes the interpretation of the function of the deposit (see below).

<sup>703</sup> The synagogue was discovered by Gottfried Schumacher in 1884 and surveyed by Shmaryahu Gutman in 1967 and Dan Urman in 1970, who started excavations in 1971 (Ahipaz 2015, p. 47).

<sup>704</sup> Ma'oz and Killebrew claim there was a door opening in the west wall (Killebrew and Ma'oz 1993, p. 1220), while Urman states that he found no evidence of this (Urman 1995, p. 465, footnote 206).

additional support for the clerestory walls. The remodeling was possibly necessitated by the sinking of the building, especially in the southwest corner of the hall.

**1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1983

**Deposit Location:** In the rubble fill behind benches along the northern wall.

**Archaeological Information:** Synagogue B, stratum IVA, L1076, Baskets 260, 276, 277, 280, 296, 298, 304, 307, and 317

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 125 coins were found dispersed in the rubble fill below the upper step and behind the lower step of the two-tiered added benches, along the interior face of the northern wall.<sup>705</sup> This section was added when the building was lengthened in its second phase, thus the coins belong to this later phase of the use of the synagogue building.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The coins found in this deposit were never published. Ma'oz and Killebrew mention in their 1988 article that "120 small bronze coins" were found, of which the latest date to "the reign of the Byzantine emperor Anastasios I, who ruled from 498 to 518 CE." 125 coins are stored at the IAA that were excavated in 1983 at Qasrin, from "Locus 1076." Based on their identification, we can assume these are the coins found behind the benches. 90 of these coins could be read and have been provided here in Fig. 13. The coins range in date from 337 CE to 518 CE, with the number of coins in the deposit growing over time. The minting places of a majority of the coins could not be read, but the bulk seems to have come from Constantinople. One coin, attributed to Zeno (474-491 CE), might be an imitation coin, based on its irregular 3 o'clock axis.

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<sup>705</sup> Ma'oz and Killebrew 1988, p. 18, footnote 5, however, mentions 120 coins and Killebrew and Ma'oz 1993, p. 1221 mentions 180 coins. This last number is likely an error, based on the coins found at the IAA. The coins were found in the fill behind the lower bench, but below the upper bench, where the upper bench of the two-tiered bench was missing (see images). No upper bench stones were removed in the areas where they were still *in situ*, so it is possible that more coins are still hidden there (personal communication Zvi Ma'oz).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place				Unknown	Total
		Antioch	Carthage	Constantinople	Cyzicus (?)		
1076	Null					36	36
	341					1	1
	346					2	2
	361					4	4
	375					2	2
	383					2	2
	392	1		1			2
	395			1		73	83
	408				1	2	21
	423					11	11
	425					1	1
	428		1				1
	450					32	32
	457			1		4	5
	474					7	7
	491			2		11	31
	497					3	3
	498			1		27	127
	518			3		21	51
Grand Total		1	1	9	1	3875	4976
<b>Date Certainty</b>							
■ Certain							
■ Uncertain							

**FIGURE 13. QASRIN, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM BEHIND THE BENCHES FROM THE SYNAGOGUE OF QASRIN. ALL 125 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## **2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1978 with possible additions in 1984

**Deposit Location:** Below the plaster floor of the second phase synagogue, in the southeastern corner

**Archaeological Information:** Synagogue B, Stratum IVB, below Floor 3

**Certain association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IIB5

**Deposit Description:** In May 1978, 82 coins were found grouped together, directly below the plaster 3 floor of Stratum IVB, close to the south-eastern column and the northeast corner of a raised platform inside the building.<sup>706</sup> During the excavations in the 1970s and 1980s, 27 coins were found in the synagogue. Of those, the only one from the same time span of the hoard was found very close by (IAA 22870, follis of Justin II, 570/571 CE). Therefore, Ariel believes it is possible that this coin also originally belonged to the hoard, even though the first excavations did not go beneath the upper floor.<sup>707</sup> During the 1984 season, additional probes were conducted under the floor along the southern wall of the building. On August 28, 1984, a small cut was made along the northern edge of the raised platform, touching the southeastern column base, to fill the probe with concrete to stabilize the pillar for reconstruction purposes (Locus 1210).<sup>708</sup> A matrix of small stones and compacted earth was found under the column base, acting as foundation fill. In this matrix, two more coins were discovered, undoubtedly, according to Ariel, part of the hoard.<sup>709</sup> This brings the total to 84 or 85 coins.

**Container Present?** No, but there could have been.<sup>710</sup>

**Description of Coins:** Ariel published a limited catalogue of these coins in 1996, as “a hoard of Byzantine folles.” He mentions that of the 82 coins found in 1978, two are missing at the IAA. However, two other coins found in 1984 were added to the deposit. According to the article, the coins cover a period of 544/545 to 607/608 CE. In the IAA database, a list of 82 coins could be located coming from this deposit. The coins range in date from 544 to 608 CE and all are folles (75 coins) or half-folles (7 coins). Most were minted under Justin II (39%)<sup>711</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> Ariel remarks that “at the time of discovery, no attempt was made to ensure that all the coins were retrieved, nor was the hoard’s stratigraphic relationship with the synagogue’s floor examined” (Ariel 1996, p. 69). In other words, more coins could have been deposited in this spot and have not been found (yet).

<sup>707</sup> Ariel 1996, p. 69.

<sup>708</sup> Personal communication Zvi Ma’oz.

<sup>709</sup> Ariel 1996, p. 69.

<sup>710</sup> Ariel 1996, p. 69: “The coins were in good condition and, as corrosion was minimal, had not adhered to each other. Apparently, they had been deposited together, perhaps in a perishable container.” Ariel interprets the deposit as an emergency hoard, possibly hidden in a small pit in the floor on the eve of the Persian invasion of 614 CE.

<sup>711</sup> This percentage can even be as high as 65%, as Ariel notes, when taking into account the unidentified “Late Roman” coins that depict the emperors Justin and Sophia sitting on their thrones (for a total of 53 coins).

or Maurice Tiberius (22%).<sup>712</sup> All the coins come from eastern mints. This deposit is clearly younger than the one found behind the eastern benches of the building.

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<sup>712</sup> The IAA has chosen to label some coins as “Late Roman”, or “Late Roman 1” as opposed to giving a potential emperor, as Ariel did in his publication. To the IAA, these specific labels have a meta-meaning and are numismatic terms, instead of archaeological terms. With Late Roman 1, for example, the IAA means fourth century, with default dates 324-408 CE. When publishing coins using IAA information, one should always note that “Late Roman” means fourth-fifth century CE, “Late Roman 1” fourth century CE, “Late Roman 2” fifth century CE, and “Early Byzantine” anywhere in the sixth-seventh century CE, though specific dates have been given in the database as a construct for data entry purposes.



Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place					Total
		Antioch	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Thessalonica	
Null	545		1				1
	549		1				1
	554					1	1
	564					1	1
	566		2				2
	568		1				1
	569		1				1
	570	1	2		1		4
	571		6		1		7
	572	3			2		5
	573		2		2		4
	574		3		4		7
	575	2	3	1	2		8
	576	1	3	1	1		6
	577		2	1	1		4
	578				3		3
	579		1				1
	581		1				1
	582				1		1
	583				1		1
	587	2					2
	588		1				1
	589		1				1
	592	1	1				2
	593	1					1
	594	1					1
	595		2				2
	596	2					2
	599	1					1
	600						1
	602		1				2
	603			2			2
	608	1					1
Grand Total		16	35	5	19	2	41
<b>Date Certainty</b>							
■ Certain							
■ Uncertain							

**FIGURE 14. QASRIN, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF QASRIN. ALL 82 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## 2. Upper Galilee

### F. Gush Halav<sup>713</sup>

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/gush-halav/>

Longitude: 33.02787015856145 Latitude: 35.44938325881958

**Bibliography:** Kohl H. and Watzinger C. 1975, *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea*, pp. 107–111; Meyers E. 1977a, “Meiron and Gush Halav 1977, : in: ASOR Newsletter 3, pp. 8–9; Meyers E. 1977b, “Gush Halav (el-Jish),” in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 253–254; Meyers E. 1978, “Gush Halav (1977),” in: *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 85, No. 1, pp. 112–113; Meyers E. 1979, “Gush Halav 1978,” in: *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 86, No. 3, pp. 439–441; Meyers E. and Meyers C. 1978, “Gush Halav (el-Jish), 1978,: in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 276–279; Meyers E. Strange J. Meyers C. and Hanson R. 1979, “Preliminary Report on the 1977 and 1978 Seasons at Gush Halav (el-Jish),” in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 223, winter, pp. 33–58; Meyers E. 1980b, “Gush Halav,” in: *Qadmoniyot*, Vol. 13, Nos. 1–2, pp. 41–43 (Hebrew); Meyers E.M. 1982, “Excavations at Gush Halav in Upper Galilee,” in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 75–77; Meyers E. Meyers C. Strange J. 1990, *Excavations at the Ancient Synagogue of Gush Halav*; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, p. 22 (Hebrew); Meyers E. 1993, “Gush Halav,” in: *NEAEHL*, Vol. 2, Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, pp. 546–549; Netzer E. 1996, “Review of the synagogue at Gush Halav and Khirbet Shem’a,” in: *EI*, vol. 25, pp. 450–455 (Hebrew, English summary p. 106); Bijovsky G. 1998, “The Gush Halav Hoard reconsidered,” in: *’Atiqot*, Vol. 35, pp. 77–106; Meyers E. 1998, “Postscript to the Gush Halav Hoard,” in: *’Atiqot*, Vol. XXXV, pp. 107–108; Frankel R. et al. 2001, *Settlement Dynamics*, p. 42; Magness J. 2001a, “The Question of the Synagogue: The Problem of Typology,” in: *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part Three, Volume 4: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, the Special Problem of the Synagogue*, pp. 1–49; Magness J. 2001b, “A Response to Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange,” in: *Judaism in Late Antiquity. Part Three: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, Part Three, Volume 4: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, the Special Problem of the Synagogue*, pp. 79–91; Ariel D.T. 2002, “The Coins from the Surveys and Excavations of Caves in the Northern Judean Desert,” in: *’Atiqot*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 298–299; Bijovsky G. 2007, “Numismatic Evidence for the Gallus Revolt: The Hoard from Lod,” in: *IEJ*, vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 187–203; Bijovsky G. 2009, “Numismatic Report,” in: *Excavations at Ancient Nabratein*, pp. 384–386; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue*

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<sup>713</sup> Meyers, Meyers, and Strange 1990, p. 22: Two synagogue buildings have been identified in the ancient village of Gush Halav. The building discussed here is located about 100m below and 700m horizontally away from the other synagogue. It is often referred to as “the lower synagogue”. The site of Gush Halav is sometimes referred to as the city of Ed-Dschîsch or Gis Chala in older sources.

*Seating Capacities* pp. 119–130 and 211; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, p. 57, 63–64, 128, 153, 177–179, 546–547, 588

**Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/gush-halav/>
- Virtual World Project:  
<http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/GushHalav/site.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1977-1978

**Excavators:** Eric Meyers, Carol Meyers, and James strange (The Meiron Excavation Project)

**Archaeological Information: /**

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: 250-360 CE<sup>714</sup>  
Phase II: 360-363 CE  
Phase III: 363-460 CE  
Phase IV: 460-551 CE

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** Within the lower city: A bit further away from the main village and below the other synagogue also identified at the site.<sup>715</sup>

**Description of the Building:** According to the excavators, this synagogue had four phases.<sup>716</sup>  
Phase I: This basilical synagogue had two rows of four columns dividing the hall into a nave and

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<sup>714</sup> These dates are based on excavated coins and pottery in foundations and fills, as well as on historical earthquake events and on historical and architectural similarities with other synagogues in the area, like Meiron and Nabratein, also excavated by Meyers (Meyers *et al.* 1990, pp. 10-13). Not everybody agrees with this phasing, however, and multiple scholars have pointed out that the synagogue might have been built as a single unit in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century (see below). The excavators believe that the final phase of the building collapsed in the earthquake of 551 CE, and this consequently provides the latest date possible for the deposition of the coin hoard (Meyers 1998, p. 107).

<sup>715</sup> Meyers, Meyers, and Strange 1990, p. 22: The excavators suggest that two synagogues indicate that there were two contemporaneous villages close by that each had their own synagogue; perhaps an Upper and Lower Gush Halav. Others, like Bagatti and Mancini, believe that the synagogues represent two religious communities within the same village: a Jewish, and a Jewish-Christian community (Mancini 1970; Bagatti 1971). For an overview of the surveys conducted at the site and a small excavation performed by Kohl and Watzinger before the Meiron Excavation Project, see Kohl and Watzinger 1916, pp. 107-108; Meyers *et al.* 1979, p. 34; Meyers *et al.* 1990, pp. 13-16.

<sup>716</sup> Netzer 1996, pp. 450–452, Figs. 1–3, summary by Hachlili 2013, p. 64: Netzer believes (contrary to the excavators) that the Gush Halav synagogue was erected as a singular architectural unit (in Phase II: 306–363 CE, rather than Phase I: 250–306 CE) in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, and that it was not destroyed in the earthquake of 363, but it continued to function until the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. He also suggests a different plan and reconstruction and maintains that the many decorative parts of the building are spolia taken from earlier buildings.

aisles. There was one main entrance in the south wall and two interior entrances in the east and west walls. Possibly, there was also a door in the west wall that led to a western side room. This door might have been blocked by debris after the 363 CE earthquake and was put out of use in Phase III-IV. Benches were built along the west wall and at the northern end of the nave. A large platform stood on the west side of the main entrance. The floor was partially plastered. Phase II: Extensive renovations: the walls, stylobate, and other architectural members were recut and reset. Possibly, a mezzanine was added to the structure. This structure could have had a simple, mostly white, mosaic floor<sup>717</sup> or a plaster floor.<sup>718</sup> Phase III: The synagogue was renovated after damage, possibly related to earthquakes. The platform on the inner part of the south wall, west of the main entrance, was renovated, raised, and reduced in size. Phase IV: Nothing changed in the ground plan. The floor was renewed in the “western corridor.” The floor plan for the different phases is nearly identical: a rectangular basilica with eastern, western, and northern side rooms.

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** July 6, 1977

**Deposit Location:** Near the doorway to the synagogue hall in the western corridor.<sup>719</sup>

**Archaeological Information:** Phase IV, Area I.4 (south western quadrant), layer L4009.1=4004=1046.

**Certain association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA4

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Magness also believes that there was only one phase, and that it was constructed no earlier than the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century based on the coins and pottery (Magness 2001a: pp. 3-18, 2001b: pp. 80-85). These different interpretations, however, do not have affect the dating of the coin deposits to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>717</sup> Hachlili 2013, p. 63.

<sup>718</sup> Spigel 2012a, p. 121.

<sup>719</sup> Although the excavators refer to this space as a “corridor” or passageway, it is a long, narrow side room with only one entrance from the main hall. They also indicate that the space was used for storage during much of its history and that its floor was not swept clean, allowing debris to accumulate (Meyers *et al*, 1990, pp. 25-26).

**Deposit Description:** 1943 badly worn *minimi* found in a cooking pot on July 6, 1977.<sup>720</sup> The cooking pot was discovered broken because of the pressure of the debris above it (the pot was probably complete when the deposit was made/in use). The find-spot of the deposit itself was a washed-in layer of yellowish soil.<sup>721</sup> Although the archaeologists found the pot some centimeters above a plaster floor beneath it, fragments of additional plaster pieces immediately below the pot indicate that it might have rested on another plaster floor. That floor had been eroded over time by flowing water, as rain washed the area regularly from uphill to the west, swirling around the corner of the building. The layer on which the pot rested was yellowish soil.<sup>722</sup> The excavators note that no pit could be detected around the pot: according to them, nobody had dug a small hole into which the pot was placed to conceal the deposit. In other words, the pot was meant to sit on top of the floor during the last phase of use of the building. Around the pot, fragments of lamps, whole and broken roof tiles, bronze pieces, iron nails, part of a bronze chandelier, and glass were also uncovered: according to the excavators, this is evidence that the corridor was used as a storage space.<sup>723</sup> Immediately above all of this was a tumble layer; the final collapse of the building.

**Container Present?** Yes: a cooking pot

**Description of Coins:** The deposit was preliminary published by Richard S. Hanson in 1979 and later by Joyce Raynor in 1990.<sup>724</sup> According to Hanson, the deposit consisted entirely of coins “of the lowest possible value” and span a range of 188 years (330-518 CE), not including two Hasmonean coins dated earlier than 330 CE. Only 417 coins could be cleaned enough for identification, and the quantity of the coins increases as one approaches the *terminus ad quem* of the deposit. Raynor affirms this analysis in her later publication, in which she reprints Hanson’s coin table. In 1998 while working at the IAA, Gabriela Bijovsky re-examined the deposit. She notes that 418 coins were cleaned and could be read, of which 400 could be dated. According to her, the deposit included a few coins from the second century BCE which were similar in size and shape to the rest of the coins, which

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<sup>720</sup> Hanson 1979, p. 53: this number is hard to determine because of the fragmentary condition of some of the coins. Meyers *et al.* 1990, p. 48 mention 1953 coins.

<sup>721</sup> Hanson 1979, p. 54.

<sup>722</sup> Hanson 1979, p. 54.

<sup>723</sup> According to Hanson, who analyzed the coins in the 1970s, the pot was “located in such a place that it might have served for some other purpose than that of concealing treasure” (Meyers *et al.* 1979, p. 53). More likely, according to him (and Raynor later), the deposit was a petty cache box, perhaps a depository for charity or operating monies.

<sup>724</sup> Meyers *et al.* 1979, pp. 52-55; Meyers *et al.* 1990, pp. 243-245 and catalogue in the back.

could be dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>725</sup> 60% of the coins fall between 425 and 498 CE, from Theodosius II to Anastasius I.

At the IAA, 426 coins could be found in the database associated with this deposit (so 1517 coins were presumably illegible). It is unclear why ten to eleven more coins were identified by IAA staff but were not included in the publications. Of the 426 coins, 406 could be dated. These coins include the two specimens dated to 104-76 BCE, minted by Alexander Jannaeus in Jerusalem, as mentioned by Bijovsky, and a nummus dated to 140 BCE to 200 CE of an unknown emperor and minting place. The remaining coins range from 268 CE to 565 CE, with the numbers increasing over time and decreasing after 498 CE.<sup>726</sup> The deposit did not end at 518 CE however, as Raynor and Hanson claim, as three later specimens especially stand out: a coin attributed to Thrasamund, king of the Vandals and Alans, dated to 496-523 CE, a coin of Baduila, king of the Ostrogoths, dated 549-552 CE, and a minimus of Justinian I, dated 548-565 CE. Most of the coins are general types, but a couple of them are rather unusual. Besides the issues of Thrasamund, Baduila and Justinian I, eight more Vandalic, Ostrogothic, and Axumite coins were part of the deposit.<sup>727</sup> Of these ten coins, eight were minted in Carthage, one in Rome, and two in Egypt.

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<sup>725</sup> Bijovsky 1998, p. 80: these coins were probably included in the deposit because their worn condition, and similar size and weight made them indistinguishable from worn coins of the 4-6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

<sup>726</sup> This correlates with Anastasius' coin reform in 498 CE.

<sup>727</sup> They have been analyzed in detail by Bijovsky 1998, pp. 81-83.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place														Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Antioch (?)	Carthage	Constantinop..	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Egypt	Heraclea	Jerusalem	Nicomedia	Rome	Rome (?)	Thessalonica		Unknown
Layer L Null																1,537	1,537
4009.1																1	1
=4004	200															1	1
=1046	270															1	1
	273															1	1
	285												1				1
	335			1													1
	341												1		2		12
	346														4		4
	361			1											3		4
	375														64		64
	383														2		3
	388														2		2
	392	1												12			32
	395	1				11		2			1				434		836
	400														12		12
	406	11															11
	408	1						1							213		314
	423											11			3		14
	425					1											1
	450					3		11	1						257		758
	457					6					6				30		42
	474					59											59
	475					8	19										27
	476					2											2
	480				1												1
	491														1		1
	498					54											54
	500														17		17
	523				4												4
	552											1					1
	565				1												1
	600				2			2									4
	-76									2							2
Grand Total		11	12	11	62	1332	19	61	2	1	2	7	12	2	12	571,681	2491,694

Date Certainty  
# Certain  
\* Uncertain

**FIGURE 15. GUSH HALAV, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND IN A COOKING POT IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF GUSH HALAV. ALL 1943 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1977-1978

**Deposit Location:** Just in front of the doorway to the synagogue hall, in the western corridor.

**Archaeological Information:** Phase III, Area I.4 (south western quadrant), layer L4021=4010.1=4048.1=1058.1

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes in Phase III, no in Phase IV

**Deposit Type:** IA2

**Deposit Description:** 131 coins were found in Area I.4 or layer L4021=4010.1=4048.1=1058.1. This layer formed the make-up for a plaster floor above it (upon which coin Deposit 1 was found) but originated as an accumulation upon the plaster floor of synagogue III.<sup>728</sup> In this soil layer, an assortment of artifacts was discovered: lamp fragments, iron implements, bronze, glass, wheel-turned hanging lamps, and 146 coins. Of these, 42 coins were found in Locus 4010.1 and 62 in Locus 4048.1, indicating some sort of cohesion.<sup>729</sup>

**Container Present?** No, but according to Hanson, the large numbers of coins found lends credence to the view that money pouches were stored here.<sup>730</sup>

**Description of Coins:** 127 of the 131 coins from this deposit were published preliminarily by Hanson in 1979 and Raynor in 1990, but no distinction was made between the coins found in Area I.4, layer L4021=4010.1=4048.1=1058.1 and coins from other areas and strata in the building. Furthermore, tables only indicate historical periods and minting places of these coins, making the publications not very useful for our research.<sup>731</sup> These coins were also not easy to trace at the IAA depot. In the end, 108 coins could be found from Loci 4048 and 4010. It is unclear what happened to the other 19 coins that were published: perhaps they were stored under another locus number, but they could not be located in the database system.<sup>732</sup>

Of the 108 identified coins, 98 could be dated.<sup>733</sup> Three coins are from an earlier period: an illegible coin dated to 103-76 BCE, a coin minted by Claudius in 51-52 CE in Nysa-Scythopolis, and an autonomous coin from Tyre dated to 153-154 CE. The other 95 coins range from 307 to 491 CE, with an even distribution throughout this period. Unfortunately, due to poor preservation, the minting places of only 14 coins could be determined.

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<sup>728</sup> Meyers *et al.* 1979, p. 52; Meyers *et al.* 1990, pp. 50-51.

<sup>729</sup> Meyers *et al.* 1990, pp. 273-274 and 278-280. In his preliminary report of 1979, however, Hanson notes 44 coins from Locus 4010.1 and 68 coins from Locus 4048.1 (Hanson, 1979, p. 52). Is this an error? He also notes 7 coins of Locus 4020. In a preliminary Locus list in the IAA archives, Eric Meyers notes 40 coins from Locus 4010.1: Coins nos. 5-15 (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century), nos. 21-28 (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century), nos. 30-52 (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century), and no. 8 (?) (450-457 CE).

<sup>730</sup> Hanson 1979, p. 52.

<sup>731</sup> Meyers *et al.* 1979, pp. 49-52; Meyers *et al.* 1990, pp. 230-243 and catalogue in the back.

<sup>732</sup> No coins could also be found under Loci 4048.1, nor under Loci 4021 and 1058. It is unclear if these loci never contained coins or if they contained coins that were illegible and thus discarded. Perhaps the 19 “missing” coins were not actually found in this layer but were added to other loci in the vicinity, or they were lost when the coins moved to the IAA depot.

<sup>733</sup> I decided to follow the information given by the IAA for these coins, and not the information in Raynor.



Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place									Unknown	Total
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nysa-Scytho..	Rome	Thessalonica	Tyre		
Null	Null										23	23
4010.1	Null										10	10
	337		1									1
	346				1							1
	365										6	6
	395				1						4	5
	400										2	2
	408										1	1
	450			1							2	12
	457					1						1
	491			1								1
	498										3	3
	500										7	7
4048.1	52						1					1
	154								1			1
	337										1	1
	341						1					1
	355										1	1
	361				1						1	2
	365										33	33
	367										1	13
	375							1			3	13
	383	1										1
	395										1	1
	450										2	2
	457										1	1
	474			2								2
	498										8	8
	-76										1	1
Grand Total		1	1	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	11	106
Date Certainty												
■ Certain												
■ Uncertain												

FIGURE 16. GUSH HALAV, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FROM AN ACCUMULATION UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF GUSH HALAV. ALL 131 COINS ARE BRONZE.

### G. Meroth (Khirbet Marus)

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/meroth/>

Longitude: 33.0318459099827 Latitude: 35.53056836128235

**Bibliography:** Ilan Z. and Damati E. 1985, "Merot," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiot*, Vol. 86, p. 8 (Hebrew); Kindler A. 1986, "The Synagogue Treasure of Meroth, Eastern Upper Galilee, Israel," in: *Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Numismatics*, pp. 315–320; Ilan Z. and Damati E. (eds.), 1987, *Meroth the Ancient Jewish village. The Excavations at the Synagogue and Bet Midrash*, Tel Aviv: Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (Hebrew); Kindler A. 1987, "The Coins of the Synagogue's Treasury," in: *Meroth the Ancient Jewish village. The Excavations at the Synagogue and Bet Midrash*, pp. 118–126 (Hebrew); Ilan Z. 1989, "The

Synagogue and Beth Midrash of Meroth,” in: Hachlili R. (ed.), *Ancient Synagogues in Israel: Third–Seventh century C.E.*, pp. 21–41; Chen D. 1990, “Dating synagogues in Galilee: On the Evidence from Meroth and Capernaum,” in: *Liber Annuus*, Vol. 40, pp. 349–355; Ilan Z. 1993, “Meroth,” in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 1028–1031; Ilan Z. 1995, “The Synagogue and study House at Meroth,” in: *Ancient synagogues. Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Vol. 1, pp. 256–288; Tsafirir Y. 1995, “The Synagogues at Capernaum and Meroth and the Dating of the Galilean Synagogue,” in: *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: some recent archaeological research*, Vol. 1, pp. 151–161; Damati E. 2000, *The Meroth Synagogue and its implication on the Chronology of Galilean Synagogues*, MA Thesis (Hebrew); Frankel R. et al. 2001, *Settlement Dynamics*, p. 43; Magness J. 2001, “The Question of the Synagogue: The Problem of Typology,” in: Avery–Peck A.J. and Neusner J. (eds.) *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part Three, Volume 4*, p. 28; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 276–281; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp.57, 69–72, 152, 170, 173–175, 231, 251, 329, 417–419, 421, 532–533, 538, 548–551, 557, 562–564, 594; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 69–74 (Hebrew)

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/meroth/>

- The Israel Museum:

[http://www.museumsinIsrael.gov.il/en/items/Pages/ItemCard.aspx?ItemId=ICMS\\_IMJ\\_537098](http://www.museumsinIsrael.gov.il/en/items/Pages/ItemCard.aspx?ItemId=ICMS_IMJ_537098)

- The Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art:

<http://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php?mode=treefriend&id=799&f=site>

**Date Excavated:** 1981-1986

**Excavators:** Zvi Ilan and Emanuel Damati

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: end 4<sup>th</sup> century-beginning 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>734</sup>  
Phase II: early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> Based on pottery sherds and coins found underneath the floors as well as in the rooms under the synagogue (Ilan 1989, p. 21 and p. 23). Stage IA is dated to 400–450 CE, based on pottery and coins underneath the plaster floor, and stage IB is dated to 450–500, based on a coin of Valentinian III from 425–455 CE, found underneath the mosaic floor. However, no full excavation report on this site, including a pottery and coin catalogue, has been published, and the Valentinian III coins has not been registered at the IAA coin department, so this information cannot be confirmed (see also Bijovsky 2012, p. 94).

<sup>735</sup> More precisely, around 620 CE, based on finds from the Islamic period found between the original walls of the synagogue and a new “frame” that was built around the building (Ilan 1989, p. 37).

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** At the highest point of the village, on the site of a quarry, with terraced houses below.<sup>736</sup>

### **Description of the Building:**

Phase I: (= Stage IA-IB and II) A basilica with two rows of six columns. The building had a plaster floor that at some point was overlaid with a mosaic floor (possibly in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>737</sup> and overlaid again with a flagstone floor during a renovation phase (= Stage II).<sup>738</sup> The east and west walls had two tiers of benches, and by the south wall were two raised platforms. There were three entrances in the south wall, a door in the west wall leading to a storeroom, and a door in the east wall leading to an outer courtyard with a cistern.<sup>739</sup> The western storeroom was four meters long with a vaulted ceiling. In front of the south entrances stood a colonnaded portico. The building was roofed with plaster and roof tiles. Under the floor of the synagogue, in the southwestern area, were six underground rooms including one with a *miqveh*. During the 6<sup>th</sup> century renovation phase, new benches were built on top of the old ones to accommodate the raised flagstone floor. The platforms were enlarged and a stairway was added to the western wall that led to an upper gallery.

Phase II: (= Stage III) The building was shortened by moving the north wall 1.3 m in, leaving the basilica with two rows of only five columns. The entrances in the south wall were closed off and three entrances were made in the new north wall. Beyond the south wall, a room with benches and a mosaic floor was added, possibly functioning as a study house. The builders also added a “frame” around the building, ranging from 1.5 to 2 meters away from the original walls. The space in between was filled with rubble, yellowish soil, and random pieces of artifacts.<sup>740</sup>

#### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1981-1986

**Deposit Location:** In the areas where the stone pavement had been raised during Stage II, under the flagstones of the main hall.

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<sup>736</sup> Ilan 1989, p. 21. Surveys of the site were conducted in the 1960s, but the place was never identified as the ancient site of Meroth until Zvi Ilan started excavations.

<sup>737</sup> Ilan 1995, p. 261.

<sup>738</sup> Ilan 1995, p. 267: this probably happened at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, based on the discovery of a small follis of Anastasius I dated 507-512 CE, found in L167 below the floor.

<sup>739</sup> Ilan 1995, p. 257. He compares this courtyard with a cistern (in some publications erroneously translated as “well”) to the atrium with a cistern that is often associated with ancient churches and remarks that perhaps the builders of the synagogue were influenced by the designs of contemporaneous churches. However, cisterns in the vicinity of synagogues are a well-known feature.

<sup>740</sup> Ilan 1989, pp. 28-29.

**Archaeological Information:** Stage II, Locus 29A (Basket 1254), Locus 167 (Basket 1729), and Locus 157 (Basket 1693).

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** The excavators note in their 1989 preliminary report that underneath Stage II's stone floor a total of 520 coins was found. 177 coins were identified from the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, including coins minted by the emperors Arcadius, Honorius, Theodosius II, and Marcian. Many of the coins were worn and, according to the excavators, of "little value."<sup>741</sup>

In other publications, however, the excavators state that the deposit consisted of a total of only 320 coins.<sup>742</sup> This amount is closer to what is stored in the IAA archives as coming from three different loci: 127 legible coins from L29A, Basket 1254; 138 coins from L167, Basket 1729, and 96 coins from L157, Basket 1693, for a total of 361 coins.<sup>743</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The excavations of the Meroth synagogue were never fully published and a coin catalogue of this site has thus never been presented.<sup>744</sup> However, the IAA provided me with a full report on the coins found in the synagogue and gave me permission to include them in this dissertation project. The coins here provided have been analyzed and identified by Gabriela Bijovsky.

361 coins are associated with this deposit in the IAA database. Locus 29A (Basket 1254) yielded 127 identifiable *minimi*, ranging from 335 to 423 CE, most of which can be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>745</sup> One coin, however, is minted by Trajan and is dated to 99-100 CE, forming an anomaly in the group. Most notable, however, are 32 coins of the VIRTVS

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<sup>741</sup> Ilan 1989, p. 27.

<sup>742</sup> Ilan and Damati 1987, p. 127.

<sup>743</sup> These numbers are based on the information found in the IAA database and these coins have been added by me to my database. Bijovsky 2012, p. 94, however mentions only 104 legible coins from L167, 109 legible *minimi* from L157, and 116 legible *minimi* of L29A, for a total of 329 coins, which no longer seems to be true. See also Ahipaz 2015, pp. 71-72.

<sup>744</sup> I reached out to Emanuel Damati over email in the hopes of getting more information on this deposit but I never received a reply. I also made multiple attempts to get my hand on his (Hebrew) MA thesis in the hopes of finding more information, but my search was unsuccessful.

<sup>745</sup> Bijovsky mentions 128 coins in her unpublished report but this does not correlate with her tables or the IAA database.

EXERCITI (1) type and 47 coins of the GLORIA ROMANORVM (15) type, which are relatively rare in Israel.<sup>746</sup> Both types date to 383-392 CE, suggesting they were added as one group.<sup>747</sup> Locus 167 (Basket 1729) consisted out of 138 identifiable coins, ranging from 330 to 474 CE.<sup>748</sup> Two coins are earlier: a completely worn Hellenistic coin (probably Macedonian) from the third century BCE, and an autonomous Roman provincial coin from Tyre, dated 46-47 CE. Locus 157 (Basket 1693) contained 96 identifiable *minimi*, ranging from 341 CE to 512 CE.<sup>749</sup> The latest coin is a follis of Anastasius I (507-512 CE), which provides a *terminus post quem* for the deposit. With the exceptions of the Trajan coin minted in Tiberias, the Roman provincial coin minted in Tyre, one coin minted in Siscia (Valentinian II, 383-392 CE), and one coin minted in Rome (Honorius, 410-423 CE), all the coins are issues of the standard eastern mints.

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<sup>746</sup> Bijovsky, *unpublished report*.

<sup>747</sup> Bijovsky further points out that this group only has six coins of the SALVS REIPUBLICAE “Victory dragging Captive” type, which usually constitutes the bulk of coins in 5<sup>th</sup>-century hoards in Israel/Palestine.

<sup>748</sup> Bijovsky mentions 141 coins in her unpublished report, but this does not correspond to her tables or the IAA database.

<sup>749</sup> Bijovsky mentions 98 coins in her unpublished report, but again this is not the same number of coins as in her tables or the IAA database.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place														Total
		Alexandria	Antioch	Antioch (?)	Constantinople	Constantinople..	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nicomedia	Rome	Siscia	Thessalonica	Tiberias	Tyro	Unknown	
29A	Null				1										1	2
	100											1				1
	337				1											1
	341														1	1
	346														1	1
	354	1													4	5
	361														1	1
	375										1				3	4
	383	1	6		3		2	1							5	18
	386				4			1								6
	392	1	13		13	1	9	2	6		1	11			4	61
	395		6		5		2		3						1	17
	402														1	1
	408						1								2	3
	423														1	1
	450														1	1
	500														3	3
157	341			1												1
	346														2	2
	361		1		1		1								4	7
	375		1												5	6
	383	1	1												2	4
	392		1												5	6
	395	1	6		3				1						20	31
	402														1	1
	408		3				1								6	10
	423		3							1		1			6	11
	450				1										3	4
	474														3	3
	475														1	1
	500														8	8
	512				1											1
167	47												1			1
	335		1				1									2
	341				1										1	2
	346														3	3
	361														12	12
	375														11	11
	383		1					1	1						1	4
	386				1											1
	392														4	4
	395	3	5		3		1								22	34
	408	1	1	1			1		1						12	17
	423														1	1
	450														10	10
	455														1	1
	457														3	3
	474														1	1
	500														30	30
	-200														1	1
Grand Total		9	49	2	37	1	18	5	14	1	1	13	1	1	154	306

Date Certainty  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 17. MEROETH, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF MEROETH. ALL 361 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1981-1986

**Deposit Location:** In a hollowed-out stone in the western storeroom, in the northeast corner

**Archaeological Information:** Unknown

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA4

**Deposit Description:** Most of the floor stones of the western room of the synagogue were pillaged over time. However, some side stones were attached to the walls and were difficult to remove; they were found *in situ* by the excavators.<sup>750</sup> In the northeast corner of the room lay a stone, only half of which survived, pierced by a 20 cm wide hole.<sup>751</sup> This stone rested above a hollow carved in the rock, the western half of which was clogged up. In the eastern half, under the hole, was a hewn sloping tunnel, 25 cm wide and 60 cm long, which led to a niche dug at the end of the large hollow. The niche measured 35 by 37 centimeters. In this niche, 482 coins were found, mingled with dirt and sand, 237 of which were gold and the rest bronze.<sup>752</sup> The distance between the top of the hole and the top of the niche was 60-95 centimeters. Thus, one would have needed some sort of ladle to remove the coins from the niche. Around the opening of the hollow, eight or nine more gold coins were found scattered around (a coin of the city of Sepphoris struck under Trajan and eight Byzantine coins),<sup>753</sup> as well as a pair of bronze scales. Presumably, the hollow or tunnel originally had a stopper, and a mat or carpet could have been laid over the stone to hide the installation.

**Container Present?** Yes, a hollowed-out rock

**Description of Coins:** Although this deposit was preliminarily studied by Kindler (1986, 1987) and described briefly by Ilan (1995) and Hachlili (2013), a detailed catalogue was never published. The IAA has been working on a full analysis, and their results have been provided to me for inclusion in this dissertation database. The coins have been evaluated by Gabriela Bijovsky.

The deposit contained 56 gold solidi,<sup>754</sup> 37 gold semisses, 150 gold tremisses, 210 bronze

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<sup>750</sup> Kindler also refers to this place as “a vaulted storeroom” (1986, p. 315).

<sup>751</sup> Ilan 1995, p. 272. Kindler 1986, p. 315 calls it a “cracked hole.”

<sup>752</sup> Kindler 1986, p. 315; Ilan 1989 p. 30. Kindler, however, states that 248 coins of this deposit were gold (for a total of 485 coins). Ilan describes the tunnel as being 90 cm long instead of 60 cm. In 1995, he stated that the tunnel was 95 cm long.

<sup>753</sup> Kindler 1986, p. 315 mentions one gold coin of Sepphoris and “eight” Byzantine coins, for a total of “eight” coins. Some counting error must have occurred here.

<sup>754</sup> According to Bijovsky, 50 are normal solidi and 6 are lightweight solidi. Four of the lightweight solidi can be attributed to Maurice Tiberius: they are all of the 23 siliqua type and have a star depicted in the reverse right field of the coin, and a globe cruciger instead of the normal globe in the hands of the standing angel. Two can be attributed to Justin II: they are of the 22 siliqua type and have a star to the left of the seated Constantinople, a

folles, and 17 bronze half-folles, 1 bronze fals, 1 gold dinar/denarius, 1 bronze prutah, and 9 bronze unidentified coins, for a total of 482 coins.<sup>755</sup> 470 of these date to the Byzantine period, with 80% produced in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The bulk of the material ranges from 491 CE (Anastasius I) to 610 CE (Phocas), although there are a number of bronze coins that predate the Byzantine period: a prutah of Alexander Jannaeus (80-73 BCE) minted in Jerusalem, and nine Late Roman coins of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (including a Roman provincial coin of Constantine I (315-316 CE) minted in Rome, a coin of Valentinian II (383-395 CE), and a coin of Theodosius I (383-392 CE)). Two later coins are exceptional: a gold dinar of the Abbasid caliph Muhammed al-Mahdi dated to 783 CE, and an Ayyubid bronze fals Ayyubid coin of al-'Aziz 'Uthman dated to 1193-1198 CE, minted in Damascus. The inclusion of these later coins is intriguing. The excavators suggested that perhaps the stone was still in use during the early Islamic period and that these coins are the only remnants of a larger stash of Abbasid and Umayyad coins that were removed. Or, the coins scattered around the stone are an indication that there was a hasty attempt to retrieve the coins during an emergency in the late 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century but the local population only managed to take out the upper part of the deposit.<sup>756</sup> This, however, would not explain the late 12<sup>th</sup> century coin. Bijovsky therefore calls them later intrusions.<sup>757</sup> For now, these two later coins remain an enigma. Some of the coins contain punchmarks: these can be seen on 73 folles (1/3 of total) and 8 half-folles (1/2 of total), all attributed to Anastasius I. These figures suggest the popularity of this practice but are not a consistent feature of all the coins.<sup>758</sup> The last exceptional coin in the deposit is a solidus attributed to the Rebellion of the Heraclii, minted at an unknown

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reverse inscription ending in ΘS, and an exergue reading OB\*+\*. However, the weight of the normal solidi in this deposit ranges from 3.82 to 4.52 grams (with standard solidus 4.5 gr), while the 6 lightweight solidi range from 4.2 to 4.3 grams (with standard lightweight solidus between 3.75 and 4.3 gr), all displaying significant loss of weight.

<sup>755</sup> Kindler 1986; 1987 writes that there are 56 solidi, 38 semisses, 150 tremisses, 225 folles and 13 half-folles, but this is incorrect. Bijovsky writes in her unpublished analysis that the deposit contains 58 solidi, 36 semisses, and 149 tremisses, but this does not correlate with the catalogue she includes nor with the IAA database.

<sup>756</sup> Kindler 1986, p. 316; Ilan 1989, p. 30; Ilan 1995 p. 273 (who attributes the sudden abandonment to "an attack by a hostile force").

<sup>757</sup> Unpublished report 2019, p. 10, p. 24. She believes the deposit was closed sometime around 610 CE, when the synagogue went out of use.

<sup>758</sup> For the use of punchmarks on Byzantine coinage, including images of the punchmarks used in the Meroth deposit, see Bijovsky 2012, pp. 189-194 (also Kindler 1986, pp. 317-318). The punchmarks can be attributed to the first monetary reform under Anastasius (also called "small module," 498-512 CE), to express a change in value of the coin by the same emperor who struck the original coin. According to Hahn and Metlich, they are marks of revalidation, stamped after the introduction of the large module (512-518 CE), to indicate the new value relative to the old coins (Hahn 2000, p. 30). A possible explanation for why they are not applied to all coins might be that the punchmarks were only applied during a short transitional period until enough coins of the large module entered circulation and revalidating coins was no longer necessary (Bijovsky 2012, pp. 193-194).



eastern mint.<sup>759</sup> Emperor Phocas' unpopular reign ended in 610 during a revolt instigated by Heraclius the Elder, which started in Carthage in 608 CE and soon spread to Palestine.<sup>760</sup> Using North Africa as a base, the rebels managed to overthrow Phocas, beginning the Heraclian dynasty, which ruled Byzantium for a century. During this revolt, the rebels started minting their own series of gold, silver, and bronze coinage. This coin is the only one that has been found so far in Israel and is extremely rare. Interestingly, this deposit contains almost no *minimi*, in contrast to the deposit found under the synagogue's floor. The chronology of the coins also only starts at the point that the floor deposit ends. In other words, the floor deposit is older than the hollowed stone deposit and is of an entirely different make-up.

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<sup>759</sup> The date and place of this series is still under discussion, but Hahn and Metlich propose Cyprus as the minting place and the letter Γ on the reverse standing for year three of the rebellion, giving a date of 310-311 CE.

<sup>760</sup> Bijovsky 2012, p. 360.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place											Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Carthage	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Damascus	Eastern Mint	Jerusalem	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica		Unknown
Null	316									1			1	
	375											2	2	
	392										1		1	
	395		1									1	2	
	400											3	3	
	507				34				2				36	
	512				41				4				45	
	518				16								16	
	522				22				2				24	
	526					1							1	
	527		1		11							2	14	
	537		1		16								17	
	538				9				6				15	
	539		7	1	1								9	
	540			1	1				1				3	
	544				1								1	
	545				1	1							2	
	548		1										1	
	552				6						1		7	
	556				1								1	
	557					2			1				3	
	558				1								1	
	563				1								1	
	565		1		72								73	
	566		2										2	
	567				4								4	
	569				2								2	
	570				1								1	
	571		1		1								2	
	572				11				4				51	
	573				2								2	
	574				1				1				2	
	575		1						1				2	
	576		3			1							4	
	577								1				1	
	578	1	2		42				1		2	1	49	
	579		1										1	
	582				18								18	
	583				1				1				11	
	584				9						1		19	
	585				4								4	
	587				1								1	
	589		2						1				3	
	602	1			701								711	
	603				1								1	
	607				3								3	
	610				7								7	
	611							1					1	
	783											1	1	
	1198					1							1	
	-73							1					1	
Grand Total		2	24	2	38816	5	1	1	1	26	1	5	73	46121

Date Certainty  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 18. MEROTH, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND INSIDE A HOLLOW STONE IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF MEROTH. 244 COINS ARE GOLD, 238 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## H. H. Shema' (Khirbet Shem'a)

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/h-shema/>

**Longitude:** 32.97710960835231 **Latitude:** 35.43963611125946

**Bibliography:** Meyers E. 1972, "Horvat Shema', the Settlement and the Synagogue," in *Qadmoniyot*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 58–61 (Hebrew); Meyers E. Kraabel A.T. and Strange J. 1972a, "Archaeology and Rabbinic Traditions at Khirbet Shema': 1970 and 1971 Campaigns," in: *Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 1–31; Meyers E. Kraabel A.T. and Strange J. 1972b, "Khirbet Shema' and Meiron," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 22, pp. 174–176; Meyers E. Kraabel A.T. and Strange J. 1976, *Ancient Synagogue Excavations at Khirbet Shema', Upper Galilee, Israel 1970–1972*; Meyers E.M. 1982, "The synagogue at Horvat Shema'," in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 70–74; Netzer E. 1996, "Review of the synagogue at Gush Halav and Khirbet Shem'a," in: *EI*, vol. 25, pp. 450–455 (Hebrew, English summary p. 106); Magness J. 1997, "Synagogue Typology and Earthquake chronology at Khirbet Shema'," in: *Journal of Field Archaeology*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 211–220; Strange J. 2001, "Synagogue Typology and Khirbet Shema': A Response to Jodi Magness," in: *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part Three, Volume 4: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, the Special Problem of the Synagogue*, pp. 71–78; Bijovsky G. 2009, "Numismatic Report," in: *Excavations at Ancient Nabratein*, pp. 384–386; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 101–119, 247–248; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 57, 73, 154, 177, 180, 553, 586, 588–589

### Websites:

-The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/shema/>

- Virtual World Project:

<http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/Shema/site.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1970-1972

**Excavators:** Eric Meyers, Thomas Kraabel, and James Strange

**Archaeological Information:** Fields NE VII-NW VII

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: 284 CE  
Phase II: 306 CE<sup>761</sup>

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<sup>761</sup> These two phases are based on the identification of materials associated with the first building that was buried and thus isolated by the rebuilding of the synagogue after the earthquake of 306 CE (Meyers *et al.* 1976, p. 33, p. 38). Magness, however, suggests that there was only one phase and that it was constructed not earlier than the late 4<sup>th</sup> century or even the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, based on the ceramics and coins found in sealed loci (Magness 1997, p. 215, 218; see also Netzer 1996). Meyers denies this (Meyers 1976, pp. 34-37), stating that the later material found in sealed loci under the floor, especially a coin dated to Gratian, is an indication of renovations to the floor in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, probably necessitated because of rain erosion. Whatever the case, the coin deposit found in a

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** On the first terrace below the ancient village.<sup>762</sup>

**Description of the Building:**

Phase I: An east-west broadhouse synagogue with two rows of four columns. There was a grand entrance at the south end of the west wall, and a second entrance in the western half of the north wall at the top of two-meter-wide stairs. Remains of single benches were found along the north and south walls.<sup>763</sup> Huge quantities of loose tesserae suggest a mosaic floor. An upper gallery was located on the west side of the building, with a room underneath decorated with colorful frescoes (the “Frescoed Room”). At the south end of the hall is an entrance to a small hewn room beneath the monumental staircase, identified by the excavators as a *genizah*.

Phase II: The layout of the building stayed the same but a *bemah* was added on top of the benches along the south wall. The form of the columns, pedestals, and capitals in the main hall changed as well.

**1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1971-1972

**Deposit Location:** Chamber

**Archaeological Information:** Area Northwest I:32, Locus 28 and 30

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA2

**Deposit Description:** A chamber was discovered under stairs from the western side room leading into the synagogue proper.<sup>764</sup> The floor level of the chamber is only slightly below that of the synagogue floor, so that the chamber is not under the main room of the synagogue but next to it. Its entrance at the time of discovery was on the north side of the chamber: a square opening of 55 cm wide, 56 cm high, and 38 cm above the floor of the side room (or, the “Frescoed Room”) of the hall of the synagogue. However, the chamber was previously oriented towards the east. The original opening was a square, horizontal

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chamber of the synagogue is associated with the second phase of the building when the synagogue was still in use in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century or early 5<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>762</sup> Ancient literature talks about the site as “Teqo’a,” and Meyers has proposed that this site was a suburb or satellite settlement of ancient Meiron, whose synagogue inspired the one at Khirbet Shema’ (Meyers *et al.* 1976, pp. 12-16).

<sup>763</sup> The excavators suggest there were benches all around the room.

<sup>764</sup> A full description of this chamber can be found in Meyers *et al.* 1976, pp. 42-45.

shaft measuring 61 cm in height and width. The bottom surface, which is still preserved, was 37 cm above the chamber floor and 104 cm below the ceiling. The bedrock above the northern part of this entrance was broken through at a later date, making a much larger, irregular opening which at the time of discovery was blocked on the inside with rough ashlar, and on the east side, by stairs which led into the main hall from the western side room. The bedrock dips down on the northern and eastern sides of the chamber and becomes relatively thin over the eastern and later northern entrances; according to the excavators, it is likely that the damage to the eastern opening was caused during the construction of the stairway and that the rough ashlar had to be laid in the opening to provide support for the staircase. There are no indications that this originally was a natural cave; it appears to have been cut out of solid bedrock and to have had some function from the beginning. The excavators suggest it was part of the industrial installations that were found here and which were used before the synagogue was constructed. Once the synagogue was built, the chamber was integrated into the complex and became an integral part of it. With its low ceiling and awkward entrance, the excavators believe that it was suitable only for "dead storage," or a *genizah*. The access to the chamber could be carefully controlled; the small opening could have been covered with something to restrict access to it. It was probably in use during the first phase, as well as the second phase of the synagogue's history (Strata II-IV).

Inside the chamber, five large pieces of glass were discovered as well as some smaller fragments, an oil lamp fragment, and 13 coins. Because the chamber had been sealed, it is likely that all these pieces were placed there intentionally. When the chamber was discovered, a fault that developed in the bedrock after the site was abandoned caused the room to flood with water.<sup>765</sup> More than 150 buckets of water had to be removed from the chamber during excavations, and most of the fill consisted of mud that had to be dried first before it could be broken up and sifted for materials. These conditions unfortunately caused all organic materials that might have been there (e.g. documents, wooden objects, mats, even some coins), to be destroyed. Furthermore, the room had been used by squatters long after the synagogue had gone out of use: pieces of Islamic pottery attest to this use at a later stage.

#### **Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** No full analysis of these coins was published in the final excavation report (Meyers *et al.* 1976). Instead, Richard Hanson and Michael L. Bates picked out some noteworthy examples found in diverse loci around the site, organized by period.<sup>766</sup> In the written description of the *genizah*, the coins are described as dated to the middle or late 4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> Meyers *et al.* 1976, p. 77.

<sup>766</sup> Hanson and Bates, in Meyers *et al.* 1976, pp. 146-169.

century, with the exception of R1550 (183-192 CE) and R1551 (98-117 CE). The catalogue in the back indicates 13 coins coming from Loci 29 and 30, indicating size, emperor, date, and where possible, type.<sup>767</sup> These seem to be the coins from the chamber, as they include R1550 and R1551. However, R1550 is identified as a SALVS REIPUBLICAE coin, possibly minted under Valentinian II and dated to 383-392 CE.<sup>768</sup> At the IAA, only one coin could be located from Locus 28: R1551, minted under Trajan. It is unclear what happened to the other 12 coins.<sup>769</sup>

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Unknown	Total
28	Null	1	1
	117	1	1
	361	1	1
	392	1	1
	400	1	1
	408	11	11
	450	1	1
	30	361	2
375		1	1
400		1	1
450		1	1
Grand Total		58	58
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Certain			
■ Uncertain			

**FIGURE 19. H. SHEMA', DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND IN A CHAMBER IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF H. SHEMA'S. ALL 13 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

<sup>767</sup> Hanson, in Meyers *et al.* 1976, pp. 281-289.

<sup>768</sup> Thus, there seems to be a discrepancy between the written report and the catalogue. For this project, the analysis from the catalogue have been followed, but no weight, sizes, and axis were provided for any of the coins.

<sup>769</sup> When contacting Meyers, he told me he was under the impression the IAA had the coins and all the information, thus it is unclear where something went wrong. An original coin register list, as well as field notes of the Horvat Shema' excavations are currently stored at the Duke Archives in the Rubenstein Library of Duke University. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this archive was closed all through 2020-21 and I was unable to make an appointment to see these notes and look for more details on the coins.

## I. Bar'am large/upper/central synagogue<sup>770</sup>

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/baram/>

**Longitude:** 33.04405088582141 **Latitude:** 35.414278507232666

**Bibliography:** Sukenik E.L. 1934, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, London: The Oxford University Press, pp. 24–26; Kohl H. and Watzinger C. 1975, *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea*, pp. 89–100; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 51–53; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 22–24 (Hebrew); Avigad N. 1993, “Bar'am,” in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 147–149; Aviam M. 2000, “Kefar Bar'am,” in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, Vol. 111, pp. 4–6; Aviam M. 2001, “The Ancient Synagogues at Bar'am,” in: *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part Three, Volume 4: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, the Special Problem of the Synagogue*, pp. 155–176; Frankel R. et al. 2001, *Settlement Dynamics*, p. 37; Aviam M. 2004, *Jews, Pagans and Christians*, pp. 147–169; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 311–312; Syon D. 2007, “The Bar'am Synagogues: Numismatic Appendix,” in: *Michmanim*, Vol. 20, pp. 33–44 (Hebrew); Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 150–152; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 60–61, 127, 178, 225, 231, 277, 437, 471–475, 540; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 75–77 (Hebrew)

### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/baram/>

- Conference on Cultural Heritage and New Technologies:

<https://www.chnt.at/photogrammetric-modelling-and-digital-reconstruction-of-the-ancient-synagogue-in-the-national-park-of-baram/>

- Virtual World Project:

<http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/Baram/site.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1. 1907  
2. 1998

**Excavators:** 1. Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger  
2. Mordechai Aviam

### **Archaeological Information: /**

**Date of Construction of the Building:** late 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>771</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> In older publications, the site is sometimes called Kefr Bir'im, referring to the village in which the synagogue is located.

<sup>771</sup> Based on the excavated coins and pottery found under the floor. Kohl and Watzinger dated the building to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries on the basis of its architectural design. Aviam dates the building to the late 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century.

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** In the center of the main village of Bar'am<sup>772</sup>

**Description of the Building:** This is a north-south basilica synagogue with two rows of six columns and a transverse row of two columns on the north side. According to Aviam, there was possibly also a transverse row of two columns on the south side, although Hachlili has suggested that the remains of the "stylobate" are the base of an aedicula.<sup>773</sup> The southern façade of the building is almost completely preserved: it had three door openings and in front a portico with eight columns. According to Aviam, this synagogue building had an earlier Phase that was smaller with a plaster floor. However, almost nothing of this Phase is preserved. The floor of the second Phase of the building was made of limestone flagstones.

**1. Deposit 1.**<sup>774</sup>

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1998

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor pavers

**Archaeological Information:** Area A: between the central and eastern doorways along the southern wall. Contains loci 11 and 16

**Certain association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

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However, he mentions a coin minted by Theodosius II (401-450 CE) found in Area D and states that the latest pottery found in a sealed locus dates to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Based on this information, a late 5<sup>th</sup> century construction date has been chosen. It is important to note, however, that no official excavation report that contains a pottery and coin catalogue has been published.

<sup>772</sup> For an overview of the medieval visitors to the site and later surveys, see Kohl and Watzinger 1916, p. 89, Aviam 2001, pp. 155-157 and Aviam 2004, pp. 1-2. The smaller synagogue of Bar'am is located about 300 meters north of the larger one, near an Arab-Christian cemetery.

<sup>773</sup> Hachlili 2013, p. 60.

<sup>774</sup> It is not clear exactly how many coins were found under the floor of this synagogue. In his 2001 report, Aviam first mentions 25+16 coins found in Area B and 32 coins found in Area D. Together this makes 73 coins. However, in his analysis of the coins on p. 161 he mentions that in total only 72 bronze coins were found during excavations, three of which did not come from under the floor (these three were found outside the synagogue, in Areas E and F). The small group (which he calls a hoard) of coins coming from the northeast corner of Area B contains 15 only coins. In his 2004 article he mentions another 12 coins found under the floor pavers in Area A, which were missing from his 2001 report. He mentions one coin found dated to the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century in Area A in his analysis of the coins. It is thus unclear how many coins were found under the floor. In 2007, Danny Syon published a catalogue of the coins (Hebrew) in which he mentions 14 coins for Area A, 24 coins for Area B, and 31 coins for Area D (for 69 coins in total): he probably only mentions the legible coins. Hachlili 2013, p. 540 mentions 124 coins found under the floor of the synagogue but one would only reach this number by adding the three coins from outside the building, as well as the 45 coins that Syon mentions were found at the small synagogue outside the village.



**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 14 coins were found under the floor tiles in this area. No coins were found in areas where the floor tiles were missing.<sup>775</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The excavations of the large synagogue at Bar'am were never published in a final excavation report. The only preliminary information on the coins can be found in a Hebrew article published by Danny Syon in 2007. After contacting Syon directly, I received a full analysis of the coins discovered in Area A; these have been used in this project. In Area A, 13 coins were found in Locus 11 and 1 in Locus 16, for a total of 14 coins.<sup>776</sup> They range from 317 CE to 346 CE, or a range of only 29 years, indicating that they were deposited at a single point shortly after 341-346 CE. All coins were minted at eastern mints, with the exception of 1 coin minted in Ticinum (follis of Crispus, 319-320 CE).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place								Total
		Antioch	Aquileia	Cyzicus	Eastern mint	Heraclea	Thessalonica	Ticinum	Unknown	
11	320			1		1		1		3
	321		1							1
	326	1								1
	329					1			1	2
	335						1			1
	341								4	4
	346				1					1
16	337								1	1
Grand Total		1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2 4	9 5

**Date Certainty**  
 ■ Certain  
 ■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 20. BAR'AM, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE LARGE SYNAGOGUE OF BAR'AM, AREA A. ALL 14 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

<sup>775</sup> Personal communication Moti Aviam: all coins were found with the aid of a metal detector. He notes that all coins from Bar'am were found under floor pavers. In areas where the floor was missing (for example in the area of a potential bemah), not a single coin was discovered. He believes that the coins were only brought in when the floor was being laid.

<sup>776</sup> At the IAA as well, 14 coins were found coming from Area A. This contradicts Aviam's article from 2004 which states that 12 coins were found here.

## 2. Deposit 2:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1998

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor pavers

**Archaeological Information:** Area B: between the central and western doorways along the southern wall. Contains Loci B1 (or 10), B9, B16, B18, and 20.

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 25 coins were found *in situ* under the floor pavers using a metal detector. A layer of field stones covered the bedrock, to prepare the area for the floor pavers. In some places, remains of an earlier plaster floor could be seen lying on top of the fieldstones, upon which a layer of soil was found with the imprints of the floor pavers that used to lay on top of it.<sup>777</sup> The coins were only found in places that were still covered with floor pavers during the excavations. In the northeastern corner of Area B 15 more coins were found as one group (This is called “Locus 10, under paver B1” by Aviam, but “Locus B1” by Syon).<sup>778</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to the published reports, a total of 40 coins was found in Area B. However, the IAA only has 24 coins identified as coming from Area B: 2 from Locus 20, 15 from B1, 1 from B9, 5 from B16, and 1 from B18. This corresponds to the document I received from Danny Syon with the full analysis of the coins. It is unclear if there were originally more coins, some of which ended up being discarded (because they were illegible?), or if Aviam was mistaken in his publications.<sup>779</sup>

The bulk of the certain coins in Area B range from 317 CE to 341 CE, which is the same timespan as the coins coming from Area A. However, a couple of heavily worn coins could potentially be dated to 367-395 CE, significantly altering the final deposition date. These

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<sup>777</sup> Aviam 2001, p. 159. The coins were thus found between the old plaster floor and the new paved floor.

<sup>778</sup> Again, the numbers change according to the publication. Aviam 2001, p. 159 mentions 16 coins found in L 10, but on p. 161 he mentions 15 coins. Syon 2007 mentions 15 coins coming from L B1 and he does not mention a L 10. At the IAA, 15 coins could be found catalogued under L B1.

<sup>779</sup> Personal communication Aviam: all the coins were in excellent condition in the field (and were thus legible). Personal communication Syon: A total of 124 coins was found at the synagogue. Of those, only 7 were totally unidentifiable and 33 were worn and could only be dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup>-early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, based on size, thickness, and texture.

coins are much smaller and harder to read but have a Victory on the reverse side. One coin in this group is peculiar: a coin possibly minted by Macrinus in Tyre, dated to 217-218 CE. This is one of the few coins found at Bar'am that is older than the 4<sup>th</sup> century and one of only two coins minted by Macrinus found in ancient synagogue deposits (the other one is from Korazin).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place										Total
		Antioch	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nicomedia	Rome	Siscia	Thessalonica	Trier	Tyre	Unknown	
20	218									1		1
	320								1			1
B1	320		1	1								2
	321						1	1				2
	325				1							1
	326	1	1			2						4
	327		1									1
	329	3			1							4
	330	1										1
B9	329	1										1
B16	320	1										1
	341			1							1 1	2 1
	395										1	1
B18	395										1	1
Grand Total		7	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1 3	21 3

**Date Certainty**  
 Certain  
 Uncertain

**FIGURE 21. BAR'AM, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE LARGE SYNAGOGUE OF BAR'AM, AREA B. ALL 24 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

### 3. Deposit 3:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1998

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor pavers

**Archaeological Information:** Area D: in the northwest corner of the hall. Contains Loci 42 and 43

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 32 bronze coins found with a metal detector. All the coins were found under pavers in the dark-brown layer of bedding.<sup>780</sup>

**Container Present?** No

<sup>780</sup> In the end, not all pavers were removed. There is a good chance that more coins can be found underneath the floor, scattered in a so-called coin layer (Personal communication Moti Aviam).

**Description of Coins:** According to Aviam, 32 coins were found in Area D (see footnote 774), which corresponds to the number of coins analyzed by Danny Syon in his unpublished report. At the IAA, however, only 26 coins could be found as coming from Area D: 25 from Locus 42 and 1 from Locus 43. It is unclear what happened to the other seven, but they were probably not kept.<sup>781</sup>

The content of this deposit is slightly different. The bulk of the coins range from 364 to 450 CE, making this deposit significantly younger than the other two. However, a couple of coins are much older: a Seleucid coin, possibly minted in Tyre between 200 and 126 BCE, and an Antoninianus minted by Probus between 276 and 282 CE. This coin denomination, introduced by Caracalla in 215 CE, was originally in silver but by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century was so debased that they were more or less entirely made of bronze (or bullion in this case: a bronze and silver mixture).<sup>782</sup> The coin discovered here weighs 3.65 grams and is marked with XXI on the reverse side, indicating that it was minted after Aurelian increased the weight of the Antoninianus in 271 CE. Its large size and heavy weight presumably would have been noticed by the user, but the fact that it was an older coin might have been the reason it was discarded and placed in the deposit. Two other Antoniniani, one minted by Probus and one by Claudius II Gothicus, were found in the nearby synagogue at Horvat Kur.<sup>783</sup>

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<sup>781</sup> Personal communication Donald Ariel.

<sup>782</sup> See Jones 1990, pp. 19-20, 41-42.

<sup>783</sup> Antoniniani have been found at other sites in Israel/Palestine and Syria, sometimes in large hoards, including at Capernaum, Beth She'an, and Tiberias. See Kool, 2016.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place					Total
		Antioch	Constantinople	Eastern mint	Tyre (?)	Unknown	
42	Null					1	1
	282	1					1
	367			1			1
	395	1	1	3		3	8
	400			3		12	15
	402	1					1
	423			1		1	2
	450			1			1
	-126				1		1
43	400			1			1
Grand Total		1 2	1	1 9	1	17	3 29

**Date Certainty**  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

FIGURE 22. BAR'AM, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE LARGE SYNAGOGUE OF BAR'AM, AREA D. ALL 32 COINS ARE BRONZE.

### 3. Lower Galilee

#### J. Beth She'arim<sup>784</sup>

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/beth-shearim/>

Longitude: 32.70284269924148 Latitude: 35.13001263141632

**Bibliography:** Mazar B. 1942, "Esh Sheikh Ibreek," in: *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*, Vol. 10, pp. 196–197; Mazar B. 1950, *Beth She'arim, Report on the excavations during 1936–1940*, Vol. 1, English Summary, The Israel exploration Society; Mazar B. 1952, "The Eighth season of excavations at Beth She'arim," in: *Yediot– Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, Vol. 21, pp. 153–164 (Hebrew); Kadman L. 1967, "The Monetary Development of Palestine in the Light of Coin Hoards," in: Kindler A. (ed.), *The Patterns of Monetary Development in Phoenicia and Palestine in Antiquity*, pp. 311–324; Mazar B. 1973, *Beth She'arim Report on the Excavations During 1936–1940*, vol. I; Hüttenmeister F. and Reeg G. 1977, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, pp. 68–72; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 70–75; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, p. 198–200 (Hebrew); Avigad

<sup>784</sup> In older records the place is often referred to as Esh Sheikh Bureik, Ibreek, or Sheikh Abreiq, the name of the Arab village in which the site is located.

N. and Mazar B. 1993 "Beth She'arim," in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 236–248; Vitto F. 1996, "Byzantine Mosaics at Beth She'arim: New Evidence for the History of the Site," in: *'Atiqot*, Vol. 28, p. 138; Safrai Z. 1998, *The Missing Century*, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters, pp. 136–137; Bijovsky G. 2007, "Numismatic Evidence for the Gallus Revolt: The Hoard from Lod," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 187–203; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 326–329; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 165–168; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 129, 183, 541

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/beth-shearim/>
- Bible Walks:  
<https://biblewalks.com/sites/BeitShearim.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1936-1940

**Excavators:** Benjamin Mazar

**Archaeological Information:** Building B

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: 3<sup>rd</sup>- early 4<sup>th</sup> century (Period IIIA)<sup>785</sup>  
Phase II: 1<sup>st</sup> half of 4<sup>th</sup> century (Period IIIB)<sup>786</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** On the northeastern side of a hill, overlooking the structures on the slopes.<sup>787</sup> The settlement was surrounded by a wall. Building B is a public building of at least two stories high, northwest of the synagogue building proper. Possibly the buildings belonged to the same "synagogue-complex."

#### **Description of the Building:**

Phase I: (=Period IIIA) This was a south-west north-east basilica synagogue with two rows of eight columns. By the northwest wall was a raised platform between the columns that could have been the base for a *bemah*. The floor was paved with flagstones. There were three

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<sup>785</sup> Mazar 1973, p. 18 notes: "The abundant archaeological material permits the dating of the first Phase of Period III from the first half of the third century to the beginning of the fourth century C.E. The architectural style and decoration of the synagogue, as well as the many small finds, such as marble slabs with Greek and Hebrew inscriptions (apparently of the third century), plaster ornamentation on the interior walls of the synagogue, many vessels (especially oil lamps and sherds typical of the third century), and coins of the third century C.E. all support our dating."

<sup>786</sup> Mazar 1973, p. 18: "The small finds of Period IIIB are characteristic of the first half of the fourth century C.E. especially the sherds and coins."

<sup>787</sup> Mazar 1973, pp. 7-9, 16. There was a long search for the historical site of Beth She'arim known from Josephus and rabbinic sources. Only in 1936 was the right site identified. The synagogue complex sits on the northeast side of the hilltop, on a height of 130 meters above sea level.

doorways in the southeast wall that connected to a courtyard. The courtyard had two cisterns. This synagogue was built as an addition to Building B, which was erected during Period II (2<sup>nd</sup> half 2<sup>nd</sup> century to beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup> century). Building B was affected by many changes during Period III.

Phase II: (=Period IIIB) Two doors in the southeast wall were enclosed, creating niches. The raised platform remained in use. The walls were coated in colored plaster and marble slabs with various decorations, and inscriptions were affixed to them. Far reaching changes were made to the annex buildings and building B, which served in this period as a large private residence. The buildings were eventually destroyed by a fire, probably around 350 CE.<sup>788</sup>

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1939

**Deposit Location:** In the basement of the building

**Archaeological Information:** Room 8 of Building B, northwest of the synagogue

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** No; found in burnt debris<sup>789</sup>

**Deposit Retrievable?** Unknown

**Deposit Type:** II?3

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<sup>788</sup> Mazar 1973, p. 19 and Safrai 1998, p. 137 link the fire to the Gallus rebellion of 352 CE. The excavators, for example, found two skeletons of people who were killed apparently while trying to escape on a city street near the stairs leading to the square in front of the synagogue. They also found burned synagogue debris in a cistern in this area, together with coins and sherds dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, they link the destruction of the complex to a violent act that occurred sometime around the middle of the century: the Gallus revolt under emperor Constantius II (which had also destroyed nearby Tiberias and Sepphoris). However, Bijovsky disagrees, as the deposit, according to her, has a *terminus post quem* of 395-408 CE (a CONCORDIA AVGGG "cross" type coin) (Bijovsky, 2007b, p. 198). She believes that, just as earthquakes have historically been used to date synagogue destruction layers, so too the Gallus Revolt is invoked speculatively to explain coin hoards in Palestine.

<sup>789</sup> Unfortunately, this is all the information we have on the context of the deposit. I tried to find more data on the exact context of the coin but without success. Unfortunately, the original excavators have long passed, and Benjamin Mazar's granddaughter Eilat Mazar informed me over email that she has no further information on this site or its artifacts. Adi Erlich, who is leading new excavations at Beth She'arim also told me in person that she does not know anything more about the synagogue excavations, or if and where there is more recorded data on this building. Uzi Leibner, a professor at the Hebrew University explained that he believes at least some of the documentation on the site was lost between the 1948 and 1967 wars, when Mt. Scopus was an enclave in Jordanian territory.

**Deposit Description:** 1200 bronze coins found in the burnt debris in the basement of Building B at the end of Period III.<sup>790</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The coins found in 1939 in the synagogue site at Beth She'arim were never published. The only published reference to the coins is in Mazar's report of 1973, in which he alludes to the 1200 bronze coins found in Building B, stating that "most of the coins are of the period of Constantine the Great, Constantine II (335-340 CE), Constans I (335-350 CE), and Constantius II. There are a few of Helena with Constantine, Licinius (307-323 CE), Fausta, wife of Constantine, and his sons Crispus (died 327 CE) and Dalmatius (died 337 CE)." <sup>791</sup>

Gabriela Bijovsky re-examined the coins for her 2007 article on the revolt of Gallus and identified 616 poorly preserved bronze coins.<sup>792</sup> According to her, the bulk of the coins are dated to the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to the '30s of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. There are, however, a couple of later coins: a coin of Constans I (348-350 CE), a fallen horseman coin of Constantius II (roughly 346-355 CE), a "Victory dragging captive" coin (383-395 CE), a "cross" (395-408 CE), and finally a worn coin dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

In the fall of 2019, I was able to access the archeological depot of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, with permission from Yosef Garfinkel, Head of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University, and Zeev Weiss, the Eleazar L. Sukenik Professor of Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology. I was allowed to visit the depot for two full days, and with the help of Daphna Tsoran, the Curator of the Collection of Institute of Archeology, I was able to examine the Beth She'arim coins, which are now stored in the coin safe at the Institute. In total, 615 legible coins from the basement deposit are stored in a wooden box. On my first

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<sup>790</sup> Mazar 1973, p. 19. Similar information can be found in a typed report from 1939, now kept in the IAA Scientific Archive 1919-1948, which states, "A hoard of 1100 coins, found in the right-hand hall of the center part gives the *terminus ad quem* for this conflagration. As the coins were found in the ash-layer they belong undoubtedly to the end of the second period of the building and serve, therefore, to ascertain the date of its ruin. Most of the coins are from the time of Constantine I and II, Constans I, Constantius II; the remainder are distributed between Helena, Licinius senior and junior, Crispus and Dalmatius; only one coin dates from the reign of Probus. The coins belong therefore to the first half of the fourth century A.D. and the series ends under Constantius II. The hoard includes no coins struck by Gallus or any other rulers from the middle of the fourth century onwards. We are therefore entitled to assume that the building, together with the whole city, was destroyed by Gallus." ([http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder\\_id=4447&type\\_id=&id=54262](http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder_id=4447&type_id=&id=54262)) Another report from 1941 written by Dimitri Baramki mentions only 828 coins, 470 of which were examined by the author. He mentions that "in the Sheikh Abreik hoard the Gloria Exercitus specimens still form a majority, but a majority of only 470 out of the 828 specimens [were] examined" ([http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder\\_id=18824&type\\_id=&id=93452](http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder_id=18824&type_id=&id=93452)).

<sup>791</sup> Mazar 1973, p. 35, footnote 13.

<sup>792</sup> Bijovsky 2007b, p. 198.



day, I sorted the coins according to their emperor and type. On the second day, I took photographs of the obverse and reverse sides of all 615 coins. Back at my office, I tried to identify and date each coin. However, I did not have the time to measure and weigh the coins for my database. Some coins are also difficult to analyze from the photos I took. All mistakes or inaccurate identifications are thus mine.<sup>793</sup>

If we assume that 1200 coins were originally found in the deposit, then 585 coins are missing from the coin safe. Perhaps these were not legible and thus were not kept. For the sake of completeness, they have been added to the database as “unknown.”

Of the 615 legible coins, I was able to date 577 coins with certainty. Of these, only one coin is older than 300 CE: a coin of Probus, dated to 276-282 CE. All other coins are from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, with 96.5% of the coins having a *terminus post quem* of the second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Of the 615 coins, the emperors of 522 could be determined. 258 coins are of Constantine I (49.5%), 138 coins of Constantine II (26.5%), 93 coins of Constantius II (18%), 24 coins of Constans I (4.5%), 6 coins of Crispus (1%), and 1 coin of Licinius I (0.5%). All eastern mints are represented, with a predominance of Antioch. Only 1 coin could be attributed to Arles: a follis minted by Constantine I (322-323 CE).

Interestingly enough, 364 of the 586 coins, or 62% of the coins are of the GLORIA EXERCITVS-type. I could not find the late coins that Bijovsky identified. Unfortunately, she does not provide any coin numbers in her article, so it is difficult to determine to which coins she was referring. Hopefully, a future full publication of this deposit will solve this problem.

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<sup>793</sup> I have recorded the specific tray in which each coin can be found in the wooden box in my database and all coin pictures can be found at <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/beth-shearim/>; this should help if one wants to find a specific coin mentioned, or check my identifications.

Loc..	End D..	Minting Place											Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Aquileia	Arles	Constantin..	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nicomedia	Rome	Siscia	Thessalonica		Unknown
Null	Null		2			2							619	623
282													1	1
321			1							1	1			3
323				1										1
324								5			1	3		9
325							4							4
326	2	1				8	1	1	4				3	16
327			1		3					1				5
328	1										7			8
329			1											5
330	3		1		1	17	5		1				19	35
331						1								1
333					17			11			1	6		35
334						6								6
335	8		76		11	9	5	4	2	12	1		1	68
336							18	1				2		20
337	14	11	25	4	1	5	10	9	15	1	3	9	3	241
340						1	1							2
341	3		2	3		2	3					1		18
346													2	2
Grand Total	25	18	106	35	1	1	36	25	34	43	19	10	26	6
Date Certainty														
■ Certain														
■ Uncertain														

**FIGURE 23. BETH SHE'ARIM, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM BUILDING B ASSOCIATED WITH THE SYNAGOGUE OF BETH SHE'ARIM. ALL 1200 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## K. Hammath Tiberias B (South)

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/hammath-tiberias/>

Longitude: 32.76608949344955 Latitude: 35.550851225852966

**Bibliography:** Dothan, M. 1962, "Hammath Tiberias," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 12, pp. 153–154; Dothan M. 1963a, "Hammath Tiberias," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, Vol. 5, pp. 11–12 (Hebrew); Dothan M. 1963b, "Hammath Tiberias," in: *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 70, pp. 588–590; 1968, "The Synagogues at Hammath–Tiberias," in: *Qadmoniyot*, Vol. 4, pp. 116–123 (Hebrew); Dothan M. 1973, "The Ancient Synagogues discovered at Hammath–Tiberias," in: Avisar O. (ed.), *Sefer Tveria*, Jerusalem, pp. 43–46 (Hebrew); Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 106–110; Dothan M. 1982, "The synagogue at Hammath–Tiberias," in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 63–69; Dothan M. 1983 & 2000, *Hammath Tiberias*, Vol. I & II; Weiss Z. 1988, "Ancient Synagogues at Tiberias and Hammat," in: *Tiberias: From its Foundations to the Muslim Conquest*, pp. 34–48 (Hebrew); Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 139–143 (Hebrew); Weiss Z. 1992, "The Synagogue at Hammath–Tiberias (Stratum II)," in: *EI*, Vol. 23, pp. 320–326 (Hebrew); Dothan M. 1993, "Hammath–Tiberias," in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 573–577; Stacey D. 2002, "Review Article; the later synagogues at Hammath Tiberias," in: *The Roman and Byzantine Near East*, Vol. 3, pp. 253–260; Milson D. 2004, "The Stratum Ib Building at Hammat Tiberias: Synagogue or Church?," in: *PEQ*, Vol. 136, No. 1, pp. 45–56; Magness J. 2005, "Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in ancient Palestinian Synagogues," in: *Dumbarton Oaks*

*Papers*, Vol. 59, pp. 7–58; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 372–375; Weiss Z. 2009, "Stratum II at Hammath Tiberias: Reconstructing Its Access; Internal Space; and Architecture," in: *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne*, pp. 321–342; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 215–227; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 11–12, 17, 74–77, 158, 255, 257, 547

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/hammath-tiberias/>

- Bible Walks:

<https://biblewalks.com/sites/hammattiberias.html>

- Virtual World Project

<http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/HammatTiberias/site.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1961-1963

**Excavators:** Moshe Dothan

**Archaeological Information:** Area D3 to H6 on the grid system

**Date of Construction of the Building:**

- Stratum IIb: first half 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>794</sup>
- Stratum IIa (=Severus Synagogue): late 3<sup>rd</sup>-first quarter 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>795</sup>
- Stratum Ib: 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>796</sup>
- Stratum Ia: mid 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>797</sup>

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<sup>794</sup> This date is based on the latest coins found in stratum III, as well as on the historical events in the Galilee in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> (Dothan 1983, pp. 66-67). Magness, however, argues for a late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century date, based on her interpretation of the pottery, coins, and inscriptions (Magness 2005a, pp. 8-13).

<sup>795</sup> This date is based on the hypothesis that the building was constructed between the visit of Diocletian to Palestine in 286 CE and the end of the reign of Constantine the Great in 337 CE, based on the inscriptions found inside the synagogue building (Dothan 1983, p. 67). However, Magness 2005a dates this phase to the late 4<sup>th</sup>-early 5<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>796</sup> This date is based on the theory that the synagogue was built immediately after the synagogue of Severus was destroyed in the earthquake of 419 CE (Dothan 2000, pp. 93-94). However, based on the dating of the pottery and coins, Magness believes that the stratum Ib synagogue has a *terminus post quem* of the late 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century (Magness 2005a, p. 10). This was also indicated by David Stacey, who believes Stratum Ib should be dated to 750 CE or later (Stacey, 2002).

<sup>797</sup> Magness 2005a dates this Phase to the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century.

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** At the far southern end of the villages of Hammath and Tiberias, which were at this point in history were combined into one city.<sup>798</sup> The synagogue is located on the highest terrace of the site.<sup>799</sup>

**Description of the Building:**

Stratum IIb: This was a rectangular hall with three rows of three columns on stylobates, dividing the space into four uneven aisles. The northeast corner of the hall extended outwards to the north, forming a niche of 1.20 m deep. There were two side rooms: one to the north and one to the south.<sup>800</sup> The northern side room possibly had a stairwell leading to an upper floor or the roof. The interior walls of the building were plastered with colorful decorations and the floor had mosaics, which were destroyed by the rebuilding of Stratum IIa.<sup>801</sup> An oblong cistern with a white mosaic floor was attached to the northwest corner of the north room.

Stratum IIa: This building, also known as the Synagogue of Severos, is very similar in layout to the one in Stratum IIb. Three entrances were located in the north wall, as indicated by a Greek inscription in the mosaic floor.<sup>802</sup> The south room was now expanded to the east and new partition walls created four rooms. One room, Room 35, had a rectangular sunken area on the west side, in which multiple objects were found.<sup>803</sup> The floor of the four aisles of the synagogue was paved with decorated mosaics, including a zodiac, Torah shrine with menorahs, and Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions.

Stratum Ib: This is an entirely new synagogue building, built upon the remains of the Severus synagogue. This building was an apsidal, longhouse synagogue with two rows of six columns

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<sup>798</sup> Tiberias was always a popular destination for pilgrims, travelers, and historians. The first excavations at the site were undertaken in 1920/21 by the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society under the supervision of Nahum Slouschz (Dothan 1983, p. 5). The investigation in the area around the synagogue started in 1947, when the construction of a modern bathhouse was undertaken at the site. The Israel War of Independence of 1948 stopped these plans, and it was only when a new development plan for the site was drawn up in 1961 that the site was properly excavated by Moshe Dothan (Dothan 1983, p. 6).

<sup>799</sup> Dothan 1983, p. 7.

<sup>800</sup> This building was not laid out in absolute cardinal directions (see map drawing). By “east” side, I mean the direction of Wall 127, “north” means the direction of Walls 122-123, “south” the direction of Wall 119, and “west” the direction of Wall 138 (Dothan 1983, 2000).

<sup>801</sup> Although Weiss suggests that the easternmost aisle had a stone pavement (Weiss 1992, pp. 323-324).

<sup>802</sup> Although it is hard to be sure; this suggestion is primarily based on parallels to Galilean synagogues (Spigel 2012a, p. 219, footnote 444). Weiss suggests that the entrance was in the east wall and that Stratum IIb and Stratum IIa were in fact one synagogue that went through several changes (Weiss 1992, pp. 322-324)

<sup>803</sup> Dothan suggests that the Torah scrolls were stored here, which would have been brought out into the nave for reading (Dothan 1983, p. 25). Spigel thinks that the image of a Torah shrine on the mosaic floor directly in front of this apse, together with archaeological remains of wooden pediments inside the space, suggest that a physical Torah shrine stood inside this sunken area (Spigel 2012a, p. 219).

and a transverse row of four columns in the northwest area. It might have had a second story. There is a large, inscribed apse at the south side of the nave with rooms on each side, an exonarthex on the north side, as well as a narthex and an atrium to the north. There is an additional hall on the west side, which has a small apse with raised platform on the east.<sup>804</sup> The entire hall was probably covered with polychrome mosaics.

Stratum Ia: In the last phase of the synagogue, the apse in the western hall was removed, niches were installed in the southeast and southwest walls, and a roof was constructed above this hall. The courtyard was divided into smaller units.<sup>805</sup> No changes were made to the main synagogue building except for a new mosaic floor that was mostly geometric in design.

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1961-1962

**Deposit Location:** Inside sunken area in the southern side room

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum IIa, Room 35, Locus 52

**Certain association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA2

**Deposit Description:** In the Stratum IIa Phase of the building, four rooms were created against south wall W119: rooms 36, 34, 35, and 109. The level of room 35 was about 80 cm higher than that of the floor in the Stratum IIb phase: the marked difference in elevation is due to a deliberate fill, laid on the mosaic floor of Stratum IIb, covered by a floor of stone slabs.<sup>806</sup> The new, higher level of the floor was apparently meant to serve as a base for a structure or accessory. Room 35 was a continuation of the nave; any structure could have been reached from the main level of the nave only by means of steps. On the west side of room 35 was a rectangular area of 1.80 m X 80 cm, which was left unfilled and had a "cist" built into it: Locus 52.<sup>807</sup> The part below the floor was 83 cm deep, and the part above the

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<sup>804</sup> Dothan 2000, p. 18. According to Milson, the last synagogue was modified into a church. This apse, together with a water installation formed a baptistery, like in the Church of Kursi (Milson 2004, pp. 45-56). I find his arguments unconvincing, as water installations were not uncommon in synagogues and do not need to point to a baptistery. Also, Milson seems to ignore the fact that the mosaic pavement of Stratum Ia building still depicts a seven-branched menorah, making it a Jewish communal building (see also Stacey 2002).

<sup>805</sup> Dothan 2000, p. 37.

<sup>806</sup> Dothan 1983, p. 28.

<sup>807</sup> Dothan 1983, p. 28.

floor probably had wooden walls on three or four sides and might have reached the ceiling of the room. A possible opening to the structure must have been on the south side, from a narrow passage leading from room 109. On the floor of the cist was found a quantity of oil lamp fragments, a pottery spindle whorl, the upper part of a stone measuring cup, a fragment of a roof tile, three broken bone needles, fragments of a bone spatula, a few bronze and iron (?) hooks, a few iron nails with flat heads, and 31 small, worn bronze coins dated to the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** In the final excavation report published in 1983, Dothan gives a full analysis of three coins found in Locus 52: coins 28, 29, and 31.<sup>808</sup> In 2000, Nitzan Amitai-Preiss published an additional 54 coins from the “Late Byzantine and Early Muslim” synagogue.<sup>809</sup> Unfortunately, this catalogue is a mixture of Byzantine and medieval coins and no information is given on where, or in which locus, each coin was found, or what their identification numbers are. It is thus unclear if any of these coins were found in Locus 52, or not. No other information on the coins could be retrieved, as they are not stored at the IAA, and Moshe Dothan passed away in 1999.<sup>810</sup> According to Ariel, there is a good chance that the coins from Locus 52 were all discarded.<sup>811</sup> Thus, this database only contains information on three of the 31 coins. The coins range from 346 to 383 CE, and are attributed to Constantius II, Valens, and Valentinian II.

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<sup>808</sup> It is unclear why only three of the 31 coins are given; does this mean the others were illegible?

<sup>809</sup> Dothan 2000, pp. 95-101.

<sup>810</sup> Dothan worked at the Haifa University and there is a chance the coins are still stored there. I reached out to professors Ayelet Gilboa, Michael Eisenberg, and Danny Rosenberg from Haifa University to obtain further information, but they never responded to me.

<sup>811</sup> Personal communication: “I can imagine a situation whereby Rahmani (staff member IAA) told Dothan that the coins were so worn as to be uncleanable and unidentifiable, and that as a result Dothan never gave them to Rahmani to access” (Donald Ariel).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place			Total
		Nicomedia	Rome	Unknown	
Null	361			1	1
	367		1		1
	383	1			1
	500			28	28
Grand Total		1	1	128	328

**Date Certainty**

- Certain
- Uncertain

FIGURE 24. HAMMATH TIBERIAS, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM IN A CIST IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF HAMMATH TIBERIAS B (SOUTH). ALL 31 COINS ARE BRONZE.

#### L. Korazin (Chorazin, Korazim)<sup>812</sup>

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/korazin/>

Longitude: 32.9117893895644 Latitude: 35.5646339568986

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<sup>812</sup> In older publications, the site is sometimes called Chirbet Kerâze, or just Kerâze.

Lod,” in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 187–203; Magness J. 2007a, “The Date of the Synagogue of Chorazin,” in: *Michmanim*, Vol. 20: pp. 7–18; Magness J. 2007b, “Did Galilee Decline in the Fifth Century? The Synagogue at Chorazin Reconsidered,” in: *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: a Region in Transition*, pp. 259–274; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 45–47, 337–338; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 177–181; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 57, 69–70, 126, 128, 141, 152, 160–161, 171, 173, 207, 217–219, 239–246, 277, 437, 440, 485–487, 531, 547–548, 593; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 55–60 (Hebrew)

#### Websites:

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/chorazim/>
- See the Holy Land:  
<https://www.seetheholyland.net/chorazin/>
- Bible Walks:  
<https://biblewalks.com/Sites/Korazim.html>

**Date Excavated:**

1. 1905-1907
2. 1926<sup>813</sup>
3. 1962-1965, 1980-1987

**Excavators:**

1. Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger
2. Na'im Makhoully and Jacob Ory
3. Ze'ev Yeivin

**Archaeological Information:** Building A

**Date of Construction of the Building:** late 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>814</sup>

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<sup>813</sup> Inspectors of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine Government “cleared the synagogue and removed a later building erected on its northwestern corner” (Yeivin 1987, p. 24). Sukenik then visited the site and described his observations in his 1934 publication (Sukenik 1934, pp. 21-24).

<sup>814</sup> This date is based on Jodi Magness’ re-evaluation of the numismatic and ceramic evidence found under the floor of the building (Magness 2007a; 2007b). Yeivin dates the construction of the building in his final publication to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, but after having looked at the evidence, I am convinced enough to follow Magness’ construction date, based on the identification of well-stratified coins. This date could even be pushed later if we believe that 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century coins found under the floor and threshold of the building are not intrusive (see below).



**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** The building was part of a civic complex with at least seven other large buildings. It sat in the middle of the settlement, along the main road, on top of a basalt plateau.<sup>815</sup>

**Description of the Building:** The building was a basilical synagogue with two rows of five columns and a transverse row of two columns in the north.<sup>816</sup> There were three doorways in the south wall and one doorway in the west wall leading to a small side room. The excavators reconstruct a raised platform with an aedicule on the southern wall, west of the middle entrance, and a *bemah* east of the middle entrance with two steps leading up to it. Possibly, a *Seat of Moses*, found in the excavations, was positioned here. The east, west, and north walls were lined with two-tiered benches. The floor was paved with flagstones, which have only partly survived. In front of the building was an open courtyard with a monumental, basalt stairway leading to the synagogue.

**1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1962-1964, 1967-1977

**Deposit Location:** Inside the synagogue, below the western threshold in the southern wall.

**Archaeological Information:** L162

**Certain association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit type:** IB6

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<sup>815</sup> The site was first identified with ancient Chorazin in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kohl and Watzinger were the first to recognize a synagogue at the site during their 1905 survey. For an overview of the different visitors to the site and the references to Korazin in the ancient sources, see Kohl and Watzinger 1916, pp. 41-43; Chiat 1982, p. 97; Yeivin 1987, p. 24; and Yeivin 2000, p. 7\*.

<sup>816</sup> In 1987, Yeivin described two synagogue buildings: according to him, the first was constructed at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century or beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. This building was destroyed in an earthquake and a new synagogue was built at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. According to Yeivin, the stone pavement floor was replaced by a plaster floor. Then, perhaps at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, this plaster pavement was destroyed and filled with earth. It was in this earth filling that over 2000 coins were found during excavation (Yeivin 1987, p. 35). Magness, however, contests this idea (see footnote 814). According to her analysis, the synagogue building was constructed in only one phase, with a *terminus post quem* in the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. She explains the different floors as following: “the Jewish community’s plans for the synagogue seem to have been overly ambitious, and after work got underway the fine flagstone pavement and ashlar benches were abandoned in lieu of cheaper alternatives” (Magness 2007b, p. 274). The coin deposit found in Building E (see below) confirms Magness’ one-phase hypothesis: in this deposit, found in a building that was constructed contemporaneously with the synagogue (Yeivin 2000, p. 30\*), coins from the 5<sup>th</sup> century were discovered. Yeivin dismisses these coins as “probably intrusive” (Yeivin 2000, p. 30\*) but they fit with Magness’ interpretation. For these reasons, a construction date in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century CE has been chosen for this synagogue building.

**Deposit Description:** This deposit was found in L162: a sounding just inside the doorway leading into the west aisle of the synagogue, next to and under the threshold. 311 coins were found under a missing part (about 1/5 in size) of the threshold.<sup>817</sup> In 1967, Kloetzli heard about more coins at Korazin and visited the site in 1967 and 1977, during which he collected about 550 coins “in the south west quarter of the Synagogue.”<sup>818</sup> According to him, many were found on the surface or at a depth of only a few inches. He also found a significant number of coins in the debris from the previous excavations, which was piled up along the southwest wall of the building. He also mentions that some 1200 to 1500 coins were found by UN people (who apparently visited the site). Might all these coins have come from the same deposit?

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to Ze’ev Yeivin’s short report on the Korazin excavations from 1973, two hoards were found at the site: one from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century, and one from the late 4<sup>th</sup>-early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>819</sup> The former was found in Locus 52 (see deposit 4), while the latter was found “beneath the threshold of the synagogue.” However, both Deposit 1 (Locus 162) and Deposit 2 (Locus 163) were found underneath thresholds: the former below the western threshold of the building and the latter beneath the eastern threshold. Which locus is he referring to? Since the article mentions “hundreds of coins,” and L163 only yielded 34 coins, we can assume that the hoard mentioned here is the one from L162. One year later, Ya’akov Meshorer published 35 coins in a preliminary article, as a “representation of the 1200 coins found at the site.” In his catalogue, Nos. 1-4 and 6-30 derive from L52, while nos. 31-32 and 34-35 are from L162. Thus, four coins from Deposit 1 are described here.

Between 1967 and 1968, Godfrey Kloetzli lived in Capernaum and visited the Korazin site. During his visits, he collected around 550 coins from the southwestern area of the synagogue building and he published 71 of them in an article in 1970. Since this excavation was executed without an archaeological permit and no records were kept, it is hard to say if these coins were discovered in the same context as the “hundreds of coins” from L162. But because they were found in more or less the same area, and “many of them were on the surface or at a depth of only a few inches”, I have added them here to the L162 deposit.<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>817</sup> Yeivin 2000, p. 9\*.

<sup>818</sup> Kloetzli 1970, p. 359. These excavations were conducted without a permit and it is unclear what happened to the coins (personal communication Donald Ariel).

<sup>819</sup> Yeivin 1973, p. 27\*.

<sup>820</sup> As the coins from Locus 700-703 were found at a deeper level. However, one must also take into account that “a good amount” of these 550 were found “in debris from excavations which was piled at the SW wall of the ruins.” It is impossible to say where these coins came from.

Unfortunately, these coins are now lost and we have no way of determining if Kloetzli's identifications are correct; I have placed them in the database at face value, but caution needs to be taken.<sup>821</sup> The "1200-1500" coins that presumably were removed from this area by UN officials and other visitors to the site have not been included.

Eventually, a final excavation report on Korazin was published by Yeivin in 2000. 311 coins from Locus 162 were identified by Ariel, and these can also be found at the IAA. The database entry for this deposit is a combination of these 311 identifiable coins and the 550 found by Kloetzli, for a total of 861 coins.

The 241 datable coins found in L162 range from 85 CE (a coin minted by Nero) to 610 CE (Phocas). The bulk, however, ranges from 307 to 518 CE in equal distribution (93%): a lack of coins dated to 340-390 CE, as Meshorer noted for this group, can no longer be seen with this new evidence.<sup>822</sup> All the coins were minted in eastern mints, with the exception of two minted in Arles (Constantine I, 307-337 CE), three in Rome (Constantius II, 337-340 CE and 337-341 CE; Gratian, 367-383 CE), one in Trier (Constantine I, 307-337 CE), and one in Ticinum (Baduila, 541-549 CE). One coin was minted by Maximian (286-305 CE).<sup>823</sup> Four Late Roman coins are imitation coins (one coming from Alexandria) and one coin minted by Phocas is a double-struck coin (Antioch, 602-610 CE).

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<sup>821</sup> Godfrey Kloetzli was an American Franciscan priest who spent much of his time in Israel as a guide and authority on holy places; as far as I know, he was not a trained numismatist.

<sup>822</sup> Meshorer 1973, p. 158: he associated this gap in the coin range to an abandonment of the site after the Gallus Revolt. This no longer seems to be correct (see also Bijovsky 2007b). If, furthermore, we accept the identifications given by Kloetzli for a couple of coins attributed to Phocas, and they are not later intrusions but come from the sealed loci, then this would push the date of the construction of the building even later, possibly to the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>823</sup> The only other synagogue deposit with a coin of Maximian is from Horvat Rimmon (Group D).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place											Unknown	Total		
		Alexandria	Antioch	Aquileia	Arles	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica	Ticinum			Trier	
162	Null														620	620
58															1	1
305															4	4
330									1							1
335	2	2			1			1								6
337	1	1		2		1							1		1	7
340		1								1						2
341	1				1					1					2	23
346		2				1					2				1	6
348															1	1
350						1									2	3
354		1			2	1		2								6
360															1	1
361	2														5	25
375	1		1													11
383	1	2			1	2	1		1						2	92
392	1	3			1	2		1	1		1				4	122
395		1													6	717
408	1	5			4										1	23
423		1					1								1	3
450		1													3	44
455															14	14
465															1	1
474															4	4
491					2										2	4
497						1									28	29
498	1														26	27
518					2										2	4
538		2													1	3
549											1					1
577						1										1
582					1											1
587						1									1	2
590						1										1
597															1	1
602		1														1
610		1														1
Grand Total	65	195	1	2	15	132	4	1	3	21	1	1			38742	106755

Date Certainty  
 ■ Certain  
 ■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 25. KORAZIN, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR AND WESTERN THRESHOLD OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF KORAZIN. ALL 861 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1962-1964

**Deposit Location:** Inside the synagogue, below the eastern threshold in the south wall.

**Archaeological Information:** L163

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** Two soundings were made along the entrances into the synagogue along the south wall. This deposit was found in L163: a sounding just inside the doorway

leading into the east aisle of the synagogue where the threshold was missing. 34 coins were found here.

**Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** 34 coins coming from Locus 163 were published by Ariel in 2000 in an inventory list, and an equal number are in the IAA storage facilities.<sup>824</sup>

The coins in this deposit range from 314 CE to 395 CE and the minting places are along the same lines as the coins from L162: predominantly eastern mints with the exception of a coin from Arles (Julian II, 355-360 CE), one from Rome (Constantine I, 314-315 CE), and one from Ticinum (Constantine I, 324-327 CE).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place									Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Arles	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Rome	Siscia	Thessalonica	Ticinum		Unknown
163	315						1					1
	327								1			1
	333							1				1
	335	2	4					1				7
	337		1		1							11
	339					1						1
	341	1	2					1		11		51
	360			1								1
	361									11		11
	375									1		1
	383					1				11		21
	392		1									1
	395				1					1		2
	408					1				3		4
	497									1		1
Grand Total		3	7	1	2	12	1	1	2	1	5	24

**Date Certainty**  
 ■ Certain  
 ■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 26. KORAZIN, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FROM UNDER THE EASTERN THRESHOLD OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF KORAZIN. ALL 34 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**3. Deposit 3:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1980

**Deposit Location:** Inside the main hall of the synagogue, running along the southern wall and overlapping with previous soundings L162 and L163

**Archaeological Information:** L700 (in front of the central entrance), L701 (overlapping with L162), L702 (below L700), and L703 (overlapping with L163)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

<sup>824</sup> Yeivin 2000, pp. 33\*-49\*. The only information given here, however, are the dates of the coins.

**Deposit Retrievable? No**

**Deposit Type: IB6**

**Deposit Description:** After the removal of an upper layer of dirt, an accumulation of small flat stones was found under the synagogue floor.<sup>825</sup> This apparently was construction or quarry debris used to level the area. Below this layer was a bedding of large basalt blocks. In these loci, 1000 more coins were discovered, most of them in the western part of the building.<sup>826</sup>

**Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** According to Yeivin (1982), approximately a thousand coins were found in these four loci.<sup>827</sup> In his 2000 analysis, Ariel published an inventory list of 41 coins from Locus 700, 125 coins from Locus 701, 660 coins from Locus 702, and 239 coins from Locus 703, for a total of 1065 coins.<sup>828</sup> At the IAA, however, there are 35 identifiable coins coming from L700, 63 from L701, 407 from L702 and 184 from L703, for a total of 689 identified coins. It is these coins that have been entered into the database.

The coins from this deposit have a different make-up than the coins found in Loci 162 and 163. They range from 323 BCE to 654 CE (excluding some later coins), with twelve coins pre-dating the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The bulk of the coins (92%) can be dated to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> to beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Unfortunately, the minting place of most of the coins cannot be determined. We do, however, have a coin from Arles (Magnus Maximus, 387-388 CE) and three from Rome (Galla Placidia, 425-450 CE; Valentinian II 383-385 CE; Constans I 337-341 CE). As for the seven coins minted in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, these are of the same modules as the later coins in the deposit and were probably added to the group for this reason.<sup>829</sup> Among the other interesting coins is an anonymous cast imitation of a prototype

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<sup>825</sup> Yeivin 1982, p. 10; Magness 2007, p. 269.

<sup>826</sup> Ahipaz 2015, p. 58 notes that after Donald Ariel consulted with the original excavators, it became clear that there is uncertainty about the exact location of the loci. It seems that it was not always clear if the locus was related to finds found above, or below the floor level. Thus, these coins need to be treated with some caution; for example, there are two Islamic coins and a modern Israeli coin among the group, which indicates disturbance of some kind (see also Magness 2007, p. 269).

<sup>827</sup> Yeivin 1982, p. 10: he did not consider them a hoard, in contrast to the coins found in L162 and L52.

<sup>828</sup> Yeivin 2000, pp. 33\*-49\*. The only information given here, however, are the dates of the coins.

<sup>829</sup> Ariel thinks it is most likely that the contributors were unaware that they were adding “pagan” or “autonomous Jewish kings”-coins to the group. This assumes that people cared about the kind of coins that were deposited in the synagogue (Yeivin 2000, p. 35\*).

coin, minted in Egypt, perhaps some time between 540 and 740 CE.<sup>830</sup> 21 coins are imitation coins: we can assume that imitation coins were a common by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Four late coins were also found: a Byzantine gold semissis (Heraclius I, 610-613 CE); two Islamic period coins (a gold solidus of Constans II, 651-654 CE and an Umayyad fals, 638-750 CE), and a modern Israeli coin (1968, not kept), indicating that the loci were disturbed later.

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<sup>830</sup> Egypt is given as minting place in the IAA database. Ariel, however, notes that it was minted at Axum, Ethiopia (Yeivin 2000, p. 37\*). The kingdom of Aksum (approximately 80 BCE-825 CE) at its height at times extended across most of present-day Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. There is no consensus on the exact date of this coin. Ariel indicates that this imitation type could have been circulating much earlier than 540 CE, possibly already between 330 and 385 CE, which would better fit the coin range of this deposit.

Inventory No.	Amman	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Beit She'an	Total
31																	6
117	1																1
341																	1
383																	1
392					2								1		1		6
395																14	14
408		1			1	1										5	17
423																1	1
450																1	1
455																3	3
457																1	1
474																1	1
497																3	3
498																2	2
750																62	62
346																1	1
354																	1
361					1					1						1	32
375																1	1
383																1	1
392		2													1	1	41
395		1														39	49
408																16	117
450																1	1
455																2	2
457																1	1
474																1	1
497																7	7
498																4	4
654																1	1
750																1	1
1968																1	1
317																255	255
337		1														1	1
339																1	1
340																1	1
341																1	1
346																13	13
351																55	75
375																210	310
378																2	2
383	1	5														2	1917
387																1	1
388																1	1
392	3	8														1	273
395	12	17	2													11	2349
408	12	3														2	448
423																2	2
450	1															1	220
455																10	10
457																3	5
474																4	5
475																1	1
491																3	3
497																67	69
498																16	17
550																1	1
740																1	1
-63																1	1
-76																2	2
-128																1	1
-187																1	1
31																55	55
99																1	1
335																1	1
337																1	2
341	1															1	31
346	1															2	13
350																1	1
351																1	1
361																65	75
375																15	28
383	1															17	47
392	1															72	104
395	1															1311	1515
404																1	1
408	1															535	639
423																13	23
450																27	27
455																5	5
457																1	1
474																1	1
475																1	1
497																17	17
498																2	2
550																1	1
613																1	1
-64																1	1
-76																2	2
Grand Total	1011	2518	12	1	189	123	1	1	3	5	37	3	52			125800	212854

**FIGURE 27. KORAZIN, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF KORAZIN. 2 COINS ARE GOLD, 1063 COINS ARE BRONZE.**



#### **4. Deposit 4:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1962-1964

**Deposit Location:** Inside a public building that might have been part of a larger synagogue complex, in a hole in the floor, covered with stone slabs.

**Archaeological Information:** Complex C, Building E, Locus 52<sup>831</sup>

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** No<sup>832</sup>

**Deposit retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA5

**Deposit Description:** This deposit was found in Building E north of the synagogue, in a room adjacent to the alley separating the two buildings.<sup>833</sup> This building had a ritual bath complex in the northern part, enclosed by four walls and paved with thick lime plaster in the west, and with flagstones in the east. The complex was bisected east-west by a row of columns and piers. The immersion pool (2 X 2.5 m) was entered from the north by means of two above-ground and seven underground steps. The pool was probably connected to the cistern close by. South of the pool was a series of rooms built around a central hall, which had four entrances, one in each direction. The buildings seem to have been part of the larger synagogue complex.<sup>834</sup> Over 400 coins were found inside a natural water channel covered by stone beams.<sup>835</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to Ze'ev Yeivin, more than 400 coins were found in this locus; however, only 159 are now at the IAA and were published in Yeivin 2000.<sup>836</sup> Thus, I have indicated 241 coins as unknown. Most of the datable coins can be attributed to the house of Constantine or the early 4<sup>th</sup> century: over 90% are dated between 290 and 340 CE.

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<sup>831</sup> The archaeological numbering of this building is confusing. In 1987, Yeivin calls this complex C. In his NEAEHL report and in the 2000 final excavation report, he calls it Complex E.

<sup>832</sup> Because of this reason, this deposit might not be connected to synagogue activities at all, and should possibly be dropped from future synagogue coin deposit lists.

<sup>833</sup> Yeivin 2000, p. 33\*.

<sup>834</sup> Yeivin 2000, p. 33\*.

<sup>835</sup> In 1987, however, Yeivin calls it "a specially cut chamber" covered with stone slabs. So, was it made deliberately for the coin deposit or not?

<sup>836</sup> Yeivin 1973, p. 148; Yeivin 2000, pp. 33\*-49\*.

However, the deposit in total ranges from around 100 CE to around 450 CE, with two coins dated even earlier: a coin of Tiberius minted in Jerusalem (18 CE) and a Seleucid coin minted between 312 and 63 BCE.<sup>837</sup> Only eight coins (or 5%) post-date 341 CE. According to Ariel, these late coins are intrusive, “as they are relatively small, and the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of the hoarded coins—100 (or 63%)—date from the 18 years preceding 341 CE.”<sup>838</sup> This deposit further contains many rare examples, most of them Roman provincial coins: three minted in Arles (Constantine I, 316 CE and 318 CE; Licinius I, 321 CE), one minted in Caesarea by Elagabalus (218-222 CE),<sup>839</sup> one coin minted in Gaza (Hadrian, 134-135 CE), one from Londinium (a follis of Constantine I, 307-319 CE),<sup>840</sup> one from Lugdunum (Constantine I, 314-315 CE), one minted in Sepphoris by Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE)<sup>841</sup>, one from Ticinum (Constantine I, 319-321 CE), two coins from Trier (Maximinus II, 310-313 CE; Constantine II, 337-341 CE), and one coin from Tyre (a silver tetradrachm from Macrinus, 217-218 CE).<sup>842</sup> The deposit also includes a coin of Dalmatius (Alexandria, 335-337 CE), one of only three coins minted by this emperor found in ancient synagogue deposits,<sup>843</sup> three coins of Helena (only found in L703 at the same site and in deposit Area B at synagogue of Bar’am), three coins of Fausta (325-326 CE, only found at this site), one coin of Hadrian (only found at Capernaum and ‘En Gedi), and one each of Hannibalianus (335-337 CE), Maxentius (310-311 CE), and Maximinus II (310-313 CE), the only coins of these emperors found in any ancient synagogue deposit.

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<sup>837</sup> Ariel notes that the deposit was closed around 340 CE, giving a *terminus post quem* for the construction of Building E that is close to the construction of the synagogue building (Yeivin 2000, p. 36\*). However, we already saw that the construction of the synagogue should be dated much later (at least the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, if not later if we accept that the coins found at L162, L702, and L703 are not intrusive), and the same could be said about this building.

<sup>838</sup> Yeivin 2000, p. 33\*.

<sup>839</sup> 11 other Elagabalus coins were found at the nearby synagogue of Wadi Hamam, one at the synagogue of Horvat Kanaf, and four at En-Gedi.

<sup>840</sup> This is the only coin from London found in any ancient synagogue deposit.

<sup>841</sup> This is the only coin from Sepphoris found in any ancient synagogue deposit.

<sup>842</sup> Ariel notes another worn, countermarked coin, apparently of the second century CE (Roman Imperial coin, IAA no. 11291) (Yeivin 2000, p. 35\*).

<sup>843</sup> The others having been found in Locus 163 at the same site, and at Capernaum.

No.	Locus	End Date	Minting Place																			Unknown	Total							
			Alexandria	Antioch	Asiut	Aries	Caesarea	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Gaza	Heraclea	Jerusalem	Londinium	Lugdunum	Nicomedia	Rome	Sapphirus	Stesia	Thessalonica	Ticinum	Trier			Type						
18										1													241	241						
135										1														1	1					
161																								1	1					
200																							1	1	1					
218																								1	1					
222					1																				1	1				
298																										1	1			
306																											1	1		
310																												1	1	
311																													3	3
313																													8	8
314			1																										2	2
315																													6	6
316																													1	1
317																													2	2
318																													1	1
319																													2	2
320																													7	7
321																													4	4
322																													1	1
324																													1	1
325																													2	2
326																													4	4
327																													5	5
328																													3	3
330																													11	11
333																													1	1
335																													2	2
337																													137	137
339																													1	1
340																													1	1
341																													33	33
346																													1	1
361																													2	2
383																													1	1
395																													1	1
408																													1	1
455																													1	1
498																													1	1
63																													1	1
Grand total	77		34	1	3	1	12	19	1	4	1	1	1	12	13	1	3	7	1	2	1			13	250	138	262			

**FIGURE 28. KORAZIN, DEPOSIT 4. COINS FOUND IN A WATER CHANNEL IN A BUILDING ASSOCIATED WITH THE SYNAGOGUE OF KORAZIN. 399 COINS ARE BRONZE, ONE IS SILVER.**

### M. Wadi Hamam (Weradim)

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/wadi-hamam/>

**Longitude:** 32.827312498002904 **Latitude:** 35.48941254615784

**Bibliography:** Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 128–129 (Hebrew); Leibner U. 2009, *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Galilee: An Archaeological Survey of the Eastern Galilee*, pp. 71–74, 205–212; Leibner U. 2010, “Excavations at Khirbet Wadi Hamam (Lower Galilee): The Synagogue and the Settlement,” in: *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 220–237; Leibner U. and Miller S. 2010, “A figural Mosaic in the Synagogue at Khirbet Wadi Hamam,” in: *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 238–264; Magness J. 2012a, “The Pottery from the Village of Capernaum and the Chronology of Galilean Synagogues,” in: *Tel Aviv*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 110–122; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 320–323; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 57, 64–66, 150, 177, 178, 332, 407–412, 493–494, 547, 594; Leibner U. 2015, “Khirbet Wadi Hamam in the Early and Middle Roman Periods,” in: *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, pp. 343–361; Leibner U. 2018, *Khirbet Wadi Hamam, A Roman–Period Village and Synagogue in the Lower Galilee*, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of

Jerusalem; Magness J. 2019, Review of *Khirbet Wadi Hamam, A Roman–Period Village and Synagogue in the Lower Galilee*, by Uzi Leibner, *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, Vol. 20, pp. 427–430; Leibner U. 2020, “The Dating of the “Galilean”–Type Synagogues,” in: *Synagogues in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, pp. 43–69

**Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/wadi-hamam/>
- The Hebrew University of Jerusalem:  
<https://scholars.huji.ac.il/uzileibner/wadi-hamam>

**Date excavated:** 2007-2012

**Excavators:** Uzi Leibner

**Archaeological Information:** Area A, Stratum II

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: first half 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>844</sup>  
Phase II: end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> -beginning 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>845</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** At the center of the site on a steep slope: the building sits partly on top of houses.<sup>846</sup>

**Description of the Building:**

Phase I: A basilica with two rows of four columns, in a northwest-southeast direction and a

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<sup>844</sup> This date is based on the middle Roman pottery, oil lamps, and coins from below the floor (Leibner 2018, p. 94; 2020, pp. 52-54) However, Jodi Magness believes that the entire building was constructed during the 4<sup>th</sup> century: she bases her assessment on the appearance of Galilean bowls (form 1C-1E) and Kefar Hananya ware at the site, which she argues give a *terminus post quem* of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, as well as on a coin (cat. No. 335) found in building A11N (see below), which is dated to 383-385 CE (Magness 2012a, p. 113; Magness 2019a, pp. 428-430; Magness and Schindler, *forthcoming*).

<sup>845</sup> Based on finds discovered in a drainage channel under the floor, in the mosaic foundations, and in the foundation trenches of the new walls (Leibner 2018, p. 96). However, coins found embedded inside the bemah and the plaster floor provide, according to Magness, a *terminus post quem* at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century for the addition of the bemah and the building’s renovation, or the second phase of the building (Magness 2012a, p. 113; Magness and Schindler, *forthcoming*).

<sup>846</sup> The ruins were first identified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Survey of Western Palestine. In 1925, Joseph Braslavsky was the first to identify architectural elements at the site that might point towards a “Galilean”-type synagogue. The architectural remains were surveyed in 1946 by Na’im Makhoul, in the 1970s and 1980s by Gideon Avni and Zvi Ilan, and in the 1980s by Yuval Shahar and Yigal Tepper. In 2007, excavations were started by Uzi Leibner under the auspices of the Hebrew University (Leibner 2018, pp. 7-8).

transverse row of three columns on the northwest side.<sup>847</sup> There was one entrance in the southeast wall, one door above the benches in the northwest wall, and one door in the southwest wall leading to a side room. There were two tiers of benches along the northwest, northeast, and southwest walls in white limestone (giving this building the nickname “the white synagogue”). There might have been a second-story gallery.<sup>848</sup> The synagogue was severely damaged in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century when its entire eastern half collapsed.

Phase II: The synagogue was renovated and partially rebuilt into a nearly square-shaped plan, and its floors were now covered with a mosaic floor with biblical scenes and Hebrew inscriptions. At some later point this floor was covered again by several plaster floors. A new set of benches was installed, made of basalt (giving this building the nickname “the black synagogue”). A *bimah* was added on top of the mosaic floor against the southeast wall during a renovation (Sub-Phase IIb).

**Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 2007-2009

**Deposit Location:** In the east wall of the synagogue building.

**Archaeological Information:** Area A, Phase I, Room A11N, wall W2A15a

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Unknown

**Deposit Type:** II?3

**Deposit Description:** To the north-east of the synagogue, two structures were discovered on top of each other, built against the east wall of the synagogue. On top of these structures lay the collapse of the upper east wall of the synagogue building (W2A15a). A few building stones were found sitting upright, left where they had fallen. Throughout this debris of building blocks, roof tiles, and rubble, concentrations of coins were exposed, predominantly in front of the face of eastern wall W2A15b.<sup>849</sup> The coins were dispersed along a vertical descent of 1.14 m in height (going down from 95.90 to 94.76 meters), in successive loci from the middle of L 5A020 to L 5A038. Each coin was measured and their spatial distribution plotted on a GIS map. A total of 37 coins, mainly third century tetradrachms and denarii, were retrieved. The dispersal of the coins indicates that they fell through the stones when the eastern wall collapsed. According to the excavators, the most

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<sup>847</sup> This was the second public building built on this spot. The first synagogue was presumably constructed in the first half of the first century, but only parts of this buildings have been preserved (Leibner 2015, pp. 348-350, Stratum III).

<sup>848</sup> Leibner 2018, pp. 94-95.

<sup>849</sup> Leibner 2018, p. 86.

plausible origin of the hoard is that it had been hidden in the east wall of the synagogue, and that the hoard was assembled from coins circulating at the site, most probably reflecting the savings of the congregation.<sup>850</sup>

### **Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** The 37 coins found in a deposit in the synagogue at Khirbet Wadi Hamam were published in full by Gabriela Bijovsky in Uzi Leibner's 2018 final excavation report.<sup>851</sup> Of the 37 coins, 29 are silver, including 15 Roman provincial tetrachms from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE and 14 imperial denarii and their debased version, Antoniniani<sup>852</sup>. 8 coins are bronze. The coin deposit ranges from 103 BCE until 268 CE, with the earliest coins being two Hasmonean prutot (one of Alexander Jannaeus, both struck in Jerusalem).<sup>853</sup> The following coins are two denarii of Trajan (dated 103-111 CE and 112-117 CE, both minted in Rome), a small bronze coin of Antoninus Pius minted in Bostra (138-161 CE), and two denarii from Rome minted by Marcus Aurelius (163-164 CE) and Septimius Severus (200-202 CE). Four more coins, three denarii and a bronze coin, are too worn to be dated but their size and fabric suggest a second century CE date. Most coins of the deposit, however, can be dated to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (62%): seven coins minted by Caracalla (four imperial denarii minted in Rome and three Syrian tetrachms struck in Tyre and Damascus),<sup>854</sup> eleven coins minted by Elagabalus (all Syrian tetrachms minted in Antioch. Possibly, there are two more Elagabalus coins: two bronze coins minted in Capitolias<sup>855</sup> and Neapolis), two bronze coins of Severus Alexander (struck in Bostra), and a Syrian tetrachm of Gordian III (struck in Antioch in 240 CE). After this, there is a gap of about 15 years and then a group of three Antoniniani of Gallienus minted in Rome (253-268 CE).

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<sup>850</sup> Bijovsky 2018, p. 527. According to the excavators, there was no bemah yet during the first phase of the synagogue and perhaps this was the location of a niche in the wall which contained the synagogue's savings deposit or treasury. In my opinion, however, this was a charity hoard. See chapter 4.3.2.

<sup>851</sup> Leibner 2018, pp. 527-530. This overview is based on her analysis.

<sup>852</sup> Also sometimes called "radiate," see Bland 2012.

<sup>853</sup> Bijovsky notes that they seem "intrusive or residual in character".

<sup>854</sup> Bijovsky notes that unlike the Roman provincial bronzes that were primarily intended for circulation in the immediate geographical vicinity, Syrian tetrachms were issued for wide distribution for fiscal and military needs. Based on numismatic evidence, Antioch and Tyre were the main mints to supply Syrian tetrachms to Palestine from the first to mid-third centuries CE (Leibner 2018, p. 529).

<sup>855</sup> Coins from the Capitolias mint in Jordan are very rare in Palestine. Bijovsky mentions only four other coins registered in the database: one found at Hammath Gader, one at Hammath Tiberias, and two of unknown provenance (Leibner 2018, p. 578, note 41).

Interestingly, this deposit does not contain any coins of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, nor any coins minted in Constantinople, Alexandria, or Cyzicus.<sup>856</sup>

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place									Total	
		Antioch	Bostra	Capitolias	Damascus	Eastern mint	Jerusalem	Neapolis	Rome	Tyre		Unknown
5A020	111								1			1
	200										2	2
	202								1			1
	222	2										2
	240	1										1
5A032	Null										1	1
5A032	Null						1					1
	117								1			1
	164								1			1
	202					1						1
	217				1				1			2
	222	5										5
	235		1									1
	256								1			1
	268	1										1
5A034	161		1									1
	200										1	1
	202								1			1
	212									1		1
	219			1								1
	222	1										1
	235		1									1
	-76						1					1
5A035	217								1			1
	222	1										1
	268	1										1
5A037	200										1	1
	212									1		1
	222	1										1
5A038	222	1										1
Grand Total		14	3	1	1	1	11	1	8	2	4	30

**Date Certainty**  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 29. WADI HAMAM, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND IN THE DEBRIS OF THE COLLAPSED EASTERN WALL OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF WADI HAMAM. 29 COINS ARE SILVER, 8 ARE BRONZE.**

<sup>856</sup> It is hard to say how much the silver coin deposit was worth: numismatists debate the value of bronze and silver coins under different emperors in Late Antiquity. Theoretically, a tetradrachm would be roughly four times a denarius, but because of rapid debasement in the third century CE, it likely did not have as much buying power as that (by 270 CE, a silver coin was basically a small billion coin with only 1 per cent silver). In fact, this is the reason why silver coins of earlier periods were still around: they had a higher percentage of silver than the contemporaneous ones and hence were saved.

## N. Capernaum<sup>857</sup>

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/capernaum/>

Longitude: 32.881028796465884 Latitude: 35.57548463344574

**Bibliography:** Orfali G. 1922, *Capharnaum et ses Ruines*; Sukenik E.L. 1934, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, London: The Oxford University Press, pp. 7–21; Corbo V and Loffreda S. 1970, *La Sinagoga di Cafarnao dopo gli scavi del 1969*; Spijkerman A. 1970, “Monete della sinagoga di Cafarnao,” in: *La Sinagoga di Cafarnao*, pp. 125–139; Foerster G. 1971, “Notes on Recent Excavations at Capernaum (Review Article),” in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 207–211; Loffreda S. 1972, “The Synagogue of Capernaum, Archaeological Evidence for its Late Chronology,” in: *Liber Annuus*, vol. 22, pp. 5–29; Loffreda S. 1974, *Cafarnao II. La Ceramica*; Kohl H. and Watzinger C. 1975, *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea*, Reprint Osnabrück: Otto Zeller Verlag, pp. 4–40; Corbo V. 1975, *Cafarnao I. Gli Edifici della Città*; Spijkerman A. 1975, *Cafarnao III. Le Monete della Città*; Loffreda S. 1976, *Ein Besuch in Kapharnaum*; Hüttenmeister F. and Reeg G. 1977, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, pp. 260–270; Loffreda S. 1979, “Potsherds from a Sealed Level of the Synagogue at Capernaum,” in: *Liber Annuus*, vol. 39, pp. 215–220; Avi-Yonah M. 1981, “Some comments on the Chronology of the Synagogue at Capernaum,” in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 60–62; Foerster G. 1981b, “Notes on Recent Excavations at Capernaum,” in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 57–59; Loffreda S. 1981, “The Late Chronology of the synagogue at Capernaum,” in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 52–56; Tzaferis V. 1983, “New Archaeological Evidence on Ancient Capernaum,” in: *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 46, No. 4, pp. 198–204; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 89–97; Loffreda S. 1985, *Recovering Capharnaum*, Jerusalem: Edizioni Custodi Terra Santa (Reprint 1993 and 1997: Franciscan Printing Press); Doron C. 1986b, “On the Chronology of the Ancient Synagogue of Capernaum,” in: *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, Vol. 102, pp. 134–143; Tzaferis V. 1989, *Excavations at Capernaum, Vol. 1 1978–1982*; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, p. 156–158 (Hebrew); Loffreda S. 1993, *Recovering Capharnaum* (Reprinted 1997); Tzaferis Z. and Loffreda S. 1993, “Capernaum,” in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 291–296; Arslan E.A. 1996, “Monete Axumite di Imitazione nel Deposito del Cortile della Sinagoga di Cafarnao,” in: *Liber Annuus*, Vol. 46, pp. 307–316; Arslan E.A. 1996, “Il Deposito di 20.323 Nummi tardo-romani della Sinagoga di Cafarnao: come procedure a un Campionamento Scientifico,” in: *International Numismatic Newsletter*, Vol. 29, pp. 6–7; Arslan E.A. 1997, “Il deposito monetale della Trincea XII nel cortile della sinagoga di Cafarnao,” in: *Liber Annuus*, vol. 47, pp. 245–328; Callegher B. 1997, “Un Ripostiglio di Monete d’Oro Bizantine dalla Sinagoga di Cafarnao,” in: *Liber Annuus*, Vol. 47, pp. 329–338; Loffreda S. 1997, “Coins from the Synagogue of Capharnaum,” in: *Liber Annuus*, Vol. 47, pp. 223–244; Dauphin C. 1998, *La Palestine Byzantine*, Vol. 3, p. 710–711; Magness J. 2001, “The Question of the Synagogue: The Problem

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<sup>857</sup> In older publications, the site is sometimes called Tell Hûm.



of Typology," in: *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part Three, Volume 4: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, the Special Problem of the Synagogue*, pp. 1–49; Arslan A. 2003, "Problemi ponderali di V secolo: verso la riforma del Nummus. Il deposito di Cafranao," in: *Revue Numismatique*, Vol. 159, pp. 27–39; Loffreda S. 2005, *Cafarnao V. Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968–2003)*; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 335–337; Callegher B. 2007, *Cafarnao IX. Monete dell'area urbana di Cafarnao (1968–2003)*; Loffreda S. 2008, *Cafarnao VI. Tipologie e contesti stratigrafici della ceramica (1968–2003)*; Loffreda S. 2008b, *Cafarnao VII. Documentazione grafica della ceramica (1968–2003)*; Loffreda S. 2008c, *Cafarnao VIII. Documentazione fotografica degli oggetti (1968–2003)*; Arslan E. 2011, "The L812 Trench Deposit inside the Synagogue and the Isolated Finds of Coins in Capernaum, Israel: a Comparison of the Two Groups," in: *Israel Numismatic Research*, Vol. 6, pp. 147–162; Magness J. 2012, "The Pottery from the Village of Capernaum and the Chronology of Galilean Synagogues," in: *Tel Aviv*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 110–122; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 173–177; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 23–26, 61–63, 127, 235–239, 483–485; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 61–66 (Hebrew); Arslan E. 2015, "Problemi di Documentazione preliminare e Finale dei Ritrovamenti Monetari con Grandi Numeri. Due Esperienze: il Ripostiglio di Biassono 1975 e il "Deposito" della Sinagoga di Cafarnao (Israele)," in: *Il Tesoro di Misurata (Libia)*, pp. 113–127; Callegher B. 2016, "Imitations and Proto-Vandalic Nummi in the Circulating Stock in Upper Gallilee between the End of the 5th and Early 6th Century: The Capernaum Deposit (Locus 812)," in: *Produktion und Recyceln von Münzen in der Spätantike, RGZM-Tagungen*, Vol. 29, pp. 155–196); Tarkhanova T. 2021, "The Friezes with the "Peopled Scrolls" Motif in the Capernaum Synagogue," in: Bonnie R. et al., *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Current Issues and Emerging Trends*, pp. 195–218

#### Websites:

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/capernaum/>
- Sanctuary Capernaum:  
<http://www.capernaum.custodia.org>
- Bible Walks:  
<https://biblewalks.com/Sites/Capernaum.html>
- Virtual World Project  
<http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/Capernaum/site.html>

- Date excavated:**
1. 1905-1907
  2. 1905-1914
  3. 1921-1926
  4. 1968-1986 and 2000-2003

- Excavators:**
1. Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger
  2. Wendelin Hinterkeuser
  3. Gaudenzio Orfali
  4. Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12

**Date of Construction of the Building:** early 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>858</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** Built on top of a platform in the center of the town, surrounded by four streets.<sup>859</sup>

**Description of the Building:** A basilica with two rows of seven columns and a transverse row of two columns in the north on raised stylobates. There were two tiers of benches along the east and west walls. Three entrances were located in the south wall. Another entrance in the north wall led to a small room in the back, while a door in the east wall led to a large, columned courtyard with a stone pavement. This trapezium-shaped courtyard could be entered from two entrances in the south wall and three in the north. Windows were found in the east wall. Inside the building, two platforms flanked the central entrance by the south wall. Various decorative elements were also discovered, carved in stone, as well as dedicatory inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek. The floor was covered in stone slabs of which patches were preserved. The entire building was made out of white limestone on top of a basalt raised platform, making the building stand out next to the black, basalt houses surrounding it.

Underneath the synagogue, three strata were discerned by the excavators: Stratum A: Structures (most likely private houses) underneath the synagogue platform; Stratum B: An artificial platform of, at some places, 3 meters high, filled with basalt stones, earth, ashes, and a

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<sup>858</sup> This date is based on Jodi Magness' re-evaluation of the pottery and coins found under the building (Magness 2001, pp. 18-26; Magness 2012a). She rightly points out that the excavators, who date the building to the late 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century, were providing a *terminus ante quem* for the archaeological finds, instead of a *terminus post quem* (Loffreda 1979; Loffreda 1981). Since pieces of pottery and hundreds of coins have been found that can be dated to the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the synagogue could not have been built earlier than the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. This date has recently been confirmed by Callegher, who, based on an analysis of the imitation and proto-vandalic nummi coins from Locus 812 in the synagogue, admits that this deposit found was probably closed sometime between 508 and 512 CE (Callegher 2016, p. 166). See also Tarkhanova 2021 for a stylistic confirmation of this date.

<sup>859</sup> The first explorations of the synagogue were conducted by Edward Robinson in 1857, Charles Wilson in 1866, and Victor Guérin in 1870. In 1894, the site and its ruins were acquired by Brother Giuseppe Baldi on behalf of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. Excavations started in 1905 both by the German scholars Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger, and the Franciscan Wendelin Hinterkeuser. From 1921 to 1926 the Franciscan monk Gaudenzio Orfali excavated the church at Capernaum and reconstructed a small part of the synagogue. In 1968, the Franciscan fathers Corbo and Loffreda resumed excavations and dug under the floor of the building, revealing thousands of coins (Kohl and Watzinger 1916, pp. 4-5; Sapir and Neeman 1967, pp. 34-37; Loffreda 1976, pp. 10-11; Tzaferis 1989, pp. XVII-XIX; Loffreda 1993, pp. 10-13; Tarkhanova 2021).

great number of broken vessels; stratum C: A layer on average 30 cm thick, consisting of white mortar on top of the platform, on which the synagogue building and its benches were set.

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1971<sup>860</sup>

**Deposit Location:** Inside the synagogue, on the south side of the western aisle, just in front of the western entrance in the southern wall (Trench XIV).

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12; Trench XIV; Locus 814; Stratum C

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 2922 coins were found on the south side of the western aisle, just inside the western entrance.<sup>861</sup> They were discovered in only one square meter, on top of the mortar, underneath one single stone. They were not deeply embedded in the mortar. Many of them had a patina of the same mortar, however, and it can thus be assumed that they were put in place while the mortar was still soft (and thus formed an integral part of the bedding).<sup>862</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** Although the thousands of coins found in the Capernaum synagogue sparked the conversation on coin deposits found in ancient synagogues (see chapter 1), they still have not been analyzed and published in full. The Franciscan Printing Press in Jerusalem published nine books between 1974 and 2008 dedicated to the excavations of the village and its finds (Cafarnao I-IX), but a publication on the coins found in the synagogue building is still lacking.<sup>863</sup> For the moment, the coins are stored in the caveau of a Franciscan convent (so no longer at the Flagellation Museum in Jerusalem where they were kept at first), and

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<sup>860</sup> Loffreda 1972, p. 9: "In the same year 1971 we cleared the entire area of the eastern aisle where the stone pavement was missing. We reached only the level of the mortar underlying the original stone pavement. Most of the area of the western aisle was also cleared to the same depth." Loffreda 1997, p. 226: "There we collected 2,922 coins. It was Saturday, September 18, 1971."

<sup>861</sup> Loffreda 1972, p. 15; Loffreda 1997, p. 226; Callegher 2016, p. 155.

<sup>862</sup> Loffreda 1972, p. 15: It must be stressed that several coins were still embedded in the thick layer of mortar at the time of excavation.

<sup>863</sup> The Cafarnao III book, published by Augustus Spijkerman, only discusses the coins found in the village and the insula sacra.

are not accessible to the public or available for research. Research and publication rights have been given to Bruno Callegher and Ermanno Arslan, who have been publishing preliminary reports on selected subgroups of coins found in the building over the past years.<sup>864</sup> At this point, all the approximately 25,000 coins have been scanned, with 5-6 coins on each scan, obverse and reverse.<sup>865</sup> Callegher is currently cutting all the scans up into individual coin images and entering their metrological data and LRBC parallels. The coins themselves have been weighed, measured, and their axis noted, and they have been stored in paper bags. This process has taken years and Callegher is currently looking for funding to continue the process and publish the coins.

This said, some information on the coins can be deduced from the dozens of articles that have been published since the 1960s. As for the 2922 coins found in Locus 814, in 1972 Loffreda published that they date mostly to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century, and were minted under Honorius, Arcadius, Theodosius, Valentinianus, and Eudoxia, with less frequent coins of Constantine and his sons.<sup>866</sup> However, Loffreda does not tell us which coins are from which emperor, nor do we have any other identification details. Arslan eventually published multiple tables on the Stratum C deposit found in Trench XIV in his 1997 publication, providing information on 739 legible coins from the deposit, dated between 335 and 491 CE.<sup>867</sup> It is not known, however, if the group also contained earlier and later coins, and we still lack a full analysis of each coin. The information given here in Fig. 30 is the data that can be provided at this point.<sup>868</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> For this project, I have been in close contact with Bruno Callegher to work through the available information on the Capernaum coins. At some point, Callegher took it upon himself to travel by train from Trieste to Milan to meet Arslan and discuss if they could give me full access to the coins. It was decided that they could not, but I want to express my deepest gratitude for such an extraordinary effort.

<sup>865</sup> Personal communication Callegher. See also Arslan 2011, p. 147, footnote 3, in which he states that he is cataloguing the coins from the entire synagogue, excluding the ones found in Locus 812, while awaiting final publication; and Callegher 2016, footnote 19, in which he notes that the complete photographic campaign was conducted in 2011-2012 with a high-definition scanner (Coin Cabinet SBF-Jerusalem).

<sup>866</sup> Loffreda 1972, p. 15.

<sup>867</sup> Arslan 1997, p. 253, Table III and p. 260, Table V: overview of the minting places (and dates) of 739 coins found in Trench XIV, dated between 335 and 491 CE; p. 261, Table VI: overview of the dates and minting places of 148 coins found in both Trenches XIV and XVIII, dated between 335 and 491 CE.

<sup>868</sup> Arslan 2003, p. 29 mentions that 1616 coins of Trench XIV have been published but I could not identify with certainty those coming from Stratum C or Stratum B in the 1997 publication, if this is indeed the publication to which he is referring.

Locus..	End Dat..	Minting Place											Total		
		Alexandria	Antioch	Aquileia	Arlés	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Lugdunum	Nicomedia	Rome	Siscia		Thessalonica	Unknown
814	Null													2,183	2,183
	348	1	4		2	2	4			2					15
	364	4				5	3	1			2				15
	375	4	4			2	4		1	1	1		2		19
	388	29	22	3		5	22	3		5	18	5	9		121
	395	20	61	6		70	49	11		34	2		5		258
	425	14	87	1		40	33	5		18	12				210
	450	4	15	1		19	12	1		4	11				67
	457		1			2	1			7			1		12
	475					21				1					22
<b>Grand Total</b>		76	194	11	2	166	128	21	1	72	46	5	17	2,183	2,922

Date Certainty  
 \* Uncertain

**FIGURE 30. CAPERNAUM, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM, FOUND IN STRATUM C, ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE WESTERN AISLE. ALL 2922 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## 2. Deposit 2:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1971

**Deposit Location:** Underneath the side benches

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12, Trench XVII, L817

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 67 bronze coins and five gold coins were found under side benches of the prayer hall.<sup>869</sup> Only six coins were embedded in the foundation of the benches, on the southeast side of the hall; the others were lying on top of the bench foundations. The five gold coins were found together, under the eastern benches, still *in situ* near the doorway leading from the synagogue hall to the courtyard.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to preliminary identifications by Fr. Spijkerman and published by Loffreda in 1972, one coin of this deposit belongs to Constantine, one to Constantius II, one to Honorius, one to Arcadius, and two to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (with

<sup>869</sup> Loffreda 1972, p. 16. These were not the only gold coins found in the synagogue; according to a publication by Callegher in 1997, 5 solidi and 2 tremisses were found in area S.146 in the synagogue, and another 2 gold coins attributed to Justin II were discovered out of context (Callegher 1997, p. 330). It is not clear, however, where area S.146 is located and if these coins were found under the floor or benches.

identification undecided).<sup>870</sup> The five gold coins are dated to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, this is all the information we have on this group.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Unknown	Total
817	Null	64	64
	400	2	2
	423	1	1
	700	5	5
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Uncertain			

**FIGURE 31. CAPERNAUM, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND UNDER THE BENCHES AT THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM. 5 COINS ARE GOLD, 67 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

### 3. Deposit 3:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1968-1986

**Deposit Location:** In Stratum C, in various locations in the synagogue building where the stone pavement was missing:<sup>871</sup> between the north wall and the northern stylobate (Trench II), in the main hall (Trenches XX, XXII, XXIV, and XXV), on the south side of the eastern aisle (Trench XVII), and in the northern area of the western aisle (Trench XXI).

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12; Trench II, Trench XVII, Trench XX, Trench XXI, Trench XXII, Trench XXIV, Trench XXV; L802, L817, L820, L821, L822, L824, L825; Stratum C

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

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<sup>870</sup> Loffreda 1972, p. 16.

<sup>871</sup> All these coins come from an “open level”: areas inside the synagogue building where the stone slabs of the floor were missing (but the bedding was still intact: many of the coins were found in the mortar, showing that they were placed there when the mortar was still fresh). Since only small patches of the ancient stone pavement were preserved inside the building, the excavators did not want to remove and “sacrifice” these stones to look for more coins. Instead, they removed some of the stone pavement of the courtyard where the floor was well preserved (Loffreda 1997, p. 227). Because of this, we do not know if and how many coins are still preserved under the floor of the synagogue.

**Deposit Description:** In stratum C of Trench II, 89 coins were discovered. Some Roman coins were laid in the loose dirt near the top, but deeper down the coins were still encrusted with white mortar.<sup>872</sup> The greatest concentration was found near the northeast corner of the trench, where 63 coins were found together. In Trench XVII a total of 67 coins was exposed: 21 were found in the mortar of the side benches (see above) and 46 were stuck in the mortar bed of the floor, where the stone pavement was missing. Last, in Trench XXI, 43 coins were found and in an expansion of Trench XXV, 71 more coins. It is unclear how many coins were found in Trenches XX, XXII, and XXIV.<sup>873</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to Loffreda, the coins embedded in the thick layer of mortar in Trench II belong to the emperors of the 4<sup>th</sup> century: Constantine, Constantius II, Constantius Gallus, Julianus, and Valentinianus.<sup>874</sup> The latest coin of Valentinianus (383 CE) gives a *terminus post quem* for the deposit. 87 of these coins were described by Spijkerman in a numismatic report in 1970 (pp. 128-135), and he dates the coins ranging from 119-120 CE (Trajan) until 383 (Valentinian I). Fig. 32 gives an overview of the information we know on the coins from Loci 802, 811, and 817, for a total of 178 coins. Almost all the coins were struck in eastern mints, with the exception of one coin minted in Rome (Theodosius I, 378-383 CE). Possibly all 32 coins of Constantius II are of the FEL TEMP Fallen horseman type.

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<sup>872</sup> Spijkerman 1970, pp. 128-135. In 1997, however, Loffreda wrote that there were 86 coins found in Trench II (Loffreda 1997, p. 226).

<sup>873</sup> Loffreda 1997, p. 227: "Later on in 1981 we found also coins in this section, when we opened Trenches 20, 22, 24, 25."

<sup>874</sup> Loffreda 1972, p. 15.

Locus..	End Dat..	Minting Place								Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Aquileia (?)	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica		Unknown
802	Null									33	33
	120									1	1
	335		1								1
	337									1	1
	341		2								2
	346									1	1
	354	2	5		1	2	1		1	11	13 1
	361	3	5							7 15	15 15
	367									1	1
	375									1	1
	383						1	1		1	3
	387			1							1
817	Null									46	46
821	Null									43	43
825	Null									71	71
Grand Total		5	13	1	1	2	2	1	1	13 210	39 210

Date Certainty  
 Certain  
 Uncertain

**FIGURE 32. CAPERNAUM, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM, FOUND IN STRATUM C, IN VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN THE SYNAGOGUE HALL. ALL 249 COINS GIVEN HERE ARE BRONZE.**

#### 4. Deposit 4:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1968-1986

**Deposit Location:** In Stratum C, in various locations under the eastern courtyard pavement: In the southeastern corner of the courtyard (Trench IV) and in the northeastern corner of the columned area (Trench XXIII)

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12; Trench IV, Trench XXIII; L804, L823

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** In Trench IV, 11 coins were found in stratum C, only one of which had traces of lime mortar still attached. In Trench XXIII, only 9 coins were found. The excavators



believe that this northern area of the courtyard was the space where “the mortar was prepared for the final setting of the stone pavement of the courtyard.”<sup>875</sup>

**Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** We do not have a lot of information on the coins found in these loci. Spijkerman 1970 includes four coins of Trench IV in his report. Of these, one was minted in Nicomedia (341-346 CE), one was minted by Constantius II (date and place unknown, Fallen horseman type), one was minted by Commodus (Gadara, 179-180 CE), and one is a Late Roman unknown coin.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place			Total
		Gadara	Nicomedia	Unknown	
804	Null			9	9
	180	1			1
	346		1		1
823	Null			9	9
Grand Total		1	1	18	119
<b>Date Certainty</b>					
■ Certain					
■ Uncertain					

**FIGURE 33. CAPERNAUM, DEPOSIT 4. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM, FOUND IN STRATUM C, UNDER THE EASTERN COURTYARD. ALL 20 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**5. Deposit 5:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1974

**Deposit Location:** Inside the synagogue, on the south side of the western aisle, just in front of the western entrance in the south wall (Trench XIV).

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12; Trench XIV; L814, Stratum B

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

<sup>875</sup> Loffreda 1979, pp. 215-216.

**Deposit Description:** 236 coins were found sealed in Stratum B, in the southwest corner of the synagogue building.<sup>876</sup> The coins were found in the whole depth of the fill.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to Loffreda 1997 and Callegher 2016, 236 bronze coins were found in Trench XIV (Locus 814). The coins were discovered throughout the whole depth of the fill. This number is confusing, however. In 1997, Arslan published several tables on Trench IV. On page 260, he published a conspectus of 739 coins, all coming from Trench XIV, but only the ones dated between 335 and 491 CE.<sup>877</sup> On the next page, he published a conspectus of 148 coins found in Trench XIV and Trench XVIII.<sup>878</sup> In this mixed table, it is not clear which coins come from which trench, and he also only gives the coins with mintmarks dated between 335 and 491 CE. Because the coins given by Arslan could have been coming from different loci, or strata, I am following Loffreda’s and Callegher’s information on 236 coins in this database.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Unknown	Total
<b>814</b>	Null	236	236
<b>Grand Total</b>		236	236
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Uncertain			

**FIGURE 34. CAPERNAUM, DEPOSIT 5. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM, FOUND IN STRATUM B, ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE WESTERN AISLE. ALL 236 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## 6. Deposit 6:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1975

**Deposit Location:** Under the “balcony” of the synagogue, on the south side outside the synagogue building, in front of the most eastern entrance to the building, as well as in front of the courtyard (Trench XVIII).

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12; Trench XVIII; L818; Stratum B

<sup>876</sup> Callegher 2016, p. 155.

<sup>877</sup> Arslan 1997, p. 260, Table V.

<sup>878</sup> Arslan 1997, p. 261, Table VI.

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** This artificial trench includes a part of the foundation of the stairs on the southeast side of the building, as well as an area in front of the eastern courtyard, and the entire area in front of the east aisle of the synagogue. Here, there was no Stratum C mortar layer. Stratum B here also contained many more pieces of white stone chips than elsewhere in the building. 570 coins were found in the fill throughout the depth of Stratum B, until the appearance of the flooring of Stratum A. Ten coins were found in the fill of the southeast stairway.<sup>879</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** In 1997, Arslan published a conspectus of 148 coins found in Trenches XIV and XVIII.<sup>880</sup> Unfortunately, it is not clear which coins come from which trench, and he also only gives the coins with mintmarks dated between 335 and 491 CE.<sup>881</sup> For this database, I am following the information from Loffreda that 580 coins were found in this trench.<sup>882</sup>

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<sup>879</sup> Loffreda 1997, p. 229. They set aside eight coins found in the first 40 cm beginning from the surface because of the possibility of contamination from above. To be complete, one must point out that Trenches XIV and XVIII were not the only two areas where coins were found in Stratum B. Trench 1 contained one coin, Trench 4 three coins, Trench 11 two coins, Trench 17 one coin, Trench 21 two coins, Trench 22 one coin, Trench 23 nine coins, and Trench 25 three coins. However, none of these finds makes up a “deposit”, and they could have been accidental losses or contaminations.

<sup>880</sup> Arslan 1997, p. 261. The same is true for his 2003 publication, in which he gives an overview of different coin types found at Capernaum but collapses the Stratum B and Stratum C coins found in Trench XIV into one group.

<sup>881</sup> In any case, because the trench was chosen randomly, the coins are presumably part of larger assemblies.

<sup>882</sup> This number, however, is far from clear as Arslan notes in 2015 that only 511 coins from Trench XVIII could be found at the Custody of the Holy Land in Jerusalem (Arslan 2015, p. 117, footnote 17).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Unknown	Total
818	Null	580	580
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>580</b>	<b>580</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Uncertain			

**FIGURE 35. CAPERNAUM, DEPOSIT 6. COINS FROM TRENCH UNDER THE “BALCONY” OF THE SYNAGOGUE, OUTSIDE THE SYNAGOGUE BUILDING ON THE SOUTH SIDE, IN FRONT OF THE MOST EASTERN ENTRANCE TO THE BUILDING, AS WELL AS IN FRONT OF THE COURTYARD, FOUND IN STRATUM B. ALL 580 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

### 7. Deposit 7:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1972/1975

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor of the northeastern corner of the courtyard of the synagogue building.

**Archaeological Information:** Area 12; Trench XII; L812

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** In Trench XII, after removing three large slabs and eight medium sized ones, 6000 coins were discovered. When the trench was enlarged three years later, another “19 kilograms” of coins were found.<sup>883</sup> After cleaning, a total of 20,323 coins were counted coming from Trench XII. In this trench, not one, but two levels of mortar could be discerned, one on top of the other, and the coins were spread out between the upper layer and slabs of the floor, as well as between the first and second mortar level. After analyzing the layers, the excavators concluded that they were put in together to form the base for the courtyard and that the coins thus belong together.<sup>884</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** This deposit is the largest group of coins found in the synagogue at Capernaum. Not surprisingly, the numismatists working on the coin material have been

<sup>883</sup> Loffreda 1997, p. 227.

<sup>884</sup> Loffreda 1997, p. 227.

struggling to work through it. Because of the high volume, it was impossible to classify quickly all the specimens found, and Arslan and Callegher instead chose to select a subset of coins and to publish a report according to a procedure based on statistical methods: the idea that a smaller subset would be a *pars pro toto* representation of the entire deposit.<sup>885</sup> Of the 20,323 coins, it was determined that only 63% of the coins could be read,<sup>886</sup> and that larger coins, like imperial coins from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century, were better preserved than the poorly-made 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century coins and would thus receive more attention.<sup>887</sup>

In 1997, a catalogue of 3058 specimen of this deposit (or 15% of the total) was published by Ermanno Arslan, however, 1133 of those are indicated as illegible.<sup>888</sup> 21 Axumite coins were published by Arslan in 1996 and some “Isis” coins from Alexandria in 2003. Callegher published another 182 coins in 2016, consisting of the imitations and proto-Vandalic nummi found in the deposit.<sup>889</sup> One problem I encountered going through these coins is that it is unclear if there is any overlap between these published coins. For this database, I am assuming there is not, and that every published coin has so far only been published once; thus, information on a total of 3287 coins has been provided here.

As Callegher notes on p. 157 of his 2016 publication, there are several trends that can be noticed in this large deposit. First, there is a sizeable group of coins (of which 75 in the database here provided) minted between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century CE (Ptolemaic coins, Hasmonean, coins by Roman procurators, Roman provincial coins, Antoniniani, and Constantinian folles). Subsequently, there is a significant quantity of issues of types struck between 350 and 363 CE (of which 152 in our database), like the FEL TEMP REPARATIO coins, SPES REIPUBLICAE coins, SECVRITAS REIPUBLICAE coins, and VOTA coins;

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<sup>885</sup> Arslan 1996; 1997; Callegher 2007, p. 147; Arslan 2015 which focuses entirely on the difficulty of documenting very large coin finds, with Capernaum as one of the case-studies.

<sup>886</sup> Arslan 1997, p. 251; Arslan 2011, p. 151: here he also states that he did not find any so-called “blank flans” among the synagogue coins, in contrast to the coins found in the settlement at Capernaum. These 37% illegible coins were identified long before the scanning project by Callegher and now are unfortunately lost: they were almost all reburied at the time of the excavations and are no longer recoverable (Arslan 2015, p. 117, footnote 17).

<sup>887</sup> This number of 20,323 has recently been contested by Arslan, who found 20,363 coins and fragmentary coins from this trench at the Custody of the Holy Land in Jerusalem. He also proposes the possibility that the building context of the coins in this trench had been contaminated by later materials. However, as 20,323 is still the number that can be found in the literature on this deposit, and Arslan admits that this higher number also incorporates fragments of coins, I have decided to stick with it for this database.

<sup>888</sup> Arslan 1997, pp. 306-322.

<sup>889</sup> Callegher 2016, p. 155: the selection of the coins defined as “imitations” was made at the time of the initial classification in 1996 and 1997: these were coins that were deemed unusual or problematic because they differed from the prototypes of official mints. 259 coins were selected at that time (1% of the total), of which 182 were published. According to Callegher, the 78 coins that were not chosen would have added nothing new to the published sample. A list of their photograph number at the Coin Cabinet SBF-Jerusalem can be found on p. 168, footnote 21.

and coins struck towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE (of which 646 here provided in the database). According to Callegher, 55% of the coins in the deposit can be dated to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (in our database, 24% can be dated to this period). In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, there is a progressive decline of coin issues (according to Callegher, from 48% in the 395-425 CE period to circa 21% in the 425-457 CE period and 8% in the 457-491 CE period). In our database, there are 740 coins from 395-425 CE (22.5%), 354 coins of 425-457 CE (11%), and 268 from the 457-491 CE period (8%). Callegher also notes that about 1.5 to 2 per cent of the legible coins are imitations and states that, in contrast to Arslan's opinion, there are cast or blank flans among the group. In our database, the latest certain coins can be dated to Zeno (476-491 CE).<sup>890</sup> The Axumite coins have been dated by Arslan to the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the third quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>891</sup> Most of the coins were minted in eastern mints, although for the majority of the coins, it is hard to say exactly at which mint. In his 2003 article, Arslan divides the coins found at Capernaum into different types. For the coins from Trench XII, he indicates that 219 are of the Cross in Wreath type (11.37% of the 1926 legible coins, with most legible coins coming from Cyzicus, Antioch, and Constantinople), 72 are *minimi* of Marcian (3.8% of total, most coming from Constantinople and Nicomedia), and 148 are *minimi* of Leo (7.7% of total, most from Constantinople). He also weighted the coins, indicating that the Cross in Wreath coins have an average weight of 0.978 grams (with a large peak between 0.93 and 0.98 grams, and a small peak between 1.11 and 1.16 grams); the Marian *minimi* have an average weight of 0.924 grams (with a peak at 0.87-0.92 grams, and one at 1.11-1.16 grams); and the Leo *minimi* have an average weight of 0.937 grams (with a peak at 0.93-0.98 grams, and one at 1.05-1.10 grams).<sup>892</sup> A conspectus of all the information gathered on the Trench XII coins from the various publications can be found in fig. 36.

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<sup>890</sup> See also Magness 2001, p. 23.

<sup>891</sup> However, Bijovsky 1998, pp. 82-83 dates them more precisely to the "6<sup>th</sup> century, as part of the repertory of Byzantine nummi."

<sup>892</sup> These weights are based on all coins of these types found in Trench XII, Trench XIV, and various other loci.

No.	Inv. No.	Accession	Amount	Square	Date	Classification													Type	Masses	Total	
						Denarius (1)	Sester	As	Quadrans	Aureus	Solidus	Denarius	Solidus	Aureus	Solidus	Denarius	Solidus	Aureus				
Null																			18,226	18,226		
10																			1	1		
117																			1	1		
167																			1	1		
200																			1	1		
268																			1	1		
270															2				2	2		
300																			2	2		
335		1																		1	1	
337																				2	2	
340					2	1			1					1	3					6	14	
348		2	1	2	3				5		1						2	1		24	41	
350																				1	1	
355																				2	2	
361		2	3			2			1					1	1			3		133	146	
364					1																1	1
367		1																		3	4	
375		3	1			3			1						2					4	14	
378		1																		98	98	
383		5	8			6			23		7			9	1			1		13	73	
387																	1			45	46	
388		6	7	2	1	2				1					6			1		109	135	
392		6	16			7			1		7			2						35	74	
395		6	30		2	35			35					21				1		70	200	
401		2	2			3							1							44	52	
402					1																1	1
403			1			2															227	230
404															5						5	5
406		1				1			2	25	1									7	37	
408		3	18			3			5	104				1						9	143	
423		1				2			2		5			3				3		39	55	
425										2					13					1	16	
435		3	3			15			22	162				2						39	246	
450						1														3	4	
455			8							1					14					4	27	
457			2						1	46	15			8						1	73	
465																				1	1	
472															1					1	1	
474		3	1			54				77				3				2		15	155	
476																				2	2	
490																				37	37	
491			2							1											3	3
500																				16	16	
575																				21	21	
600																				2	2	
-4																				1	1	
-76																				1	1	
-96																				1	1	
-100										1											1	1
Grand Total	42	105	4	8	140	1	1	100	418	36	1	51	41	2	1	13	1	1	980	1,942		
Sub-Category																				18,247	18,331	

**FIGURE 36. CAPERNAUM, DEPOSIT 7. COINS FROM UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE NORTHEASTERN CORNER OF THE COURTYARD OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM. ALL 20323 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## O. Horvat Kur

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/horvat-kur/>

Longitude: 35.537051 Latitude: 32.885014

**Bibliography:** Zangenberg J, and Münger S. 2011, "Horbat Kur preliminary report 2010," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot—Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, Vol. 123; Zangenberg J. 2013, "Horbat Kur preliminary report 2011," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot—Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, Vol. 125; Zangenberg J. Münger S. and McCane B. 2013, "The Kinneret Regional Project Excavations of a Byzantine Synagogue at Horvat Kur, Galilee, 2010–2013: A Preliminary Report," in: *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 557–576; Zangenberg J. Münger S. and Rassalle T. 2013, "Synagoge van Horvat Kur geeft steeds meer geheimen bloot," in: *Archeologiemagazine*, Vol. 1/2013, pp. 40–43; Wyssmann P. 2013, "Ein Münzdeposit aus einer spätantiken Synagoge in Galiläa," in: *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel*, Vol. 2/2013, pp. 60–61; Neumann F. et al. 2014, "Galilee Blooming: First Palynological and Archaeological Data from an Early Byzantine Cistern at Horvat Kur," in: *Environmental Archaeology*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 39–54; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 67–68 (Hebrew); Aviam M. 2016, "Another Reading Table Base from a Galilean Synagogue: Some Comments on the Stone Table from Ḥorvat Kur," in: Patrich J. Peleg–Barkat O. and Ben–Yosef E. (eds.), *Arise, Walk Through the Land – Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Land of Israel in Memory of Yizhar Hirschfeld on the Tenth Anniversary of His Demise*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, pp. 79–82; Zangenberg J. 2016a, "A Basalt Stone Table from the Byzantine Synagogue at Ḥorvat Kur, Galilee: Publication and Preliminary Interpretation," in: Patrich J. Peleg–Barkat O. and Ben–Yosef E. (eds.), *Arise, Walk Through the Land – Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Land of Israel in Memory of Yizhar Hirschfeld on the Tenth Anniversary of His Demise*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, pp. 61–78; Zangenberg J. 2016b, "Performing the Sacred in a Community Building: Observations from the 2010–2015 Kinneret Regional Project Excavations in the Byzantine Synagogue of Horvat Kur (Galilee)," in: Day J. et al. (eds.), *Spaces in Late Antiquity Cultural, Theological and Archaeological Perspectives*, London: Routledge, pp. 166–189; Zangenberg J. Münger S. and McCane B. 2016, "Horvat Kur, Kinneret Regional Project 2012, 2013," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot, Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, Vol. 128; Zangenberg J. 2017, "The Menorah on the Mosaic Floor from the Late Roman/ Early Byzantine Synagogue at Horvat Kur," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 67, pp. 110–126; Zangenberg J. 2019a, "Will the Real Women Please Sit Down. Interior Space, Seating Arrangements, and Female Presence in the Byzantine Synagogue of Horvat Kur in Galilee," in: *Gender and Social Norms in Ancient Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Texts and Material Culture*, Vol. 28, pp. 91–118; Zangenberg J. 2019b, "New Observations on the 'Basalt Stone Table' from Horvat Kur, Galilee," in: *Strata: Bulletin of the Anglo–Israel Archaeological Society*, Vol. 37, pp. 95–111; Zangenberg, Jürgen, Annalize Rheeder, and Philip Bes *Forthcoming*, "A Piece of Heaven on Earth. Results of Ten Years of Archaeological Research by Kinneret Regional Project in the Synagogue of Ḥorvat Kur."



## Websites:

- Kinneret Regional Project:

<https://kinneret-excavations.org/tel-kinrot/horvat-kur>

- Academy of Finland, Centre for Excellence:

<https://blogs.helsinki.fi/sacredtexts/2018/07/24/the-final-excavation-season-at-the-horvat-kur-synagogue/>

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/kur/>

- ASOR Blog and Video:

<http://www.asor.org/blog/2014/07/14/report-on-2010-2013-excavations-at-horvat-kur-galilee/>

**Date Excavated:** 2010-2018

**Excavators:** Jürgen Zangenberg, Stefan Münzer, Raimo Hakola, and Byron McCane (Kinneret Regional Project)

**Archaeological Information:** Area A

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: Beginning of 350-450 CE-range (Synagogue IA)<sup>893</sup>

Phase II: End of 350-450 CE-range (Synagogue IB)

Phase III: Ca. 450-500 (Synagogue IIA)<sup>894</sup>

Phase IV: Ca. 500-600 (Synagogue IIB)

Phase V: Ca. 600-650 (Synagogue IIC)

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** At the top of the hill, on the northeastern edge of the settlement.<sup>895</sup>

## Description of the Building:

Phase I (= Synagogue IA): The building was a more-or-less square synagogue (10 m X 11 m), on the north side built on top of an old terrace wall. The main entrance was probably located in the south wall. A narrow door connected the main hall with a row of two or three rooms

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<sup>893</sup> As the field supervisor on this site, I am part of the staff working on the final publication. Much of the information on the building and the coin deposits provided here has not been published yet and is provided by me with permission from the directors Jürgen Zangenberg, Stefan Münzer, Raimo Hakola, and Byron McCane, and from numismatist Patrick Wyssmann. The reconstruction of the building is based on Zangenberg, Rheeder, and Bes *forthcoming*.

<sup>894</sup> Zangenberg, Rheeder, and Bes *forthcoming* state that "Often, these changes [to the building] were only local and are difficult to exactly pinpoint chronologically, and therefore not easy to combine into coherent "periods". The use of labels like "IIA," "IIB" and "IIC" proposed here, therefore, is tentative at best."

<sup>895</sup> A map by Gottlieb Schumacher from 1888 describes the site of Horvat Kur as a ruin. The site was also visited by Victor Guérin (1868-1880), the surveyors Condor and Kitchener in 1881, Bezalel Rabbani in the 1950s, and Gideon Foerster and Zvi Ilan in the 1980s who identified this area as occupied by a synagogue (Ilan 1986, pp. 35-37).

running along the eastern edge of the plateau and another door gave access to a northern room. The roof was supported by four internal columns. The synagogue's floor was covered with a simple, greyish-white plaster.

Phase II (= Synagogue IB): In this phase, the row of secondary rooms outside the eastern synagogue wall was (partly) demolished in order to allow the expansion of nearby domestic structure. In the north-eastern most corner of the building, the Synagogue IA walls are also demolished down to the foundation levels and a large courtyard is created there instead. The original floor was raised by laying out a thick mosaic floor including a supporting plaster bedding. Remains of this mosaic floor have been partly preserved *in situ* in the southeastern corner of the building, showing a menorah and inscription. Around 450 CE Synagogue IB was severely damaged or almost entirely demolished.

Phase III (= Synagogue IIA): Synagogue IIA represents a new building, though it kept some continuity with its predecessor by using the same location and some previous architectural features. Synagogue II was now broader than long, measuring ca. 16.5 m east-west (instead of ca. 10 m) by ca. 11 m north-south. The hall was divided into a wide nave and two narrow aisles separated by four columns on each side. The northern room was now abandoned and the entrance closed. The synagogue had an entrance with a double-leaf door from the west and a smaller, single leaf door from the south. The south entrance is not in the middle of the wall, but slightly to the west, probably because of the ornate, elevated square platform built against the southern wall, which functioned as the synagogue's *bimah*.<sup>896</sup> This *bimah* was square, measuring ca. 3 x 3 m and possibly 80 cm high. A narrow flight of stone steps descended from the northern side of the platform and connected it to the floor of the nave. A low entrance from the east offered access to a low inner chamber. Internally, almost the entire mosaic floor was demolished and a new, greyish plaster floor was put in. A low bench of basalt stones ran along the inside of all four walls.

Phase IV (= Synagogue IIB): The eastern section of the northern wall was rebuilt after some damage. A portico was also added to the western side of the building. The Synagogue IIA-*bimah* seems to have collapsed and only been partly rebuilt: the interior room was rebuilt as solid platform by filling the previous interior room up with flagstones taken from Synagogue IIA. In addition to the rearrangement of the *bimah*, the entire floor was repaired with a new, thick layer of plaster.

Phase V (= Synagogue IIC): Probably in this phase a staircase was constructed against the outside of the southern wall, possibly leading to a wooden gallery above the synagogue's eastern aisle. Benches were now also inserted between the columns that separated both aisles from the nave, very likely to extend available seating space provided by already existing benches along the walls. One of the stones added as such a bench is the "Horvat Kur table".<sup>897</sup> The entire floor of the eastern aisle was also raised by adding a stone paving layer. Last, another single, undecorated seat was plastered on top of the southern bench just west of the

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<sup>896</sup> Zangenberg *et al.* 2013; Tervahauta 2021, pp. 318-321.

<sup>897</sup> Zangenberg J. 2016a; Aviam 2016; Zangenberg 2019b.

entrance, with a footstool on the floor right in front of it. This has been interpreted as a Seat of Moses.

### **Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 2008-2013

**Deposit Location:** In the western portico of the synagogue, but probably originally underneath the mosaic floor of the synagogue hall

**Archaeological Information:** The coins were scattered over two soil layers on top of each other. The top layer contains L 7024, 7033, 7051, 7079, 7090, 7105, 7136, 7149, 7156, and 7353 (also known as the “coin-layer”). The layer underneath contains Loci 7024, 7033, 7081, 7098, 7109, 7144, 7150, 7157, 7170, 7211, and 7353 (also known as the “tesserae-layer”).

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** To the west of western wall W7018 stood a portico, bounded by wall W7018 to the east, wall W7073 to the west, terrace wall W7114 to the north, and a single-faced retaining wall W7148 to the south.<sup>898</sup> Inside the portico were three distinct layers of artificial fill: a lower brownish-gray layer placed on top of a thin, natural layer of reddish brown soil directly above bedrock with a gray layer containing large fieldstones spread evenly across the area to raise the surface;<sup>899</sup> an intermediate, hard, grayish layer of 5-10 cm containing much plaster, 87 coins, and 15971 tesserae (= the “tesserae layer”); and an upper, soft, brownish layer of circa 5 cm covered with flat-lying cobbles, containing 9249 tesserae and 752 coins (= the “coin layer”).<sup>900</sup> According to the excavators, the large quantity of crude fieldstones, the thousands of single tesserae, the plaster chunks, and the plaster-coated potsherds in the two upper layers point to these layers being construction debris, dumped in the portico to form a new floor level. The debris and coins could have originated from two possible sources: following one theory, the coins were originally placed

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<sup>898</sup> Zangenberg 2013a.

<sup>899</sup> In this lower layer, Loci 7026, 7027, 7088, 7125, 7153, 7162, 7175, 7190, 7212, 7222, and 7353, another 21 coins were discovered. Some of these coins possibly belong to the portico deposit and over time made their way down to the lower layer but have been excluded here since they are separated from the two upper layers by the bed of cobblestones.

<sup>900</sup> Zangenberg 2013a; Zangenberg *et al.* 2013; and unpublished reports. Finally, the surface of the upper layer was beaten hard and strengthened with cobbles to create a new walking surface that connected the western entrance of the synagogue with the threshold of the portico.

*inside* the synagogue hall (presumably under the mosaic floor) and ended up in the portico as a secondary deposit when the mosaic floor was replaced and thrown out. Since most of the coins were found in the brown, upper layer above the grey layer containing most of the tesserae pieces, the excavators theorize a so-called reverse stratigraphy in the portico of the original make-up of the mosaic floor.<sup>901</sup> However, it could also be that the coins were brought in deliberately to make the foundation of the portico.<sup>902</sup> In that case, they were never under the floor of the synagogue hall.

### **Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** The coins have been preliminarily studied by Patrick Wyssmann but have not been published yet. At the end of each summer campaign, all coins were brought to the IAA for safe storage. When the synagogue excavations ended in 2018, the IAA made plans to re-study the coins for their own database registry, as is customary practice. However, by mid-2021, partly because of the coronavirus-pandemic, the coins had not been re-evaluated yet. Thus, the information on the coins found in this database are Wyssmann's interpretations.

The Horvat Kur Deposit 1 group contains 839 coins: 43 from L7024, 1 from L7033, 199 from L7051, 62 from L7079, 25 from L7081, 20 from L7090, 10 from L7098, 172 from L7105, 5 from L7109, 3 from L7136, 1 from L7144, 7 from L7149, 6 from L7150, 261 from L7156, 7 from L7157, (0 from L7170), 5 from L7211, and 12 from L7353. The coins range from 209 CE (Septimius Severus) to 527-565 CE (Justinian I), although only 361 coins could be dated (or 43% of the total).<sup>903</sup> The largest concentration dates to the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, or the early Byzantine period (308 out of the 361 coins): Of the 195 of which an emperor could be established, 60 can be attributed to Arcadius (31%), 54 to Theodosius I (28%), and 22 to Honorius (11%). Notable are the high concentration of SALVS REIPVBLICAE coins. Most coins were minted in Antioch or Constantinople, but 1 coin was minted in Caesarea (Diadumenian, 217-218 CE)<sup>904</sup>, 1 in Heraclea (Gratian, 383 CE), 1 in Lugdunum (Valentinian II, 375-383 CE), and 7 in Rome (including one of Flavius Victor, 388-397 CE, the only coin of this western emperor found in a synagogue deposit). Among the deposit were also 5 blank flans, 11 possible barbaric imitations, and one possible Vandalic coin. One coin showed a countermark: the only

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<sup>901</sup> Zangenberg 2013a; Zangenberg *et al.* 2013. Ahipaz and Leibner incorrectly state that many coins were covered in plaster, attesting to the theory that they came from the plaster foundation of the hall mosaic (Ahipaz and Leibner 2021, p. 221). This is not accurate: they were mixed with the plaster from the mosaic, but were not coated with it, giving no evidence that they were originally *embedded* in the mosaic floor.

<sup>902</sup> To make the magical building material? This would also explain the Justinian I coin, which is dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century and could thus not have come from under the mosaic floor.

<sup>903</sup> Wyssmann dates the deposit starting in 203 CE, but this is based on a Geta coin found in L7125: a locus in the fieldstone layer just above bedrock and thus below our "tesserae layer" (Wyssmann 2013, p. 60).

<sup>904</sup> The only other coin of Diadumenian from a synagogue deposit was found at 'En Gedi.

dupondius in the deposit. As for denominations, of the 212 coins that could be identified, there were 194 nummi (*minimi*), three folles, two 40 nummi, two Antoniniani (one of Claudius II Gothicus and one of Probus), a denarius (of Septimius Severus), and a dupondius. The latest coin in the group, the 40 nummi coin of Justinian I (527-565 CE), was pierced with a hole.<sup>905</sup>

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<sup>905</sup> Earlier, preliminary reports state that two Justinian coins were found in the portico (Zangenberg *et al.* 2013), but only one could be found in the final report provided to me by Patrick Wyssmann.

Inv. No.	Inv. Date	Alarzeno	Arzach	Aquila	Caesarae	Constantinople	Cyprus	Hadriacis	Minting Place	Iconoclastia	Roma	Siscia	Thessalonica	Unknown	Total
									Lugdunum						
7024	Null					1								14	15
	345													1	1
	383		1				1							2	4
	392	1	2									1		2	4
	395						1							2	3
	408						1							11	12
	423						1							1	1
	450													2	2
	455													1	1
7029	408													1	1
7051	Null													111	111
	375													1	1
	383		2								1			11	14
	388		1											1	2
	392		1				1							6	9
	395	1	5			1	1							12	20
	403						1							2	1
	408		2			1	3							17	23
	421													1	1
	422													2	2
	423													1	1
	450													13	13
	455													1	1
7076	Null													35	35
	278											1			1
	317								1						1
	367											1			1
	383		1											1	2
	388													1	1
	392					1								1	2
	395						2							7	9
	408	1												2	8
	450													7	2
7091	Null													11	11
	383						1							1	2
	392	1				1								1	2
	395					1	1							1	3
	403													1	1
	406		1											3	1
	408													2	3
	450													2	2
7096	Null													11	11
	383													1	1
	395						1							1	2
	408						1				1			1	3
	450													2	2
	457													1	1
7098	Null													6	6
	408													2	2
	455													1	1
	565		1											1	1
7105	Null		1											110	111
	324													1	1
	375						2	1						1	1
	383													3	6
	386													1	1
	387						1							1	1
	388											1		1	1
	392		1											8	9
	395					2	1							5	9
	402													1	1
	408	1	1	1								1		21	25
	450													1	1
	455													4	4
	457													1	1
	476													1	1
7109	Null													2	2
	209													1	1
	387										1			1	1
	408													1	1
7116	383	1												1	1
	392													1	1
	408													1	1
7144	Null													1	1
7149	Null													4	4
	375													1	1
	402		1											1	1
	408	1												1	1
7150	Null													2	2
	395													1	1
	408													2	3
7156	Null		1			1	2				1			150	155
	218				1										1
	270										1				1
	341												1		1
	361	1												1	1
	367		1											1	1
	383	1	2				2							5	5
	388												1		1
	392	1	2											12	15
	395		2				1							2	5
	400													1	1
	401													1	1
	402		2											3	5
	406													1	1
	408	1	6			2	2			2				47	60
	422													1	1
	423													1	1
	450													2	2
	457													2	2
	518					1								1	1
7157	Null													4	4
	383										1				1
	392		1											1	1
	408													1	1
7711	Null													4	4
	392													1	1
7809	Null			1										5	6
	392												1		1
	395													1	1
	408													3	3
	450													1	1
Grand Total		11	36.2	1.1	1	11.2	24.2	1	1	1	6.1	2	5	261.470	361.478

**FIGURE 37. HORVAT KUR, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM THE "COIN LAYER" AND "TESSERAE LAYER" IN THE THE PORTICO OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT KUR. ALL 839 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## **Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 2012

**Deposit Location:** Inside the *bemah*

**Archaeological Information:** In the upper floor level of the *bemah* (L7278) and its cobblestone foundation (L7604 and L7605) and inside two pits in the floor of the *bemah*: L7247, and L7259 and L7555.

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IA2

**Deposit Description:** The *bemah* seems to have gone through several phases of construction, but as a whole it is a square, limestone installation demarcated by W7134 on the south, W7112 on the west, W7226 on the north, and a monumental threshold stone 7200 and wall W7138 on the east, forming a square room of circa 3.5 meters on each side.<sup>906</sup> Within this enclosure was a matrix of firmly packed, light brown soil with many cobbles and bigger stones, chunks of plaster, and some architectural fragments. The space inside the *bemah* was made smaller through the placement of worked, basalt stones against the inner walls at different levels. The excavators suggest they functioned as benches or shelves inside the space as they only rise around 21 cm above the upper floor level of the *bemah*. Remains of at least two floor levels were discovered: L7278 was a neatly constructed upper floor made of rectangular basalt and limestone pavers. Between these pavers two coins were discovered. The cobblestone foundation of this floor contained another 7 coins (L7604 and L7605). The pavement floor was broken in two places. In the southwestern corner the pavement was missing and excavation revealed a firmly packed, reddish brown clay layer, L7247, containing Roman and Byzantine pottery, four coins, and a bronze oil lamp of the Roman period. In the northeast corner, the missing paver revealed another pit containing layers L7259, L7289, and L7555, which contained 27, 0, and 5 bronze coins respectively. Underneath the cobblestone foundation layer, remains of another, lower floor were discovered: another surface of neatly worked pavers (L7305) covering a smaller surface area than the upper floor level.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The *bemah* of Horvat Kur contained 45 bronze coins, ranging from 351-361 CE (a FEL TEMP REPARATIO coin) to 476-491 CE (Zeno). Very few coins could be fully identified, with only two coins attributed to Arcadius, two to Valentinian II, one to

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<sup>906</sup> Unpublished reports based on interpretations by Ulla Tervahauta. Data provided by project architect Annalize Rheeder.

Zeno, one to Marcian, and one to Theodosius I. However, those that can be identified show similarities to the coins found in the portico area. In this group, one coin was minted in Alexandria and one in Constantinople. The deposit might have also contained one prutah, one Persian coin, and one imitation coin.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place			Total
		Alexandria	Constantinop..	Unknown	
7247	Null			4	4
7259	Null			20	20
	392			1	1
	395			1	1
	408			3	3
	423			2	2
7278	450			1	1
	491			1	1
7555	Null			1	1
	361			1	1
	450			1	1
	455			1	1
	457			1	1
7604	450			2	2
7605	Null			2	2
	383	1			1
	395		1		1
	408			1	1
Grand Total		1	1	16 27	18 27

**Date Certainty**  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 38. HORVAT KUR, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND INSIDE THE BEMAH OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT KUR. ALL 45 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**Deposit 3:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 2012-2013

**Deposit Location:** Under and around stone blocks that make up a stylobate bench

**Archaeological Information:** The coins were found in the destruction debris around the eastern stylobate bench (L7237, L7246, and L7403), under the decorated basalt “Horvat Kur table”-stone of the eastern stylobate bench (L7317), and south of the Horvat Kur table, underneath another stone of the stylobate bench and just next to a lead vessel, L7422.

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No



**Deposit Type:** IIB5

**Deposit Description:** In 2012, square AE 29 was opened to expose the northeast end of the synagogue. It was dug from top soil down to the plaster floor and contained destruction fill, packed with stones of all sizes, plaster chunks, and Middle Roman to Byzantine pottery. In this matrix, three well-preserved Byzantine gold coins were discovered, dating to Justin II and Tiberius II (in L7237 and L7246). On the east side of this square AE 29, a north-south stylobate bench was discovered, consisting of large, rectangular blocks (W7290). One of the stones of the bench was clearly in secondary use, as it was decorated on all four sides, of which two were hidden when placed in the line of the wall. The stone has four feet and a worked top side and was dubbed the “Horvat Kur stone table.”<sup>907</sup> In 2013, the stone was lifted, exposing two layers of plaster below it.<sup>908</sup> The table rested on the lower plaster floor, and a later plaster floor sloped up to it, partly covering its feet. Two gold coins, one of Justin II and one of Tiberius II, were found between the lower plaster layer and the basalt table (Locus 7317). Another gold coin was excavated to the east of the table during that season, in L7403, and probably belonged to the same deposit.<sup>909</sup> The stone to the south of the table (which was also decorated) was lifted and revealed a lead vessel without a lid, and next to it the last two gold coins of Justin II and Marcus Tiberius (Locus 7422). All these coins probably belonged to the same deposit, hidden under the secondary eastern stylobate bench.<sup>910</sup>

**Container Present?** Yes: lead vessel without lid

**Description of Coins:** All eight coins were minted in Constantinople: two solidi of Justin II dated 565-578 CE and three dated 567-578 CE, one solidus of Maurice (Tiberius) dated 586-584 CE, and two tremisses of Tiberius II Constantine dated to 578 CE and later. Two of the later coins of Justin II are identical and were minted in the same officina (Θ), and so are the two coins of Tiberius II Constantine. One tremissis shows cut marks on both sides. The coins are significantly younger than the coins found both in the portico and the *bemah* of the synagogue, contributing to the idea that this bench, and the “Horvat Kur stone” were installed later.

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<sup>907</sup> For more information on this stone, see Zangenberg 2016a; Aviam 2016; Zangenberg 2019b.

<sup>908</sup> Zangenberg *et al.* 2016.

<sup>909</sup> This coin was not stuck in the plaster but was just lying there. Might these scattered coins be evidence of stone robbers in the early Islamic (based on an early Islamic coin found in the vicinity) or Mediaeval period (based on scattered pieces of Crusader glazed pottery in the vicinity), removing a gold deposit but forgetting some? Are these the only remains of what used to be a much larger deposit?

<sup>910</sup> Zangenberg *et al.* 2013, p. 11.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Constantinop..	Total
7237	578	1	1
7246	Null	1	1
	578	1	1
7317	Null	1	1
	578	1	1
7403	578	1	1
7422	578	1	1
	584	1	1
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Certain			

**FIGURE 39. HORVAT KUR, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FOUND UNDER AND AROUND STONE BLOCKS THAT MAKE UP A STYLOBATE WALL OR SECONDARY BENCH AT THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT KUR. ALL 8 COINS ARE GOLD.**

#### 4. Beth She'an Valley

##### P. Beth Alpha

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/beth-alpha/>

**Longitude:** 32.51903281284762 **Latitude:** 35.427072644233704

**Bibliography:** Sukenik E.L. 1932, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*; Sukenik E.L. 1934, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, London: The Oxford University Press, pp. 31–35; Sukenik E.L. 1951, “A New Discovery at Beth Alpha,” in: *Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund*, Bulletin II, p. 26; Kadman L. 1967, “The Monetary Development of Palestine in the Light of Coin Hoards,” in: Kindler A. (ed.), *The Patterns of Monetary Development in Phoenicia and Palestine in Antiquity*, pp. 311–324; Avigad N. 1971, “Beth Alpha,” in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 4, pp. 192–192; Chiat M. 1980, “Synagogues and Churches in Byzantine Beit She’an” in: *JJA*, Vol 7, pp. 6–24; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 121–127; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 173–175 (Hebrew); Avigad N. 1993, “Bar’am,” in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 190–192; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 314–316; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 154–158; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 186–188, 191, 540

**Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/beth-alpha/>
- Jewish Virtual Library:  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/beit-alpha>
- Bible Walks:  
<https://biblewalks.com/sites/BeitAlpha.html>

**Date Excavated:** Jan 10-Feb 27, 1929

**Excavators:** Eleazar Lipa Sukenik

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Date of Construction of the Building:** 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>911</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** Synagogue on a narrow street surrounded by dwellings.<sup>912</sup>

**Description of the Building:** This synagogue is a basilica with two rows of five columns. It has an elaborately decorated mosaic floor with a zodiac cycle and Aramaic and Greek inscriptions. In the southwest wall is an apse with three steps leading up to a raised platform, extending 2.3 m into the main hall. Post holes on the platform might indicate a Torah shrine, rods for a curtain, or a chancel screen. In the southeast corner of the nave are two raised platforms. There are single benches around all four walls of the structure. Three doors in the north wall lead to the aisles and nave, while a single door in the west wall leads down three steps into a side room. On the north side of the building is a narthex with a large courtyard in front. Remains of roof tiles indicate that the building had a tiled roof construction.

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<sup>911</sup> Sukenik writes in 1951: "Although the inscription found on the Beth Alpha mosaic speaks of work carried out in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, it does not refer to the synagogue itself but only to the laying down of the mosaic pavement. From the pottery fragments found beneath the layer of mortar covering the walls, we concluded at the outset of the excavation that the building dated from about 5<sup>th</sup> century, and this opinion was confirmed by the discovery of the coins in the platform of the apse. According to Regling it can be definitely concluded that the synagogue existed before the reform introduced by Anastasius I in the coinage system (498), which completely withdrew earlier coins from circulation" (Sukenik 1951, p. 26). However, we now know that the reform of Anastasius I did not cause the immediate withdrawal of earlier coins, but that coins from the 4-5<sup>th</sup> centuries and earlier continued to circulate for centuries. A construction date based on the coin deposit is problematic as the coins were not found in the foundation or under the floor but in an easily accessible hiding space. Instead, the coins are an indication of the synagogue's period of use. A better indicator might be the remains of patches of mosaic floor found under the richly decorated 6<sup>th</sup> century mosaic floor. Since this synagogue was excavated early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, no standard, high-detailed excavation report was ever published.

<sup>912</sup> The site was discovered in 1847 by a former Prussian consul. It was visited by travelers until Kibbutz Hefzibah was founded next to the site in 1922 (Sukenik 1932, pp. 9-10).

## 1. Deposit 1:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1929

**Deposit Location:** In a hole in the apse floor

**Archaeological Information:**

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA2

**Deposit Description:** 36 Byzantine coins were found in a hole dug into the apse floor, covered with stone slabs, of which one was still in place.<sup>913</sup> The apse floor was raised above the nave and had three steps leading up to it. The cavity in the floor was about 80 cm deep, 1 meter long, and 80 cm wide, rounded on the south side. Its interior was plastered to prevent small items from falling through.<sup>914</sup> The coins were mixed with earth. Only seven survived in good condition.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The coin deposit at Beth Alpha was discovered in 1929 and was never published. The final excavation report mentions that 36 bronze coins were found, of which seven were identifiable. The full description reads: "The earliest was a coin of Constantine the Great (306-337) bearing, on the obverse, the head of the emperor as divus, covered with a veil; and, on the reverse, a chariot harnessed to four horses. It was impossible to decipher the inscription. A second coin, not so well preserved as the first, was attributable to the time either of Constantine or of his sons. A third coin was attributable to Theodosius I (379-395) or Honorius (395-423). Two of the coins belong to the reign of Valentinianus II (383-392) or Valentinianus III (425-455). Two other coins, one preserving the obverse and the other the reverse, belong to the time of Justinus I (518-527). On the first is stamped a

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<sup>913</sup> Sukenik 1932, p.13, p. 48. In the IAA Archives of the British Mandate (The scientific Archive 1919-1948) is a letter written in 1929 by an Assistant Inspector of the Department of Antiquities in Jerusalem, who visited the Beth Alpha synagogue during excavations. On the second to last page, he writes "No objects were discovered except 32 coins picked up from a cavity at the platform of the apse." ([http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder\\_id=19211&type\\_id=&id=102064](http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder_id=19211&type_id=&id=102064)). Sukenik, however, submitted a final report to the Department of Antiquities on March 17 of 1929: "On the spot where the Torah-Shrine stood there was a small receptacle built into the floor, which apparently served as the treasure-box of the Synagogue; 36 Byzantine coins were still there. More details will be known once the coins are cleaned" ([http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder\\_id=19211&type\\_id=&id=102070](http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/zoom/zoom.aspx?folder_id=19211&type_id=&id=102070)).

<sup>914</sup> Sukenik 1932, p. 13 writes: "It is probable that this cavity serves as a treasury of the synagogue, and that these coins, in course of time, dropped down to the floor of the cavity." It is unclear where he believes the original place of the coins was: higher up in the cavity?

half-length representation of the emperor, turned to the right, wearing diadem, paludamentum and cuirass. Of the inscription there survive only the letters IVSTI on the left of the coin. On the second, the value of the coin is indicated by the letter M i.e. 40 nummi. A cross stands above the M and a star to the right. The form of a star on the left is defaced. The mint is indicated by the letters NIKM, i.e. Nicomedia. The letter B between the limbs of the M signifies the second officina at Nicomedia. All other coins, according to Regling, belong to the period preceding the reform in coinage introduced by Anastasius I.” Besides this, no further information on the content of the deposit can be found: the coins are not at the IAA or at the Hebrew University, and nobody knows where they ended up. All we can say that the bronze coins range in date from 306 to 527 CE, and that at least one was minted in Nicomedia.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place		Total
		Nicomedia	Unknown	
Null	Null		1	1
	337		1	1
	423		1	1
	455		2	2
	498		29	29
	527	1	1	2
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>				
■ Uncertain				

FIGURE 40. BETH ALPHA, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FROM INSIDE THE APSE OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF BETH ALPHA. ALL 36 COINS ARE BRONZE.

## Q. Ma'oz Hayyim

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/maoz-hayyim/>

Longitude: 32.4937460112101 Latitude: 35.546650886535645

**Bibliography:** Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 136–138; Tzaferis V. 1982a, “The Ancient Synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim,” in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 32, pp. 215–244; Tzaferis V. 1982b, “The Synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim,” in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 86–89; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 171–172 (Hebrew); Tzaferis

V. 1993, "Ma'oz Hayyim," in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 946–948; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 426–431; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 272–276; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 177, 181, 187, 188, 191, 548, 562

**Websites:**

-The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/maoz-hayyim/>

**Date Excavated:** 1974-1977

**Excavators:** Vassilios Tzaferis

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: late 3<sup>rd</sup>-early 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>915</sup>  
Phase II: end of the 4<sup>th</sup> – beginning 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>916</sup>  
Phase III: 6<sup>th</sup> century

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** Unknown<sup>917</sup>

**Description of the Building:**

Phase I (=Building A): This was an almost square hall with two rows of four columns. By the south wall was a raised, rectangular stone platform. The floor was covered with limestone slabs. The location of the entrance to the building is unknown, but it might have been in the east wall based on the entrances in the later phases.<sup>918</sup>

Phase II (= Building B): The width of the hall remained the same, but the building was lengthened by 4 meters on the north side. There were now two rows of five columns. An apse

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<sup>915</sup> The basis for this date is unclear, as Vassilios Tzaferis states that there is "no ceramic or numismatic evidence that date it [the synagogue] precisely" (Tzaferis 1982a, p. 243).

<sup>916</sup> This date is based on the artistic style of the mosaics of Building B, which Tzaferis places sometime between the introduction of the "rainbow style" at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the "single element filling an entire area-style" at the beginning of the sixth century (Tzaferis 1982a, pp. 226-227). Of course, we have since long stepped away from dating synagogues based on art-historical styles. Unfortunately, Tzaferis notes that the fill layers in between the floor levels were sterile, so we cannot date the floors based on pottery or coin evidence. He eventually dates the buildings B and C based on ceramic materials found just outside the building.

<sup>917</sup> Fragments of a mosaic floor were discovered at Kibbutz Ma'oz Hayyim during the construction of security fences in February of 1974, and three seasons of excavations followed. The synagogue was located west of the kibbutz, on a low hill called "the hill of the dwarfs" (Tzaferis 1982a, p. 215). Since no ancient village was ever excavated, however, it is unclear what the relationship was between the synagogue and the town.

<sup>918</sup> Tzaferis 1982a, p. 218.

was added in the south wall, with a marble chancel screen in front of it.<sup>919</sup> The floor was covered with mosaics up to the walls, leaving no space for benches. There were two entrances in the east wall. A courtyard surrounded the building on the east and north sides.

Phase III (=Building C): A new mosaic floor was laid about 30 cm above the old floor. The east, west, and north walls probably had benches as the mosaics stop about 60 cm in front of these walls. A 10 cm high stone platform extended from the apse into the nave up to the first columns. No pavement was found inside the apse, but in its rear part was an installation built of stones and plaster with a tiled floor; perhaps a *genizah*.

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1974-1977

**Deposit Location:** Just outside the south wall, close to the apse

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** No<sup>920</sup>

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA5

**Deposit Description:** A deposit of about 50 coins was found, carefully wrapped in cloth and with a broken roof-tile on top of it, near the apse on the outside of the south wall.<sup>921</sup>

**Container Present?** Yes: cloth

**Description of Coins:** The excavations of the synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim never received a final publication and the preliminary reports are scarce and limited in their analysis of the building and its artifacts. A full catalogue of the coins found at the site, including the deposit, was never published. A group of 48 coins from this site is in storage at the IAA and is presumably the coin deposit.<sup>922</sup> They form a very limited typology group, all attributed to

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<sup>919</sup> Tzaferis believes that the chancel screen was already in place in the earliest stage of the synagogue. However, Joan Branham believes the chancel screen in this building was only put there in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Branham 1992, pp. 384-385)

<sup>920</sup> Because of this reason, this deposit might not be connected to synagogue activities at all, and should possibly be dropped from future synagogue coin deposit lists (see chapter 4.5.2).

<sup>921</sup> Tzaferis 1982b, pp. 88-89.

<sup>922</sup> Personal communication Donald Ariel: "This kind of discrepancy [between 48 and 50 coins] can exist because the IAA only has the data on the identified coins, and in those years [the 1970s] the unidentified material might have been ignored. So, it may very much have been that the deposit was fifty coins and that there were two unidentified coins that were not noted, and maybe even displaced. Today, of course, we do track those

emperors between Anastasius I (498-518 CE) and Maurice Tiberius (582-602 CE), giving a range of only one century. 34 coins are 40 nummi, eleven are 20 nummi, one is a 16 nummi, one a decannumium, and one unknown. All coins were minted in eastern mints.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place					Total	
		Antioch	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Thessalonica		Unknown
Null	Null						1	1
	512						1	1
	518		3					3
	527		8					8
	533		1					1
	538		2					2
	539	1						1
	544		1					1
	562					1		1
	565						1	1
	569				1			1
	571			1		1		2
	574		1					1
	578		1				1	2
	580					1		1
	581		1					1
	582	2	1		2			5
	585	1						1
	589	1						1
	590	1						1
	596		1					1
	602		13				23	36
	696						2	2
Grand Total		6	19 5	1	3	3	5 6	37 11
Date Certainty								
■ Certain								
■ Uncertain								

**FIGURE 41. MA'OZ HAYYIM, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND OUTSIDE THE SYNAGOGUE OF MA'OZ HAYYIM, CLOSE TO THE APSE. ALL 48 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1974-1977

**Deposit Location:** In the apse of the synagogue

**Archaeological Information:** Building C

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unidentified coins, but even between thirty and forty years ago, in the transmission of the 1970s coins to the IAA, then to me in 1989, I can no longer be certain of how many unidentifiable coins there were.”



**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA2

**Deposit Description:** The area of the *bemah*, including the apse, was raised ten centimeters above the floor of the hall and paved with stone slabs.<sup>923</sup> Beneath this floor, a post and fragments of marble slabs were found: indications that this area was set off with a chancel screen. Behind the *bemah*, near the inner wall of the apse, a rectangular installation was found, built of stones and plaster and sunk into the floor. This “chamber” contained several ceramic lamps, fragments of a glass lamp, and coins. The installation was paved with two roof-tiles in secondary use.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** No catalogue was ever published on the coins found at Ma’oz Hayyim and the preliminary publications do not mention how many coins were found in the apse, nor what its locus number(s) or basket numbers are, so more information on these coins could not be found at the IAA. The coins were presumably bronze (gold coins would have been explicitly mentioned), but unfortunately this is all the information we have on these coins.<sup>924</sup>

## **R. Rehov (Rehov, H. Parwa)**

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/rehov/>

**Longitude:** 32.46212241907585 **Latitude:** 35.49274921417236

**Bibliography:** Paltiel A. 1969, “A Hoard of Byzantine Gold Coins from the Town of Rehov,” in: *Israel Numismatic Bulletin*, Vol. 3, pp. 101–106 (Hebrew); Vitto F. 1974, “Ancient Synagogue at Rehov,” in: *Atiqot*, vol. 7, pp. 17–18 (English summary), 100–104 (Hebrew); Vitto F. 1975, “The Synagogue of Rehov,” in: *Qadmoniyot*, Vol. 8, pp. 119–123 (Hebrew); Vitto F. 1980, “The Synagogue of Rehov, 1980,” in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 3–4, pp. 214–217; Vitto F. 1981, “A Byzantine Synagogue in the Beth She'an Valley,” in: *Temples and High places in Biblical Times*, pp. 164–167; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 138–144; Sussman J. 1982, “The Inscription in the Synagogue at Rehov,” in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 146–153; Vitto F. 1982, “The Synagogue at Rehov,” in: *Ancient Synagogues*

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<sup>923</sup> Tzaferis 1982a, p. 222; Tzaferis 1982b, p. 86. Although Tzaferis calls the podium in front of the apse a *bemah*, no evidence was found to determine whether this was a *bemah* or a Torah shrine, or both.

<sup>924</sup> Vassilios Tzaferis passed away in 2015 and it is unlikely that more information on these coins will ever be known.

*Revealed*, pp. 90–94; Chen D. 1986a, “The Design of the Ancient Synagogues in Galilee, III,” in: *Liber Annuus*, Vol. 36, pp. 235–240; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 186–189 (Hebrew); Vitto F. 1993, “Rehob,” in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 1272–1274; Dauphin C. 1998, *La Palestine Byzantine*, Vol. 3, pp. 785–786; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 456–461; Bijovsky G. 2012, “A Byzantine Gold Hoard from Rehob (H. Parwa),” in: *Israel Numismatic Research*, Vol. 7, pp. 147–158; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 297–301; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 177, 181–182, 213, 249, 520–521, 552; Vitto F. 2015, “Wall Paintings in the Synagogue of Rehov: An Account of Their Discovery,” in: *The Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology*, Vol. 7, pp. 1–12

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/rehob/>

**Date Excavated:** 1974-1980

**Excavators:** Fanny Vitto

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: beginning 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>925</sup>  
Phase II: end 4<sup>th</sup> century- beginning 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>926</sup>  
Phase III: 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>927</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** Building set off from surrounding dwellings by a street.<sup>928</sup>

#### **Description of the Building:**

Phase I: This was a basilica with two rows of five columns. There were three doors in the north wall and one door in the east wall. There was a mosaic floor of which only portions of the borders in the aisles have been preserved.

Phase II: A *bemah* was added by the south wall with steps on the western and eastern sides. The floor was covered with mosaics of high quality showing geometrical designs and the columns were decorated with Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions.

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<sup>925</sup> Based on “architectural fragments together with coins and ceramic finds” (Vitto 1980, p. 215) However, no final report on this excavation has been published to verify these dates.

<sup>926</sup> Based on “style of the mosaic pavement, the coins and the pottery” (Vitto 1980, p. 215).

<sup>927</sup> Based on pottery sherds found below the mosaic inscription of the third phase of the building (Vitto 1980, p. 217).

<sup>928</sup> The synagogue was discovered in 1969, when during agricultural land preparations various architectural fragments of the building, including pieces of a marble chancel screen, came to light (Vitto 1982, p. 90).

Phase III: Many renovations and modifications were carried out in the building until it was destroyed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. A narthex was added to the northern side of the building with a mosaic floor and inscriptions. The *bemah* was widened, the side steps were filled in, and two sets of steps were added to the northern side. The *bemah* probably had a chancel screen in front of it. The mosaic floor underwent considerable repairs. Benches were built over the previous mosaic floor against the east and west walls. The entrances to the building remained the same.

**1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1968

**Deposit Location:** Surface find

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** No

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA4

**Deposit Description:** A local kibbutz member found 28 Byzantine gold coins in a clay box during preparation for cultivation of a plot of land on which the Arab village of Farwana had stood until 1948.<sup>929</sup> Together with the coins were fragments of a chancel screen with a depiction of a seven-branched menorah. The deposit was found a few meters south of the south wall of the synagogue.

**Container Present?** Yes: clay box

**Description of Coins:** The gold coins found in a box at Rehob were first analyzed in 1969 by Abraham Paltiel. He identified 16 coins of Heraclius I, 7 coins of Constans II, 3 coins of Constantine IV, and one coin of Justinian II, for a total of 27 coins.<sup>930</sup> He dated all the coins between 630 and 685 CE. However, the coins were re-analyzed by Gabriela Bijovsky in 2012, who provided a more up-to-date interpretation. At the moment, 10 coins are registered at the IAA, while the rest remain in the possession of the member of Kibbutz 'En ha-Naziv who found the deposit. According to Bijovsky, all the coins are gold solidi struck by emperors of the 7<sup>th</sup> century: 14 coins of Heraclius I, 9 of Constans II, 4 of Constantine IV, and one of Justinian II, for a total of 28 coins ranging from 613/616 CE to 686/687 CE. Coins of Justinian II are a rare find in Palestine: this is the only synagogue deposit that contains a coin from

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<sup>929</sup> In her 1982 report, Vitto mentions 27 coins, and 27 were also analyzed by Paltiel in 1969. However, Bijovsky analyzes 28 coins from Rehob in her 2012 publication: coin No. 5 in her catalogue does not appear in Paltiel's catalogue. It is unclear where this coin came from (perhaps two coins were stuck together?).

<sup>930</sup> Paltiel 1969, pp. 104-105.

this emperor. All the coins were minted in Constantinople and are common types, although one of the solidi of Constans II is a light-weight solidus of 23 siliquae, weighing 4.17 grams (instead of 4.30 grams for a normal solidus).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Constantinople	Total
Null	616	3	3
	629	1	1
	631	1	1
	635	1	1
	636	1	1
	638	2	2
	639	3	3
	641	2	2
	647	2	2
	651	1	1
	654	3	3
	659	1	1
	663	2	2
	673	1	1
	681	1	1
	685	2	2
	687	1	1
Grand Total		20 8	20 8
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Certain			
■ Uncertain			

**FIGURE 42. REHOB, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND INSIDE A BOX, A FEW METERS AWAY FROM THE SYNAGOGUE OF REHOB. ALL 28 COINS ARE GOLD.**

**2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1974

**Deposit Location:** Under the rubble of a collapsed wall west of the Torah shrine

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Unknown

**Deposit Retrievable?** Unknown

**Deposit Type:** II?5

**Deposit Description:** 14 Arab-Byzantine copper coins, apparently wrapped in cloth, were found beneath the rubble of a collapsed wall separating the western aisle from a small room west of the *bimah*.<sup>931</sup>

**Container Present?** Yes: cloth

**Description of Coins:** The 14 Arab-Byzantine bronze coins found during the excavation of the synagogue at Rehob in the 1970s have not been published yet. In her 2012 article on the gold coin deposit, Bijovsky writes that they will be published by Nitzan Amitai-Preiss as part of the final report, but this has not appeared yet.<sup>932</sup> The only information we have on these coins is that there are one “Arab-Byzantine 1” series coin (circa 647-670 CE) and 13 “Arab-Byzantine 2” series coins (circa 670-690 CE), divided into the following groups: two coins from Damascus, one “Lazy S” type, five Pseudo-Damascus coins, and five *al-wafā lillāh* coins. These dates correspond to the Deposit 1 dates, making the deposits contemporaneous: they represent two different currencies in circulation during the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century: imperial Byzantine gold coinage and provincial bronze coinage.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place		
		Damascus	Unknown	Total
Null	670		1	1
	690	2	11	13
<b>Grand Total</b>		2	12	14
<b>Date Certainty</b>				
■ Uncertain				

**FIGURE 43. REHOB, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND BENEATH THE RUBBLE OF A COLLAPSES WALL OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF REHOB. ALL 14 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

<sup>931</sup> Bijovsky 2012, p. 148. Vitto refers to this hoard as the “money-pouch” in her publications.

<sup>932</sup> Bijovsky 2012, p. 148, footnote 2. In the fall of 2019, I reached out to Amitai-Preiss as well as to Fanny Vitto, the director of the excavations at Rehob, to ask about the progress on the analysis of these coins and if I could use the unpublished analysis for this project. They responded that I was allowed to look at the bronze coins and analyze them myself, on condition that this would only be for an internal thesis and not for publication, including not online. Since this dissertation will be available online, however, and after consultation with Donald Ariel of the IAA, I decided not to include the unpublished information on these coins in my database. The information that I do provide here can be found in Bijovsky 2012.

## 5. The Coastal Plain

### S. Caesarea

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/caesarea/>

**Longitude:** 32.50683478117231 **Latitude:** 34.89414989948273

**Bibliography:** Sukenik E.L. 1951, "More about the ancient Synagogue of Caesarea," in: *Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund*, Bulletin II, pp. 28–30; Avi-Yonah M. 1960, "The Synagogue of Caesarea (Preliminary report)," in: *Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund*, Bulletin III, pp. 44–48; No Author, 1962, "A Hoard of 3,700 Late–Roman Coins from Caesarea," in *Israel numismatic Bulletin*, Vols. 3–4, p. 106; Avi-Yonah M. 1963, "Notes and News — Caesarea," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 13, pp. 146–148; Kadman L. 1967, "The Monetary Development of Palestine in the Light of Coin Hoards," in: Kindler A. (ed.), *The Patterns of Monetary Development in Phoenicia and Palestine in Antiquity*, pp. 311–324; Avi-Yonah M. and Negev A. 1975, "Caesarea," in: *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*; Levine L. 1975, *Caesarea under Roman Rule*; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 153–158; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 236–237 (Hebrew); Avi-Yonah M. 1993 "Caesarea," in: NEAEHL, pp. 278–279; Dauphin C. 1998, *La Palestine Byzantine*, Vol. 3, p. 744–747; Bijovsky G. 2007, "Numismatic Evidence for the Gallus Revolt: The Hoard from Lod," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 187–203; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 332–334; Govaars M. Spiro M, and white L.M. 2009, *the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima Excavations Report: Field O*; Magness J. 2010, "Field O: The "Synagogue" Site. Book Review," in: *American Journal of Archaeology* (online); Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 171–173; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 121–122, 541, 562; Raphael K. and Bijovsky G. 2014, "The Coin Hoard from Caesarea Maritima and the 363 CE Earthquake," in: *Israel Numismatic Research*, Vol. 9, pp. 173–192

#### **Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/caesarea/>

- Bijovsky Catalogue FH hoard final:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxuqy-fB\\_vKrNE5fVHh2Y3hoc0U/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxuqy-fB_vKrNE5fVHh2Y3hoc0U/view)

- Bible Walks:

<https://biblewalks.com/Sites/Caesarea.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1. 1956, 1962  
2. 1982, 1984

**Excavators:** 1. Michael Avi-Yonah  
2. The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima (JECM) under direction of Robert J. Bull

**Archaeological Information:** Field O, Area A

**Date of Construction of the Building:** 4<sup>th</sup> century?

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** Located inside the northern gate of the city.<sup>933</sup>

**Description of the Building:** Very little is known about the layout of the building, but a final report on the different excavations and surveys done at the synagogue site in Caesarea was published in 2009 by Govaars, Spiro, and White. The authors try to give an accurate overview of the different phases of the building, distinguishing at least four phases to the building: first the structure of Stratum I-III, second, Stratum IV, third, Stratum V, and fourth, a new Stratum VI or a later Phase of Stratum V. In the first three strata the structure was a square building with a cistern. In Stratum IV, which is dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>934</sup> the structure apparently was a large hall measuring 18 by 9 meters, oriented east-west with the entrance on the short eastern side facing the town. However, the only evidence for this orientation is a Greek inscription in the pavement facing that direction. The structure of Stratum V is an entirely new building orientated north-south with a narrow entrance hall and a central hall.<sup>935</sup> The building of Stratum IV had a mosaic floor with geometric designs and Greek inscriptions. There is evidence for a platform inside the building, as well as a chancel screen and posts. There is also evidence of an entry hall and an adjoining triclinium.

Based on this information, it is unclear if this building indeed was a synagogue. There are no *in situ* elements, design or otherwise, associated with a typical synagogue and so its identification has been disputed, including by Jodi Magness.<sup>936</sup>

#### 1. Deposit 1:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1962

**Deposit Location:** In the plastering of a projection which might have contained the Ark, or close to a wall of the building: the context and exact location are unknown.

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<sup>933</sup> Remains of a synagogue at Caesarea were first reported in 1932 and the area was partly cleared in 1945 by J. Ory, who started the first, preliminary excavations at the site in 1947 (Avi-Yonah 1960, p. 44; Avi-Yonah 1993, p. 271, p. 278).

<sup>934</sup> This date is uncertain, as the pottery, glass, coins, or other small finds of the building have never been published. I am providing this date based on the analysis of the building by Govaars, Spiro and White.

<sup>935</sup> Raphael and Bijovsky 2014, p. 177.

<sup>936</sup> Govaars *et al.* 2009, p. 140; Magness 2010.

**Archaeological Information:** Area A, stratum IV<sup>937</sup>

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Unknown

**Deposit Type:** II?4

**Deposit Description:** The exact findspot of this deposit of 3700 bronze coins is unknown. One report by Avi-Yonah states that the coins were found “in the plastering of a projection [of the synagogue] nearer the sea.”<sup>938</sup> However, this building has the sea on both the northern and the western sides. Where was this projection? Another report states that the coins were found “near one of the walls,” but does not give additional information as to the precise location of this wall.<sup>939</sup> Govaars, Spiro, and White point out that the differences in the description of the exact findspot thus heighten the uncertainty over the context of the coin deposit. They did ascertain, based on other descriptions in Avi-Yonah’s reports, that “towards the sea”, probably meant “towards the west” of the building.<sup>940</sup> Pictures taken by E. Jerry Vardaman during the excavations show Avi-Yonah and a measuring stick near the coins. The scattering of coins covers approximately 30 X 30 cm.<sup>941</sup> Based on the time of the day (between 11 am and 1 pm) and the position of the shadow, Govaars, Spiro, and White suspect that Avi-Yonah was facing north at the time the picture was taken, which would locate the deposit on his eastern side, west of a wall. If the projection was on the west side of the building, then this deposit was found outside the building. However, all this is highly speculative; as long as we do not have a plan from 1962, it remains impossible to determine exactly where the deposit was found.

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<sup>937</sup> But according to Govaars, Spiro, and White it is not even certain that the coin hoard can be associated with Stratum IV because of the discrepancies between the written evidence, unknown find spot, and the lack of clear photographic evidence by excavator Avi-Yonah (Govaars *et al.* 2009, p. 80).

<sup>938</sup> Avi-Yonah, 1963, p. 147. He also suggests that the projection might have contained the Ark. If this is true, then the Ark (or Torah shrine) would not have been placed facing Jerusalem, which is situated southeast of Caesarea.

<sup>939</sup> Avi-Yonah and Negev, 1975, p. 278.

<sup>940</sup> Govaars *et al.* 2009, p. 42.

<sup>941</sup> Govaars *et al.* 2009, p. 51 and Fig. 51. I have tried to receive permission to add this picture to this study but was unsuccessful. The rights of all images taken during this excavation campaign lay with the E. Jerry Vardaman Estate (Marylinda Govaars told me they had only received one-time publication permission for the images in their work), which is now affiliated with the Cobb Institute at Mississippi State University. When I reached out to them, they told me that the widow (now remarried) Mrs Alfalene Vardaman still has all the rights, but she is in a frail state and nobody is sure who currently makes decisions on her behalf. Further inquiries in this matter did not receive a reply. The picture, however, can be freely found on the internet (<http://www.mythicistpapers.com/2013/07/01/nazareth-the-caesarea-inscription-and-the-hand-of-god-pt-5/>).



## Container Present? No

**Description of Coins:** According to communications between Ariel and Govaars, Spiro, and White, Yaakov Meshorer was the first to identify and date the 3700 coins, which were, according to him, almost all from the time of Constantius II (latest: 361 CE), but no information was published on this analysis.<sup>942</sup> An unpublished numismatic study was subsequently undertaken by Jean-Michel Gozlan in 1986, who included in his work a descriptive catalogue of coin types.<sup>943</sup> This study is kept at the IAA Coin Department, but is not accessible. Bijovsky used the hoard in her article from 2007 on the possible connection between the Gallus Revolt and coin hoard found at Lod, Israel.<sup>944</sup> She states that the Caesarea deposit has a range between 316 and 361 CE. Only 1172 of the 3700 coins in the hoard were available for this study, and only 429 coins were in a state of preservation that enabled complete identification. Finally, in 2014, Bijovsky published a full catalogue of 1454 of the coins in an online article ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxuqy-fB\\_vKrNE5fVHh2Y3hocOU/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxuqy-fB_vKrNE5fVHh2Y3hocOU/view)), together with a summarizing article.<sup>945</sup> The same number of coins analyzed in her report is described in the IAA Coin Department database. Sometimes, however, there are discrepancies between the online publication and the IAA database in the weights and sizes of the coins. In these cases, the IAA database has been followed. In cases where the dates are different, the online publication has been followed as the dates seem to be more specific.<sup>946</sup> There are other mistakes in the online report, for example, where multiple IAA numbers appear twice or IAA entries are missing: I have tried to resolve those issues as much as I could in this database. Of the approximately 3700 coins found in the Caesarea deposit, circa 2245 were illegible, leaving us with 1454 or 1455 legible coins.<sup>947</sup> The coins range in date from 315 CE to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The bulk of the deposit, however, ranges from 341 to 361 CE, or a span of only 20 years (1332 coins, or 91.5%). Around 59 coins are earlier and include GLORIA EXERCITVS coins, VICTORIAE DD AVGG Q NN coins, VOTA types, She-Wolf with Twins coins, Victory on a Galley coins, and posthumous issues of Constantine I of the

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<sup>942</sup> No Author 1962, p. 106; Govaars *et al.* 2009, p. 42, and footnote 67 on p. 245.

<sup>943</sup> Mentioned in Bijovsky 2007b, p. 195 and 2014, p. 183, referring to an unpublished article in the coin department of the IAA, Jerusalem, written by Gozlan in 1986.

<sup>944</sup> Bijovsky 2007b.

<sup>945</sup> Bijovsky 2014, pp. 183-186.

<sup>946</sup> These decisions were made after deliberations with Gabriela Bijovsky and Donald Ariel.

<sup>947</sup> Bijovsky mentions 1453 analyzed coins in her 2014 article (p. 183), but her online catalogue gives information on 1454 coins. The IAA database has 1455 coins.

quadriga and VN-MR types.<sup>948</sup> Eleven coins are younger and are possibly intrusive: they are common types but appear here in very small quantities, a sign that, according to Bijovsky, they were not originally part of the deposit.<sup>949</sup> All the coins in the deposit can be attributed to the house of Constantine, according to the following break-down: 38 coins of Constantine I, 8 coins of Constantine II, 25 coins of Constans I, 1074 coins of Constantius II, 146 coins of Constantius Gallus, and 61 coins of Julian II. The main coin types are the FEL TEMP REPARATIO types (about 65% of all coins), and the SPES REIPUBLICAE types (about 18.5%). The minting place of 871 coins could be determined: 261 are from Antioch (30%), 202 from Alexandria (23%), 108 from Cyzicus (12%), 104 from Constantinople (12%), 53 from Rome (6%), 44 from Heraclea (5%), 36 from Thessalonica (4%), 35 from Nicomedia (4%), 10 from Siscia (1%), 7 from Aquileia, 5 from Arles, 2 from Sirmium, 2 from Trier, and one from Lugdunum. The two coins from Sirmium are the only coins from this mint found in synagogue deposits; they are both FEL TEMP REPARATIO coins of Constantius II, dated 351-355 CE.<sup>950</sup>

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<sup>948</sup> Bijovsky cites a couple of noteworthy coins within this group: two posthumous issues of Constantine I (one *Aeterna Pietas* type from Lyons and a *lvstvenmem* type from Nicomedia depicting *Aequitas*), a coin of Constantine I from Trier reading *VIRTVS AVGGNN*, and a rare coin Constantine I coin from Antioch with the *Constantinus Avg* reverse type.

<sup>949</sup> Bijovsky 2014, pp. 184-185. If they are intrusive, then the deposit ends around 361 CE.

<sup>950</sup> Although this deposit is not comparable to any ancient synagogue deposit, Bijovsky compares it to a hoard from the village of ancient Qasrin, which has a similar date and make-up of types and minting places (Bijovsky 2014, p. 186).

Locus	End Date	Minting Place																	Total							
		Alexandria	Antioch	Aquileia	Arles	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Heraclea	Lugdunum	Nicomedia	Nicomedia (?)	Rome	Rome (?)	Sirmium	Siscia	Siscia or Alexa.	Thessalonica	Thessalonica (?)		Trier	Unknown					
Null	Null																			2,245	2,245					
315											1										1					
317				1																	1					
330			1																	1	1					
335	2	2	1		1						2									1	6					
337	1	2	8	2		1	1			1							1			1	13					
339							2	1												1	3					
341	1		4			3		2	1	3							1		1	3	19					
346	12		25			4		13		1	9			2		4				20	90					
350	1		1			1		6		1										1	11					
354	133		148	5	4	67	50	34		25	1	33		6	1	16		1		138	662					
355													2								2					
360				1							6										7					
361	50		67			22	40	7		2			1		1		14	1		334	539					
375																				2	2					
383			1																	2	3					
395			1					1												3	5					
400																				44	44					
423																				1	1					
Grand Total	198	4	256	5	7	103	1	106	2	44	1	32	2	1	52	1	1	2	9	1	36	1	2	498	2,331	1,355

**FIGURE 44. CAESAREA, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND IN OR CLOSE TO THE POSSIBLE SYNAGOGUE OF CAESAREA. ALL 3700 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## 6. Carmel Region

### T. Horvat Sumaqa

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/horvat-sumaqa/>

**Longitude:** 32.66999678520021 **Latitude:** 35.03896236419678

**Bibliography:** Hüttenmeister F. and Reeg G. 1977, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, pp. 419–420; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 161–163; Dar S. 1988, “Horvat Sumaqa: Settlement from the Roman and Byzantine Periods in the Carmel,” in: *Bulletin of the Anglo–Israel Archaeological Society*, Vol. 8, pp. 34–48; Dar. S. and Mintzker Y. 1989, “The synagogue of Horvat Sumaqa,” in: *Ancient Synagogues in Israel: Third–Seventh century C.E.* pp. 17–20; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 231–233 (Hebrew); Dar S. 1993, “Horvat Sumaqa,” in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 1412–1415; Dar S. and Mintzker Y. 1995, “The Synagogue of Horvat Sumaqa, 1983–1993,” in: *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Vol. 1, pp. 157–165; Dar S. 1998, *Sumaqa, a Jewish Village on the Carmel* (Hebrew); Dauphin C. 1998, *La Palestine Byzantine*, Vol. 3, pp. 690–691; Dar S. 1999, *Sumaqa: A Roman and Byzantine Village on Mount Carmel, Israel*; Turnheim Y. 1999, “The Design and the Architectural Ornaments of the Synagogue at Horvat Sumaqa,” in: *Sumaqa: A Roman and Byzantine Village on Mount Carmel, Israel*, pp. 233–261; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 402–404; Dar S. 2008, “Horvat Sumaqa,” in: *NEAEHL, Supplemental*

Volume, pp. 2041–2043; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 248–251; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 122–124, 442, 553–554

**Websites:**

-The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/sumaqa/>

**Date Excavated:** 1983-1990

**Excavators:** Shimon Dar

**Archaeological Information:** Area 1, Phase V and IV

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>951</sup>  
Phase II: 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>952</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** At about two-thirds of the way up the south slope of the Sumaqa hill, not noticeable above its surroundings.<sup>953</sup>

**Description of the Building:**

Phase I (=Phase V on the excavation site): A basilica building with two rows of five columns. There were three entrances in the eastern façade wall. The floor was covered in coarse chalk and plaster.

Phase II (=Phase IV on the excavation site): The hall was made smaller by “thickening” the south and north walls. Part of the north entrance in the east wall was blocked by a new bench along the north wall. Some changes were also made to the western side of the building, including

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<sup>951</sup> However, this date is mainly based on the synagogue’s architecture and its comparison to other synagogues in the Hellenistic-Roman world (Dar 1999, p. 31). The numismatic evidence suggests a later date. The coins found in cave Locus 171, for example, date to the 4<sup>th</sup> century and were found next to the foundation wall of the building (see below). If they were placed there before or at the same time as the construction of the first phase of the building, then the synagogue should date to middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century or later.

<sup>952</sup> Dar 1999, p. 32: “It is reasonable to assign the second phase to a period extending between the fifth and the first half of the seventh centuries AD.” No further explanations for this construction date are given in the publication report. However, field supervisor Yigal Ben Ephraim believes that the first phase building was destroyed in a fire in 408 CE, based on the dates of coins from under a burnt destruction layer found around the site, perhaps connected to one of the Samaritan revolts (personal communication). This provides a possible *terminus post quem* for the second phase of the building, but would contradict the numismatic evidence from cave Locus 171.

<sup>953</sup> The site of Sumaqa has attracted visitors and researchers since Victor Guérin described the site, including the synagogue, in 1870. The building and surrounding areas was subsequently researched by the British Survey of Western Palestine in 1873, Laurence Oliphant in the 1880s, Kohl and Watzinger in 1905 and 1916, von Mülinen in 1908, the staff of the Mandatory Department of Antiquities in 1929, Frankel in 1954, Zaharoni and Weger in 1966, the Archaeological Survey of Israel in 1968, Gideon Foerster in 1972, Hüttenmeister and Reeg in 1977, and Kloner and Olami in 1980. Comprehensive excavations of the building, however, were only started by Shimon Dar in 1983 (Dar 1988, p. 34; Dar 1999, pp. 8-10, p. 17).

creating a courtyard surrounded by small rooms, but the exact plan is unclear. At some point, a narthex was added to the east of the main hall, with a bench and a platform identified as a *bemah* by the northern wall.<sup>954</sup> According to the excavators, it is unclear if this building was still used as a synagogue, although two menorah inscriptions found elsewhere in the settlement suggest a continuous Jewish settlement.<sup>955</sup> The floor was covered with stone slabs.

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1983-1990

**Deposit Location:** Between the stone paving slabs in the narthex

**Archaeological Information:** Phase II, Locus 1 and Locus 151

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** Based on the different publications on the Sumaqa synagogue and the coins discovered, determining the number of coins found in the eastern narthex as well as their exact locus can be very confusing. In his first preliminary reports, Shimon Dar mentions that “between the stone paving slabs in *Locus 151* a hoard of *six* interfused coins was found.”<sup>956</sup> In the final report published in 1999, however, he describes *Locus 151* as a “thick layer of remains dating to the medieval period” on top of the floor.<sup>957</sup> On page 22, Dar mentions that a deposit of *six* coins was found between the paving slabs of the flagstone floor in the northern area of the eastern narthex of the synagogue belonging to *Locus 286*. But on page 28 Dar mentions that there were *thirty* 5<sup>th</sup>-, six 6<sup>th</sup>- and one 7<sup>th</sup>- century coins found between the cracks of the paving stones in the narthex of the synagogue in *Locus 286*.

To make things even more confusing, in the coin catalogue by Arie Kindler, in Appendix 6 of the excavation report, no coins are mentioned from *Locus 286*. Instead, he mentions three

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<sup>954</sup> I do not believe that this platform was used as a *bemah* as no other examples of *bemot* have been found in synagogues in Israel/Palestine in a narthex or side room of the building instead of in the main hall. Perhaps it was the location of a handwashing installation or a platform for a menorah?

<sup>955</sup> Dar 1999, p. 32 notes “perhaps only a part of the building was used as a synagogue, and the other parts, including the courtyard and the additional rooms, as residential areas. This is suggested by the mixture of common pottery with large quantities of bones of edible animals found there.” Field supervisor Yigal Ben Ephraim does not believe this second phase building was still a synagogue (personal communication).

<sup>956</sup> Dar and Mintzker 1989, p. 19.

<sup>957</sup> Dar 1999, p. 25. In Dar’s article from 1988 he mentions that “a small coin hoard was discovered in a gap between the poorly-laid paving stones close to the façade of the synagogue” (Dar 1988, p. 40).

coins from *Locus 151* (No. 11, 17, and 22, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century). However, the description of the coins in the 1999 report according to which “The earliest coin was one of Justin II (565-578 CE) and the latest of Heraclius I (610-641 CE), minted in Nicomedia in 618/619 CE” were found between the cracks of the narthex floor, corresponds best to the coins attributed to *Locus 1* in the final numismatic report: Nos. 56, 57, 58, and 59. This locus is described as another layer of remains dated to the medieval period on top of the floor. It is thus unclear which coins were found between the pavement stones of the synagogue, and which came from a layer on top of the floor.

After personal communications, things became a bit clearer. The thirty coins mentioned in the 1999 publication were erroneously attributed Locus 286: this is an incorrect translation from Hebrew to English and should be three coins. Furthermore, Locus 286 contained a small hoard of 7 coins, but this group is not associated with the synagogue but with a later phase: the medieval layer on top of the floor. Finally, Loci 1, 151, and 286 were indeed the same area of the building, but each number indicates a different season of work. Only Locus 1 and Locus 151 indicate the same context: the pavement of the northern area of the eastern narthex. Here, a total of 11 coins was discovered between the stones. This is the coin deposit that is described as “the hoard coming from in between the paving slabs of the Byzantine synagogue of Horvat Sumaqa.”

#### **Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** Currently, the Sumaqa coins are held by one of the former field supervisors of the Sumaqa excavations, Yigal ben Ephraim, who lives on a kibbutz in the Golan. I was able to visit the kibbutz in the fall of 2019 and look at the coins myself. After going through hundreds of coins, I was able to find 6 from Locus 1 that seem to fit the descriptions given by Arie Kindler, and another 5 from Locus 151 or the pavement in the northern part of the eastern narthex. No envelopes were found that indicate coins from Locus 286. Thus, this database contains information on 11 coins from the Sumaqa narthex deposit.<sup>958</sup>

The eleven coins have a broad range in dates, from 318-320 CE to 610-613 CE, with five coins from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, three from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and three from the 7<sup>th</sup> century (it did not contain any coins from the 5<sup>th</sup> century). However, there are clearly two clusters, with all the 4<sup>th</sup> century coins coming from Locus 151, and the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century coins coming from Locus 1; perhaps these were separate groups after all? The coins from Locus 151 are of Constantine I, Constantius I and Constantius Gallus, while the coins of Locus 1 can be attributed to Justin II, Maurice (Tiberius), and Heraclius I. All the coins are from eastern mints, except for one Constantius II coin from Rome.

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<sup>958</sup> I would like to thank Yigal Ben Ephraim for opening his house to me, and Yaniv Sfez from the IAA for being my Hebrew translator during the meeting and for his help with the identification of these coins.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place						Total
		Antioch	Constantinople	Heraclea	Heraclea (?)	Nicomedia	Rome	
1	568		1					1
	591					1		1
	596	1						1
	602	1						1
	611		1					1
	613		1					1
151	320				1			1
	341					1		1
	346						1	1
	354			1				1
	375						1	1
Grand Total		2	3	1	1	1	2	92

**Date Certainty**  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 45. HORVAT SUMAQA, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND BETWEEN THE PAVEMENT STONES IN THE NARTHEX OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT SUMAQA. ALL 11 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## **2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1983-1990

**Deposit Location:** In a small, natural cave underneath the northern part of the west wall

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 171

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** No

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IA2

**Deposit Description:** A small, natural cave measuring 2.10 X 2.40 meters and 1.70 meters high was discovered under the northern part of the west wall (W15) of the building.<sup>959</sup> Inside the cave stood a row of ashlar, five stones long and three stones high, of the same make-up as the other walls of the building. The cave was full of yellowish-grey chalk, typical of the region, together with a group of metal, bone, and stone vessels. These objects include a bronze cosmetics spoon, a bone cosmetic stick, a bronze pin, a spindle whorl of black stone, iron working tools, two large nails with a rectangular cross-section, and three coins dated to the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that the entire assemblage is contemporary in date. According to the excavators, the workmen constructing the building

<sup>959</sup> Dar 1999, p. 23; p. 29.

could have filled the cave with rubble and blocked it, but they did not. Was the cave still in use at the same time as the synagogue?

**Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** The three coins from Locus 171 appear in the coin catalogue of the final publication.<sup>960</sup> However, only limited data are provided: emperor, minting place, and reverse type. All three coins can be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, including a coin of Licinius II (Antioch) and a coin of Constantius II.<sup>961</sup> According to the excavators, all the coins from the synagogue at Sumaqa are kept at the house of Yigal ben Ephraim, but after checking (and double-checking), there were no coin envelopes from Locus 171. It is unclear what happened to these coins.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place		
		Antioch	Unknown	Total
171	324	1		1
	350		1	1
	361		1	1
Grand Total		1	1 1	2 1
<b>Date Certainty</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Certain</li> <li>■ Uncertain</li> </ul>				

**FIGURE 46. HORVAT SUMAQA, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND IN A CAVE, POSSIBLY CONNECTED TO THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT SUMAQA. ALL 3 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## 7. Judean Shephelah

### U. Horvat Rimmon

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/horvat-rimmon/>

**Longitude:** 31.3711624564758 **Latitude:** 34.86530542373657

**Bibliography:** Kloner A. 1979, "H. Rimmon," in: *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, Vol. 72, pp. 32–34 (Hebrew); Kloner A. 1980, "Hurvav Rimmon, 1979," in: *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 30, Nos. 3–4, pp. 226–228; Kloner A. and Mindel T. 1981, "Two Byzantine Hoards from the Ancient Synagogue of Horvat Rimmon," in *INJ*, Vol. 5, pp. 60–68; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of*

<sup>960</sup> Dar 1998, p. 377 (Hebrew); Dar 1999, p. 350, coins analyzed by Arie Kindler.

<sup>961</sup> In this catalogue, the reign of these emperors is given as a minting date. Further analysis of these coins would probably give a more exact date.



*Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 228–230; Kloner A. 1983, “The Synagogue of Horvat Rimmon,” in: *Qadmoniyot*, vol. 16, pp. 65–71 (Hebrew); Naveh J. and Shaked S. 1985, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, pp. 84–89, no. 10; Kloner A. 1989, “The Synagogues of Horvat Rimmon,” in: *Ancient Synagogues in Israel: Third–Seventh century C.E.* pp. 43–48; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 278–279 (Hebrew); Kloner A. 1992, “The Ancient Synagogue of Horvat Rimmon,” in: *Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 1, pp. 7–9 (Hebrew); Kloner A. 1993, “Horvat Rimmon,” in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 1284–1285; Magness J. 2003, *The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine*, pp. 97–99; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 396–399; Bijovsky G. 2012, *Gold Coins and Small Change*, pp. 64–77, 95–96; 175–176, 211, 273–274, 328–331, 450–455; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 244–247; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, pp. 58, 250, 537–538, 552–553; Ahipaz N. 2015, *The Custom of the Ritual Burial of Coins in Synagogues*, MA thesis, pp. 78–82 (Hebrew); Werlin S. 2015, *Ancient Synagogues of Southern Palestine, 300–800 CE*, pp. 222–236

**Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:

<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/rimon/>

- Mapio:

<https://mapio.net/pic/p-94902537/>

**Date Excavated:** 1978-1981

**Excavators:** Amos Kloner

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum IV-Stratum VII

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: second half 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>962</sup>  
Phase II: second half 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>963</sup>

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<sup>962</sup> This phase is called the Early Synagogue (Late Roman, Stratum IV) and is dated by the archaeologists to 250-363 CE (personal communication Sherry Whetstone). It appears that the end of the synagogue has been connected to the earthquake of 363 CE, but since the final report has not been published yet, it is unclear if this is persuasive.

<sup>963</sup> This phase is called the Middle Synagogue, Stratum Va (early Byzantine, 363-500 CE) (personal communication Sherry Whetstone).

Phase III: end 5<sup>th</sup> to beginning 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>964</sup>

Phase IV: early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>965</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** On the highest point of the hill.<sup>966</sup>

**Description of the Building:**

Phase I (=Stratum IV): Because of the poor state of preservation of the walls, a final plan of the first phase of the synagogue has not been published. It is identified as a broadhouse type, with a rectangular niche in the center of the north wall, the floor of which is 2.5 meters higher than that in the main hall.<sup>967</sup> The floors were paved with a crushed-limestone floor on a pebble and cobble foundation.

Phase II (=Stratum V (a-b)): The synagogue was a basilica with two rows of three columns. The floor was paved with plastered fieldstones. There were three entrances in the southern wall, preceded by a narthex, and a long room runs north-south to the west of the main hall. This western room was used as a dump during Phase III (see below), after the synagogue was destroyed by fire.

Phase III: The synagogue was reconstructed after a fire had destroyed the building, some time in the late fifth to early sixth century. The walls were now strengthened and ten pillar bases were inserted into the floor, dividing the main hall into a central nave and two side aisles. A platform stood along the north wall.<sup>968</sup> The western room was used as a dump for debris, as large amounts of ashy remains indicated. In this debris, two separate strata were identified, although they apparently were excavated as a single locus.<sup>969</sup> The upper 80 cm of debris contained finds dated to the Byzantine period, while the lower 20 cm had sherds from the Second Temple period to the second century CE.

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<sup>964</sup> This phase is called the Middle Synagogue (Middle Byzantine, Stratum Vb) and is dated to 500-600 CE. This date is based on the destruction of the synagogue by fire and the ash layer it left at the end of Stratum Vb: coins found in Groups D and E (below the ash) give a *terminus post quem* for the destruction, while the coins found in Hoards A and B (above the ash) give an *ante quem* (see below).

<sup>965</sup> This phase is called the Late Synagogue (Late Byzantine, Stratum VI) and is dated to 600-700 CE. This date is based on coins found beneath the pavement of the last synagogue building, the latest of which date to Phocas (602-610 CE).

<sup>966</sup> The site of Horvat Rimmon never received a final excavation report. I was in contact via email with Amos Kloner in 2019, but unfortunately, he passed away at the end of that year before I could get more information on the coin deposits from him. The manuscript should be in the final stages of publication.

<sup>967</sup> Kloner 1989, p. 47.

<sup>968</sup> It is unclear if this platform belongs to Phase II (Spigel 2012a, p. 245) or Phase III. Kloner treats the bemah as part of Phase III, but also indicated that it was an integral part of the northern wall, which was constructed during Phase II (Kloner 1989, Werlin 2015, p. 230).

<sup>969</sup> Werlin 2015, p. 228.

Phase IV (=Stratum VI-VII): The last synagogue reused the walls of its predecessor, but was paved with a new floor of rectangular stone slabs.<sup>970</sup> The hall was divided into a nave and two side aisles by two rows of three free-standing columns and two pilasters. In the western room, a beaten earth floor and tabun were installed.

**Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1979

**Deposit Location:** In the upper layer of debris in the western side room.

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 33, Hoard A

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA7

**Deposit Description:** During Phase III, the western room was used as a dump: an 80 cm deep layer of debris was discovered, containing material dated to the Byzantine period. Distributed throughout the fill were numerous artifacts, including a bronze candelabrum, glass lamps, cast bronze leaves, chains and pieces of various vessels, a golden pendant, glass and stone beads, bone and ivory objects, a glass plate, pieces of jars and cooking pots, oil lamps, roof tiles, iron nails, and fragments of a chancel screen.<sup>971</sup> A short time after this debris had accumulated, a deposit of 12 gold coins in a small pottery jar covered by a stone was buried upside down in the top layer of this fill.<sup>972</sup> Locus 33 is located in the middle of the western side room (or annex), bordered by W1 on the west and W20 on the east. It was originally a probe into a deep layer of dirt fill and debris, and was later divided into the different layers L33a, L33b, and L33c.<sup>973</sup> L33 a is located between W28 on the north and W26 on the south, and is dated to Stratum VI. L33b is located between W27 on the north and L64 on the south, and is dated to Stratum V. L33c is located between W27 on the north

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<sup>970</sup> Magness 2003, p. 98.

<sup>971</sup> Werlin 21015, pp. 228-229, based on Kloner 1989 p. 45 and Naveh and Shaked 1985, p. 87.

<sup>972</sup> Kloner and Mindel 1981, p. 60 date the burial of the vessel to Stratum Vb, sometime between the late fourth and mid-sixth century. Magness believes that the ashy debris in the room (L64, beneath the northern half of L44/L62) is evidence of the destruction of the synagogue by fire. A short time after this episode, the gold deposit was buried; the fire thus must have happened sometime in the late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century (Magness 2003, pp. 97-98 and Bijovsky 2012, p. 96).

<sup>973</sup> I am grateful to Sherry Whetstone who took the time to check the contexts of the coin deposits found at Horvat Rimmon and shared with me the information that she could find on them in the unpublished final publication manuscript.

and W35 on the south, and is dated to Strata II-III. Deposit 1 was found in the debris of L33b. There is no floor associated with it.

**Container Present?** Yes: small pottery jar

**Description of Coins:** The twelve gold coins from Hoard A were published by Amos Kloner and Tessa Mindel in 1981. The coins range from 364-375 CE (Valentinian I) to 491-518 CE (Anastasius I), and, with the exception of the two coins of Valentinian I, were all minted in Constantinople. The coins show a range in wear, with a very worn coin of Leo I (457-474 CE), seven coins with signs of some circulation, and four almost uncirculated specimens (including three out of the five latest coins).<sup>974</sup> The deposit includes three solidi, two semisses, and seven tremisses.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place		Total
		Antioch	Constantinople	
33	375	2		2
	474		3	3
	491		2	2
	498		1	1
	518		4	4
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>				
■ Certain				

FIGURE 47. HORVAT RIMMON, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND IN A JAR IN THE WESTERN ROOM OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT RIMMON (HOARD A). ALL 12 COINS ARE GOLD.

**Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1979

**Deposit Location:** In the upper layer of debris in the western side room.

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 33, Hoard B

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA7

**Deposit Description:** Found in the same upper debris layer as Hoard A, in the western room of synagogue Phase III, or the debris of Locus 33b. 35 coins were originally wrapped in cloth

<sup>974</sup> Kloner and Mindel 1981, p. 61.

(small parts of this cloth were preserved) and put in a small pottery jug.<sup>975</sup> The jug was buried upside down, about 1 meter away from Hoard A, at the same depth. It also has no floor associated with it.

**Container Present?** Yes: cloth bundle inside pottery jug

**Description of Coins:** The 35 gold coins from Hoard B were published by Amos Kloner and Tessa Mindel in 1981. The coins range from 364-375 CE (Valentinian I) to 491-518 CE (Anastasius I), and, with the exception of one coin of Valentinian I, all were minted in Constantinople, following the same pattern as Hoard A. The same trend in wear can be seen as well, with four coins showing signs of a lot of wear (including the two oldest coins), twenty coins show some signs of circulation, and eleven coins almost uncirculated (including seven of the Anastasius I coins).<sup>976</sup> The deposit includes one solidus, nine semisses, and 25 tremisses.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place		Total
		Antioch	Constantinople	
33	375	1		1
	450		1	1
	457		1	1
	474		6	6
	476		1	1
	491		14	14
	498		3	3
	518		8	8
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>				
■ Certain				

**FIGURE 48. HORVAT RIMMON, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND IN A JAR IN THE WESTERN ROOM OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT RIMMON (HOARD B). ALL 35 COINS ARE GOLD.**

**Deposit 3:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1979

**Deposit Location:** In the upper layer of debris in the western side room.

<sup>975</sup> Kloner and Mindel 1981, p. 60.

<sup>976</sup> Kloner and Mindel 1981, p. 61.

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 64, Group D (Baskets 213, 214, 226, 233, 241, 262, 291, 301, 302, 307, 308, and 316)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IA2

**Deposit Description:** 160 loose bronze coins were found in dirt debris beneath the ash floor (L44) in the southern part of the room, separate from Locus 65.<sup>977</sup> This debris seems to be an intentional fill.<sup>978</sup> The coins were found mixed with other objects, including lamps, pieces of candelabra, and jewelry.<sup>979</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to Kloner, 160 coins from the third-fifth century were found in the ash fill of the room.<sup>980</sup> Unfortunately, these coins have not been published. The IAA, however, provided me with a catalogue of coins found in group "D" analyzed by Gabriela Bijovsky: coins found scattered over the ash floor of Locus 64. According to Bijovsky, 25 coins were illegible and 106 were legible, for a total of (only) 131 coins. Thus, 131 coins have been added to my database from this deposit.

The coins range in date from 268-270 CE (Claudius II Gothicus) to 409-410 CE (Honorius), with the peak of the coins around 400 CE. This makes the deposit older than the gold deposits. Almost all coins were minted in eastern mints, with the exception of a coin from Lugdunum (Constantine I, 330-335 CE) and one from Rome (Gratian, 375-378 CE). The early provincial coin of Claudius Gothicus as well as another uncertain coin are Antoniniani. Two other Roman Provincial coins include a coin of Maximianus Herculeus (a follis, 286-305 CE), and one of Galerius Maximianus (296-305 CE). One coin dated to the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century is a VOTA imitation coin, with a blundered inscription in a wreath. The last coins in the group include seven folles, an uncertain pentanummium, and a dodecanummium, potentially of Justinian I, making this a usual mixed coin deposit.

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<sup>977</sup> See below. The ash floor covered the sealed debris of the Byzantine period in the southern half of the western annex, south of the line of W26 (personal communication Sherry Whetstone).

<sup>978</sup> Kloner 1989, p. 45; Bijovsky 2012, p. 95 "The room served as a dump or storeroom for broken or discarded objects for about a hundred years. The dump consisted of an 80 cm deep fill yielding many large stones, fragments of copper and other objects."

<sup>979</sup> One of the reports (Kloner 1980, p. 227) states that the fill with loose coins and scattered objects, and the two pots with gold coins were found in separate rooms. This is not correct: all the coin assemblages come from the same western side room.

<sup>980</sup> Kloner 1989, p. 45.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place								Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Lugdunum	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica		Unknown
64	Null									25	25
	270									1	1
	299		1								1
	300									1	1
	305									1	1
	330		2						1		3
	335					1					1
	341		1								1
	346		1							2	3
	350									1	1
	354				1						1
	361								2	5	7
	363									3	3
	367									1	1
	375	1								7	8
	378							1			1
	383						1			6	7
	392		1	2	1						4
	395	1	2		1		2			8	14
	400			1						13	14
	402	1	1	2						7	11
	404									2	2
	408									9	9
	410									1	1
	419									2	2
	423						3			1	4
	450									2	2
Grand Total		3	9	4	3	1	6	1	3	59	89

Date Certainty  
 Certain  
 Uncertain

**FIGURE 49. HORVAT RIMMON, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FOUND IN DIRT DEBRIS IN THE WESTERN ROOM OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT RIMMON. ALL 131 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**Deposit 4:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1979-1980

**Deposit Location:** In western hall, inside a hole between two stones in the wall

**Archaeological Information:** Wall W25, Group C (Basket 250)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA3

**Deposit Description:** 64 bronze coins were found in the western hall of the synagogue, in a hole or crack in between two stones in the west wall, some 20 cm above the floor of Locus 64.<sup>981</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to Kloner, the 64 coins found in the wall date to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.<sup>982</sup> The coins have not been published but the IAA provided me with an analysis conducted by Gabriela Bijovsky that shows 58 legible coins coming from this basket. I assume the other six coins were illegible.

The coins in this deposit range from 276-282 CE (Probus) to 410-423 CE (Honorius) but most of the coins are from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, reflecting a same date range as those from Locus 64. All the coins are of the *minimi* low denomination (no folles are represented in this group). Four coins are Roman provincial, including two coins of Probus, one of Carinus,<sup>983</sup> and one of Diocletianus: all are Antoniniani. Of the 21 mintmarks that are legible, only one potentially came from a non-eastern mint: the late coin of Honorius, dated 410-423 CE and minted in Rome. Twelve coins are so poorly preserved that they could only generally be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>981</sup> Kloner 1980, p. 227; Bijovsky 2012a, p. 95. This is W25, the Stratum IV wall beneath W1. L64 is the dirt fill that contained much debris beneath the northern half of L44/L62 (personal communication Sherry Whetstone).

<sup>982</sup> Kloner 1989, p. 45.

<sup>983</sup> This is the only coin of Carinus found in an ancient synagogue deposit.



Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place						Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Rome (?)	Thessalonica		Unknown
Null	Null							6	6
	282		1		1				2
	285				1				1
	295		1						1
	318							1	1
	335			1					1
	346		2					1	3
	361				1			4	5
	364							1	1
	375	1	1	2				3	7
	383							2	2
	386						1		1
	392							2	2
	395				1			5	6
	400							12	12
	402			1	2			5	8
	408		1					1	2
	423				1	1	1		3
Grand Total		1	6	4	7	1	2	25 18	46 18
<b>Date Certainty</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Certain <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertain									

**FIGURE 50. HORVAT RIMMON, DEPOSIT 4. COINS FOUND IN A HOLE IN THE WESTERN WALL OF THE WESTERN ROOM OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT RIMMON. ALL 64 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**Deposit 5:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1979

**Deposit Location:** In the upper layer of debris in the western side room.

**Archaeological Information:** Locus 65, Group E (Baskets 216, 227, 234, 245, 249, 261, 262, and 289)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IA2

**Deposit Description:** 54 loose bronze coins were found in dirt debris beneath ash floor Locus 44 in the southern part of the room, scattered over the ash floor of Locus 65, but

separate from Locus 64.<sup>984</sup> The coins were mixed with other objects, such as oil lamps, pieces of candelabra, and jewelry.

**Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** According to Bijovsky (2012), fifty coins similar in character to Group D were found in this deposit in Locus 65, two of which are later intrusions: a follis of Anastasius I, dated to 512-518 and a solidus of Heraclius.<sup>985</sup> However, in her unpublished IAA report, she writes that 39 coins were legible (one was a later intrusion),<sup>986</sup> four coins were illegible, and eleven crumbled during cleaning. This makes for a total of 54 coins originally coming from the *in situ* deposit. The coins range in date from 284-296 CE (Diocletian) to 408-423 CE (Honorius), reflecting the same date range as the coins from Group C and D. The earliest coins are two Roman Imperial Antoniniani: the coin of Diocletian already mentioned and an uncertain coin dated to the end of the third century. The minting places of only twelve coins could be determined, but all come from eastern mints except two coins from Rome (Valentinian II, 378-383 CE and Honorius, 402-409 CE).

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<sup>984</sup> L65 is the dirt fill beneath the southern half of L44, which contained a lot of debris (personal communication Sherry Whetstone).

<sup>985</sup> Bijovsky 2012a, p. 95.

<sup>986</sup> The intrusion is a Byzantine follis of Anastasius I (512-518 CE).

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place								Total	
		Alexandria	Antioch	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Rome	Siscia	Thessalonica		Unknown
65	Null									15	15
	296				1						1
	300									1	1
	346									3	3
	354			1							1
	361									5	5
	367	1									1
	375			1				1			2
	378									1	1
	383						1			3	4
	392								1		1
	395									1	1
	400									6	6
	402		2							4	6
	408			1						2	3
	409						1				1
	419									1	1
	423					1					1
Grand Total		1	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	20 22	32 22

**Date Certainty**  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

FIGURE 51. HORVAT RIMMON, DEPOSIT 5. COINS FOUND IN DIRT DEBRIS IN THE WESTERN ROOM OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF HORVAT RIMMON. ALL 54 COINS ARE BRONZE.

## 8. Judean Desert

### V. 'En Gedi

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/en-gedi/>

Longitude: 31.46155972680044 Latitude: 35.39247751235962

**Bibliography:** Barag D. and Porat Y. 1970, "The Synagogue at En-Gedi," in: *Qadmoniyot*, Vol. 3, pp. 97–100 (Hebrew); Barag D. Porath Y. and Netzer E. 1972, "The Second Season of Excavations in the Synagogue at En-Gedi," in: *Qadmoniot*, Vol. 2, pp. 52–54 (Hebrew); Hüttenmeister F. and Reeg G. 1977, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, pp. 108–114; Barag D. Porat Y, and Netzer E. 1982, "The synagogue at 'En-Gedi," in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 116–119; Levine L. 1982, "The Inscription in the 'En Gedi Synagogue," in: *Ancient synagogues Revealed*, pp. 140–145; Chiat M. 1982, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*, pp. 219–224; Ilan Z. 1991, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, pp. 318–321 (Hebrew); Mazar B. and Barag D. 1993 "En-Gedi," in: *NEAEHL*, pp. 399–409; Ariel D.T. 2002, "The Coins from the Surveys and Excavations of Caves in the Northern Judean Desert," in: *'Atiqot*, Vol. 41, No. 2, p. 298; Hadas G. 2005, "The Excavations in the Village of 'En Gedi, 1993–1995," in: *'Atiqot*, vol. 49\*, pp. 41–71 (Hebrew) and

136–137 (English); Hirschfeld Y. ed. 2006, *Ein Gedi– A Very Large Village of Jews*; Hirschfeld Y. 2007, *En–Gedi Excavations II*; Bijovsky G. 2007, “The Coins,” in: *En–Gedi Excavations II*, pp. 157–233; Milson D. 2007, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine*, pp. 352–357; Spigel C. 2012a, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities* pp. 198–204; Hachlili R. 2013, *Ancient Synagogues: Archaeology and Art*, p. 120–121, 183, 185, 191, 270, 272, 306, 463, 521–522, 536, 544–545; Werlin S. 2015, *Ancient Synagogues of Southern Palestine, 300–800 CE*, pp. 91–134; Segal M. *et al*, 2016, “An Early Leviticus Scroll from En–Gedi: Preliminary Publication.” In: *Textus*, Vol. 26, pp. 1–20

**Websites:**

- The Bornblum Eretz Israel Synagogues Website:  
<http://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/en-gedi/>
- Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire:  
<http://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/hoard/7855>
- Bible Walks:  
<https://biblewalks.com/Sites/EinGedi.html>
- Jewish Agency for Israel:  
<http://www.jewishagency.org/places-israel/content/26141>
- Virtual World Project  
<http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/EnGedi/site.html>

**Date Excavated:** 1. 1970-1972  
2. 1996-2002

**Excavators:** 1. Dan Barag, Yosef Porat, and Ehud Netzer  
2. Yizhar Hirschfeld

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Date of Construction of the Building:** Phase I: end 2<sup>nd</sup>-beginning 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>987</sup>  
Phase II: mid-3<sup>rd</sup> – beginning 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>988</sup>  
Phase III: mid-5<sup>th</sup>-second half 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>989</sup>

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** In the center and highest top of the settlement, surrounded by houses.<sup>990</sup>

**Description of the Building:** This synagogue had at least three phases:

Phase I (=Barag Stratum IIIB or Porath 2020 Phase IIc): A trapezoidal-shaped building with two entrances in the north wall.<sup>991</sup> No internal columns divided up the space. The building had a crude mosaic floor with geometric designs (L125). On the west side of the building was a large courtyard, also paved with monochrome mosaics.

Phase II (=Barag 1992 Stratum IIIA or Porath 2020 Phase IIb): Four columns were added to create an eastern and a southern aisle, making the building a basilica. The center door in the northern wall was blocked and made into a rectangular niche, which could have been the location for a Torah shrine. Between the second opening near the northeastern corner and the niche, a stepped seat was installed, possibly a so-called Seat of Moses.<sup>992</sup> Three entrances were also made in the west wall with an exedra beyond it. The mosaic floor was repaired. Along the south wall, three-tiered benches were added.

Phase III (=Barag 1992 Stratum II or Porath 2020 Phase IIa): The three doorways in the west wall

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<sup>987</sup> Based on the coins found in the *genizah* of the Stratum II synagogue, which date to the Severan dynasty. However, these coins were not found under the floor of the Stratum IIIB synagogue and their use for dating is thus problematic. Spigel 2012a, p. 198 dates the different building phases as following: Phase I: 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century, Phase II: 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century, Phase III: 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century. It is unclear where he is getting these dates from and it might be a mistake in his publication (personal communication).

<sup>988</sup> This date is based on a time when “a fixed location for the Ark of the Law in the wall facing Jerusalem began to be a standard phenomenon.” In other words, the date is not based on archaeological evidence but on historical conjecture.

<sup>989</sup> It is unclear what this date is based on. Hirschfeld 2006, p. 19\* writes “The synagogue of Stratum II was built in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century CE or during the second half of that century, when the Jewish settlement at the site flourished.”

<sup>990</sup> Hirschfeld 2006, p. 12\*. The first travelers to ‘En-Gedi mention the site in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the first methodical survey was carried out in 1875 by a team of British researchers. More Western researchers visited the site in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first picture of the synagogue was taken in 1911 by F.M. Abel. Later, Benjamin Mazar (1949; 1961-64), Yohanan Aharoni (1956), Nahman Avigad (1961-62), Joseph Naveh (1978), and Gideon Hadas (1980s) surveyed or excavated parts of the settlement. The synagogue area was eventually excavated by Dan Barag, Joseph Porat, and Ehud Netzer between 1970 and 1972 (Hirschfeld *et al.* 2007, pp. 17-20).

<sup>991</sup> Chiat 1982, p. 220; Barag 1993 and 2006, p. 17; Spigel 2012a, p. 199. Hachlili 2013, p. 121, however, talks about three openings. It is unclear where she got this information from.

<sup>992</sup> Barag 2006, p. 17.

were turned into passageways to create a western aisle. Another narthex was added to the west of the building with a washing installation in the southwestern corner. The door in the southern end of the west wall now led into a small side room, and the eastern door opening in the north wall led to another side room to the north (L110). The function of both rooms is unknown. The niche in the hall was replaced by a rectangular structure which protruded 1.5 m into the nave,<sup>993</sup> with an apse behind it which might have been the location for a wooden Torah shrine.<sup>994</sup> The interior of the wooden structure held a storage space, or, according to the excavators, a *genizah* in which 3000 coins were found.<sup>995</sup> In front of the wooden structure, a rectangular area surrounded by chancel screens was constructed.<sup>996</sup> The mosaic floor was renovated and decorated with three seven-branched menorahs, colorful birds, and multiple inscriptions. The building was destroyed in a fire, which left many objects *in situ*.<sup>997</sup>

### **1. Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1970-1972

**Deposit Location:** In the synagogue niche in the middle of the northern wall.

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum II or Phase IIa, Locus 101, Reg. Nos. 55 and 265

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA4

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<sup>993</sup> A base of dressed stones was found here; the excavators suggest it had a wooden structure on top that held the Torah scrolls. Porat identifies this structure as L119, a *bemah* (Porat, *unpublished report*).

<sup>994</sup> Chiat 1982, p. 221: fragments of wooden posts were found *in situ*, as well as the negatives of a wood frame at the bottom of the niche walls and the negatives of reeds in plaster fragments found in the niche.

<sup>995</sup> Barag 2006, pp. 19-20: the finds discovered here include a footed, goblet-shaped vessel, a small, bronze seven-branched menorah, pottery lamps, a decorated pottery bowl, fragments of glass vessels, and remnants of burnt scrolls. In my opinion, these are not from a *genizah* (a storage place for sacred objects that were no longer being used but could not be thrown away) but were still being used in synagogue rituals at the time of its destruction (see Deposit 1, below).

<sup>996</sup> This was a rectangular space which enclosed a mosaic panel. At the four corners of this structure were small sockets, which apparently held the posts of a chancel screen (possibly of wood) which surrounded the area.

<sup>997</sup> Barag *et al.* 1982, p. 117; Hirschfeld 2006, p. 16. This would have taken place at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, based on the coins found in the village. Bijovsky remarks in her unpublished paper on the 'En Gedi synagogue coins, however, that the latest coins found at the synagogue site go no later than "the undated series of Justinian I, struck until 538 CE". There thus seems to be a discrepancy between the latest coins found in Hirschfeld's excavation of the Byzantine village (which go up to 600 CE) and the latest coins in the synagogue and its deposits (Bijovsky, *IAA unpublished paper 2016*, p. 7). The pottery from the synagogue, however, points to a destruction of the building in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century.

**Deposit Description:** Nearly 3000 coins were found in the debris of the Stratum II Torah shrine, together with the remnants of (a) charred scroll(s), a goblet, a miniature silver seven-branched menorah, pottery lamps, and fragments of glass.<sup>998</sup> The coins were initially dispersed into two main groups related to L101: Reg. No. 55 and Reg. No. 265, but were then combined into one group. 138 coins were cleaned immediately after the discovery and more coins were cleaned by the IAA in the 2010s. Only 175 of the coins were preserved well enough to be identified.<sup>999</sup>

**Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** The final publication of the synagogue of 'En Gedi is in an advanced stage and should be published soon.<sup>1000</sup> It will include a coin catalogue written by Gabriela Bijovsky. The IAA was kind enough to give me access to this report, which I was able to use for this project.<sup>1001</sup>

Of the circa 3000 coins found in the debris of the Torah shrine, only 175 were preserved well enough to be identified. The coins range in date from the second century BCE (an uncertain Seleucid coin) to 518-527 CE (Justin I). The Seleucid coin is followed by eight Jewish coins, including two prutot of Mattathias Antigonus (40-37 BCE, minted in Jerusalem),<sup>1002</sup> a Herodian prutah of Agrippa I (41-42 CE, Jerusalem),<sup>1003</sup> two Roman procuratorial coins (minted in Jerusalem under Tiberius and Pontius Pilate), and three prutot of the Jewish War (minted 67-68 CE in Jerusalem). According to Bijovsky, these coins pre-date the construction of the synagogue by many centuries but constitute very common types that circulated in the Second Temple village of 'En Gedi, and are found in large

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<sup>998</sup> Bijovsky, *IAA unpublished paper 2016*, p. 2, pp. 4-6. The scroll was eventually scanned at the IAA with the same techniques scholars are now using to read the Dead Sea Scrolls. The researchers discovered that the charred scroll contains texts from the first two chapters of the book of Leviticus and that it was probably still being used at the time of the destruction of the synagogue. The scroll and its analysis and translation has been published as Segal *et al* 2016.

<sup>999</sup> Bijovsky remarks that the state of preservation of the coins found at 'En Gedi is very poor. Due to the high concentration of salts in the soil around the Dead Sea, most of the coins turned into highly corroded coppers. Moreover, the lack of proper storage of the coins in humidity and temperature-controlled environments after their discovery in 1972 was not helpful for their preservation over the last decades. Hence, a majority of the coins are lumps of metal that are completely unidentifiable, even more so than at other sites. Only about 6% of this hoard could be read after being cleaned at the IAA laboratories.

<sup>1000</sup> Personal communication Yosef Porat at the end of 2019. By mid-2021, the publication had still not come out.

<sup>1001</sup> This report was written by Bijovsky in 2016 and is referred to here as Bijovsky, *IAA unpublished paper 2016*

<sup>1002</sup> These are the only coins of Mattathias Antigonus found in ancient synagogue deposits.

<sup>1003</sup> This is the only coin of Agrippa I found in ancient synagogue deposits.

numbers in almost all the other excavations at the site.<sup>1004</sup> The period between the two Jewish Revolts is also well represented in the deposit, starting with a coin of Vespasian, struck in Gaza in 69-70 CE, followed by two coins of Domitian (both minted in Caesarea, one of them bearing two countermarks), two coins of Trajan (one minted in Ashkelon 106-107 CE, the other in Caesarea), and three coins of Hadrian (two minted in Ashkelon – 117/188 CE and 119/120 CE, and one in Gaza bearing a double date: year three of the imperial visit, which is also year 192, or 131/132 CE).<sup>1005</sup> Four other coins can be dated roughly to the first century CE, three of which were minted at Ashkelon, and two others to 70-135 CE. The deposit continues with no gaps into the second and third century,<sup>1006</sup> starting with two coins of Antoninus Pius through the Severan dynasty, up to the end of provincial coinage by the early second half of the third century. Among this group of 53 coins are five minted in Jerusalem (or Aelia Capitolina), two coins minted in Petra,<sup>1007</sup> a coin of Elagabalus possibly from Neapolis,<sup>1008</sup> and a coin of Severus Alexander probably from Anthedon.<sup>1009</sup> In addition, there is a rare coin minted in Damascus (emperor unknown) and three imperial issues from Rome: a sestertius of Antoninus Pius and two others of uncertain rulers: a sestertius and a dupondius. After this, the chronological sequence continues with a series of very worn Antoniniani dated to the second half of the third century (including a possible coin from Milan, the only coin from this minting place found in an ancient synagogue deposit), and a group of radiate fractions from the reigns of Diocletian and Maximian. After this, the number of coins increases: huge quantities of unidentifiable and corroded Late Roman *minimi*, generally dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, constitute the bulk of the deposit (due to their bad state of preservation, only 74 of these appear here in the database). Only five coins of the 5<sup>th</sup> century were in good enough condition to be analyzed. They include a nummus of Theodosius II, one of Valentinian III, and one of Marcian, and two coins of the “cross in wreath” type. The latest coin is a follis of Justin I.

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<sup>1004</sup> See Bijovsky 2007, pp. 157-159.

<sup>1005</sup> Coins minted at Ashkelon have only been found in the synagogue deposit at ‘En Gedi.

<sup>1006</sup> The numismatic evidence from Hirschfeld’s excavations of the Byzantine village apparently shows a hiatus in settlement from the mid-second century until the second quarter of the third century (Bijovsky 2007, p. 160).

<sup>1007</sup> These are the only coins from Petra found in ancient synagogue deposits.

<sup>1008</sup> The only other coin from Neapolis in an ancient synagogue deposit was found at Wadi Hamam.

<sup>1009</sup> This is the only coin from Anthedon found in ancient synagogue deposits.



Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place																	Total		
		Alexandria	Anthedon	Antioch	Ashkelon	Ashkelon (?)	Caesarea	Caesarea (?)	Constantinop..	Cyzicus	Damascus	Gaza	Heraclea	Jerusalem	Milan (?)	Neapolis (?)	Nicomedia	Petra		Rome	Unknown
101	Null																			2,825	2,825
31													1								1
42													1								1
59													1								1
68													3								3
70											1										1
92						1															1
96						1															1
100				4																	4
107				1																	1
117						1															1
118				1																	1
120				1																	1
132											1										1
135																			2		2
161						1												1	1		3
180					1																1
192						1															1
200				1															9		10
212																	1				1
217													1				1				2
218													1								1
222				1			1						1			1					4
235		1				1															2
250																			7		7
251													1								1
260			2			1			1				1								5
270																		2			2
275														1					6		7
296												1									1
299																			4		4
300	1																		23		24
310																			1		1
315																				1	1
321																			1		1
325																			1		1
341																			1		1
346																			1		1
354								1													1
361																			1		1
375																			2		2
383	1											1							9		11
395																1			21		22
400																			24		24
408																			3		3
450								1													1
455																		1	2		3
457																			1		1
527								1													1
-37													2								2
-100																			1		1
Grand Total	11	1	2	45	1	52	1	2	1	1	2	2	121	1	1	1	2	32	55 2,891	95 2,905	
Date Certainty																					
# Certain																					
# Uncertain																					

**FIGURE 52. 'EN GEDI, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND IN THE NICHE IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF 'EN GEDI. ALL 3000 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## **2. Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1971

**Deposit Location:** In the courtyard of a house next to the synagogue, inside a small silo in the corner of the courtyard floor.<sup>1010</sup>

**Archaeological Information:** Courtyard House D, Locus 285, Reg. No. 1227

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** No with synagogue, yes with houses<sup>1011</sup>

**Deposit Retrievable?** Yes

**Deposit Type:** IIA5

**Deposit Description:** A hoard of 41 Byzantine folles, wrapped in cloth, was found in the courtyard of House D, which is located adjacent to, and west of the synagogue.<sup>1012</sup> The coins were hidden with an oil lamp in a small silo (L285) made of field stones cemented in lime mortar (35X72 cm in inner space), covered by the clay lid of a casserole, in the southeast corner of the courtyard (L233). All the coins were cleaned after discovery but most are in a very poor state of preservation; as some of the coins adhered to each other their identification can only be partially observed.

**Container Present?** Yes: a cloth bundle

**Description of Coins:** As with the Torah Shrine deposit, the Byzantine folles deposit has not been published yet. However, the unpublished paper by Gabriela Bijovsky from 2016, given to me by the IAA, informed my database.

The deposit contained folles of only three emperors: Anastasius I (512-518 CE), Justin I (518-538 CE), and Justinian I (527-538 CE), clearly indicating that the coins in this deposit were assembled at one time. The seven folles of Anastasius I are of the large module, all minted in Constantinople. The seven folles of Justin I include one minted in Constantinople, one in Nicomedia, and five uncertain mints. The four folles of Justinian I comprise one minted in Constantinople, two in Nicomedia, and one of an uncertain mint. The illegible coins include 21 worn folles and two half-folles, all roughly dated between 512 and 538 CE. Bijovsky remarks that the lack of small module coins of Anastasius I and heavy folles of Justinian I

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<sup>1010</sup> Barag *et al.* 1982, p. 119. Hachlili 2013, p. 544 mentions that the hoard was found plastered inside a wall of the house, but this information is incorrect (personal communication Gabriela Bijovsky).

<sup>1011</sup> Because of this reason, this deposit might not be connected to synagogue activities at all, and should possibly be dropped from future synagogue coin deposit lists. However, because Bijovsky *IAA unpublished paper 2016* places this deposit under the subchapter "Coins from Excavations at the Synagogue of En-Gedi" (in contrast to the Coins from the Village), it has been included here.

<sup>1012</sup> Bijovsky, *IAA unpublished paper 2016*, pp. 2-4.

probably indicates that coins of a certain weight and module were specifically selected for hoarding.<sup>1013</sup>

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place			Total
		Constantinop..	Nicomedia	Unknown	
285	518	7			7
	527	1	1	3	5
	538	9	3	17	29
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>					
■ Certain					

FIGURE 53. ‘EN GEDI, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND IN THE COURTYARD OF A HOUSE, POSSIBLY CONNECTED TO THE SYNAGOGUE OF ‘EN GEDI. ALL 41 COINS ARE BRONZE.

### 3. Deposit 3:

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1970-1972

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor of a side room of the synagogue of Stratum II or Phase IIa.

**Archaeological Information:** Stratum II or Phase IIa, Locus 168, Reg. No. 1246 (under the floor of room L110)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IIB6

**Deposit Description:** Approximately 143 unidentifiable *minimi* and 7 identifiable coins were found as one group under the floor of a side room to the north (L110) of the synagogue. The room could be accessed through an opening in the northern wall of the building (W102), but its function is unknown.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** As with the Torah Shrine and the follis deposit, the group of coins found under the floor of a side room of the synagogue has not been published yet. However, the unpublished paper of Gabriela Bijovsky from 2016 reveals information on

<sup>1013</sup> Bijovsky, IAA unpublished paper 2016, p. 3.

seven of these coins.<sup>1014</sup> Only four could be dated: one Roman provincial coin to the second century CE, one Late Roman coin to 378-383 CE, one to 383-395 CE, and one to 395-408 CE. None could be attributed to a certain emperor or minting place.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place	
		Unknown	Total
168	Null	146	146
	200	1	1
	383	1	1
	395	1	1
	408	1	1
Grand Total		3 147	3 147
<b>Date Certainty</b>			
■ Certain			
■ Uncertain			

**FIGURE 54. 'EN GEDI, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FOUND UNDER THE FLOOR OF A SIDE ROOM OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF 'EN GEDI. ALL 150 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## 9. Turkey

### W. Sardis

**URL:** <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/sardis/>

**Longitude:** 38.488333

**Latitude:** 28.040278

**Bibliography:** Hanfmann G. 1964, "The Sixth Campaign at Sardis (1963)," in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 174, pp. 3–58; Hanfmann G. 1965, "The Seventh Campaign at Sardis (1964)," in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 177, pp. 2–37; Hanfmann G. et al. 1966, "The Eighth Campaign at Sardis (1965)", in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 182, pp. 2–54; Hanfmann G. and Majewski L. 1967, "The Ninth Campaign at Sardis (1966)," in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 187, pp. 9–62; Hanfmann G. Mitten D. and Ramage A. 1968, "The tenth Campaign at Sardis (1967)," in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 191, pp. 2–41; Hanfmann G. et al. 1970, "The Eleventh and Twelfth Campaign at Sardis (1968, 1969)," in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 199, pp. 7–58; Bates G.

<sup>1014</sup> Bijovsky, IAA unpublished paper 2016, pp. 2-3. It is unclear why all the coins from this deposit were not published in her catalogue: perhaps they were all illegible? She identifies this group as "probably a foundation deposit."

1971, *Byzantine Coins. Archaeological Exploration of Sardis*, Harvard University Press; Hanfmann G. and Thomas R. 1971, "The thirteenth Campaign at Sardis (1970)," in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 203, pp. 5–22; Seager A. 1972, "The Building History of the Sardis Synagogue," in: *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 76, No. 4, pp. 425–435; Seager A. 1974, "The Synagogue at Sardis," in: *Qadmoniot*, Vol. 7, pp. 123–128; Buttrey, Theodore V et al. 1981, *Greek, Roman, and Islamic Coins from Sardis*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Hanfmann G. and Burrell B. 1981, "Notes on some Archaeological Contexts," in: Hanfmann G. and Scott J. (eds.), *Archaeological Exploration of Sardis*, Harvard University Press, pp. xx–xxiv; Kraabel, A.T. 1982, "The Excavated Synagogues of Late Antiquity from Asia Minor to Italy," in: *Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress*, Vol. 16.2.2, pp. 227–236; Seager A. 1982 "The Synagogue at Sardis," in: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, pp. 178–184; Hanfmann G. 1983, *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times. Results of the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis 1958–1975*, Harvard University Press; Magness J. 2005, "The Date of the Sardis Synagogue in Light of the Numismatic Evidence," in: *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 109, No. 3, pp. 443–475; Evans DeRose J. 2013, "Five Small Bronze Hoards from Sardis and their Implication for Coin Circulation in the Fifth Century C.E." in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 369, pp. 137–156; Evans DeRose J. 2018, *Coins from the Excavations at Sardis, Their Archaeological and Economic Contexts, Coins from the 1973 to 2013 Excavations*, Harvard University Press

#### **Websites:**

- Sardis expedition:

<http://sardisexpedition.org/en/essays/about-synagogue>

- Museum of the Jewish People:

<https://www.bh.org.il/the-ancient-synagogue-of-sardis-turkey/>

- The Byzantine Legacy:

<https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/sardis-synagogue>

**Region:** Lydia

**Date Excavated:** 1. 1958-1971  
2. 1973-2013

**Excavators:** 1. George M. A. Hanfmann (Harvard University, Cornell University, Corning Museum of Glass)  
2. Harvard-Cornell Sardis Excavations

**Archaeological Information:** Syn (= Main Hall of Synagogue), SynFc (= Forecourt of synagogue)

**Date of Construction of the Building:** mid-6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1015</sup>

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<sup>1015</sup> This date is based on the re-evaluation of the numismatic evidence found under the floor of the synagogue by Jodi Magness (Magness 2005b). The excavators believe that there were two phases to the synagogue building: the

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** In the middle of a shopping district, along a colonnaded street.<sup>1016</sup>

**Description of the Building:** This synagogue was not a freestanding building but was incorporated into a monumental Roman bath and gymnasium complex. Below the synagogue building lay at least three consecutive buildings, including a Roman civil basilica.<sup>1017</sup> Only in the fourth, and final stage, did the building definitely function as a synagogue.<sup>1018</sup> The synagogue consisted of two main rooms: an entrance court, or forecourt with a fountain in the middle, and a long assembly hall, or main hall. The floor of the forecourt was covered in complex and multicolored mosaic panels with donor inscriptions. Three doors led into the main hall, which had two rows of six piers. Two platforms with pediments flanked the inside of the central door. At the opposite, west end of the hall, was a broad apse containing three-tiered benches, separated by a railing. In front of the apse stood a large, marble table decorated with Roman eagles. Two pairs of marble lions (spolia) flanked the table. The floor of the main hall was also covered with geometric mosaic designs and donor inscriptions. In total, more than 80 inscriptions were found in the building, carved on marble plaques, incised in stone, or as part of the mosaic floor. Pieces of a large marble menorah were also found inside the main hall.

**Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** July 20, 1963

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor in the forecourt of the synagogue

**Archaeological Information:** Hoard B, Area E 113-115 N 7-10, at a depth of 96.75 to 97.25 meters

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

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first phase constructed in the second half of the third century, the second in the fourth century. However, after Magness examined the unpublished field reports and notebooks of the excavations, an initial construction date of the structure as a synagogue in the mid-sixth century seems more correct. In fact, a *terminus post quem* of the early 7<sup>th</sup> century might even be proposed, based on the coins found under the floors of the synagogue hall and courtyard (see below).

<sup>1016</sup> The synagogue was discovered in 1962 by the Harvard-Cornell expeditions (Seager 1972, p. 425) For an overview of early travelers visiting the site, see Hanfmann 1983, p. 148.

<sup>1017</sup> Seager and Kraabel 1983, p. 172.

<sup>1018</sup> Magness 2005b, p. 109.

**Deposit Description:** This deposit is mentioned in the Bates catalogue from 1971 on the Byzantine coins found at Sardis.<sup>1019</sup> The only information on the deposit, which is labeled Hoard B, given is that it was found on July 7, 1963 at a depth of 96.75 to 97.25 meter, in grid E 113-115 N 7-10. The deposit contains 248 coins, of which 223 were disintegrated and 22 were illegible; only 3 have been identified. The date of the hoard is said to be 491-578 CE.

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** The only information on this deposit is found in Appendix B: Description and index of hoards, in the volume on the Byzantine coins found at Sardis published by George E. Bates in 1971 (p. 151). Here, Bates states that of the 248 coins found in this deposit, 223 were disintegrated and 22 were illegible. Thus, only 3 have been identified: Nos. 16, 253, and 421 in Bates' catalogue. The coins are respectively a nummus of Anastasius I (491-518 CE, Constantinople), a decanummium of Justinian I (560-561 CE, Cyzicus), and a pentanummium of Justin II (565-578 CE, Constantinople). At the moment, Andrew Seager, Marcus Rautman, Jane DeRose Evans, and others are working on the final publication of the coins from Sardis. When they are finished, more information on the context and the content of this deposit may become available.<sup>1020</sup>

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<sup>1019</sup> Bates 1971, p. 151 (Appendix B).

<sup>1020</sup> Personal communication Nicholas Cahill. He states that the researchers "have been working through the coins and the fieldbooks and plans and photographs, trying to sort them into "real" contexts as much as possible." He also notes that "This is slow and painstaking work ... and sorting out which coins actually come from under which mosaics, as opposed to coming from repairs, damaged areas, etc. or from benches, drains, or other contexts, has taken a lot of time and the work still needs to be checked and proofread."

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place			Total
		Constantinople	Cyzicus	Unknown	
Null	Null			245	245
	518	1			1
	561		1		1
	578	1			1
Grand Total		2	1	245	3 245
<b>Date Certainty</b>					
■ Certain					
■ Uncertain					

**FIGURE 55. SARDIS, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND IN A GROUP UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE FORECOURT OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF SARDIS. ALL 248 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

**Deposit 2:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1958-1971

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor in the forecourt of the synagogue

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** These coins were found below the floor level in the forecourt. A total of almost 500 coins was discovered under the synagogue floor, 65 of which were found in the main hall: 435 come from under the floor of the forecourt. 300 of these circa 400 coins were legible and circa 123 of them were reliably located beneath unbroken mosaics or were sealed in the mortar bedding for the fountain.<sup>1021</sup> The specific context of each coin, however, is very confusing. The coins were not given any real stratigraphic context in the

<sup>1021</sup> Seager 1972, pp. 432-433; Hanfmann and Scott 1981, p. xxii; Hanfmann 1983, p. 173. See for example Hanfmann 1965, p. 21: 15 coins were found between July 7-14, 1964, when a fragmentary mosaic in the northeastern part of the forecourt, directly north of the entrance which led from the "Marble Avenue" into the synagogue through the Byzantine shops, was lifted (roughly E 107-112, N 1-4). The coins were found in fill below the mortar bedding of the mosaic, but above a second layer of mortar. The latest of the coins was datable to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE (report by D.G. Mitten). And Hanfmann *et al.* 1970, p. 47: A total of 124 coins was found under inner mosaic panels W 1-5 (MS 62.6-10), 94 of which were legible.



field books or in the coin registries during the excavations: the archaeologists just list grid coordinates, field book pages, date of excavation, etc. Thus, it is difficult to determine which coins come from under which mosaic panels, and which coins come from repairs or damaged areas, or from inside drains and pipes. In 2005, Jodi Magness published an article on 31 coins dating from before 380 CE, which she believes come from under the Sardis forecourt floor. However, even here different contexts and stratigraphic layers are given for the group as a whole: some coins come from directly under the mosaic floor, while others were found under the bedding of the mosaic floor. Still others were found next to or under the water pipes that provided water to the fountain, and which according to the excavators, were laid at a later stage.<sup>1022</sup> Thus, archaeologist Nicholas Cahill, the current director of the Sardis excavations, believes it is too early to draw any conclusions on the contexts and the function of the Sardis coins.<sup>1023</sup> The coins have been included in this study but need to be approached with caution. When the final publication monograph is published, the Sardis team will make the coins available in a searchable database at <http://sardisexpedition.org>.

### **Container Present? No**

**Description of Coins:** Circa 400 coins were found in this deposit, of which 123 came from sealed loci. Magness published 31 coins of this deposit dated after 380 CE in her 2005 article. The catalogue of Byzantine coins published by George E. Bates in 1971 contains another 39 coins.<sup>1024</sup> This leaves us with a remaining 330 unknown coins.

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<sup>1022</sup> “The pipe system serving the fountain was replaced by a second, parallel set of pipes.” Hanfmann *et al.* 1968, pp. 29-31; Seager 1977, pp. 434-435; Hanfmann 1983, p. 174.

<sup>1023</sup> Personal communication. In two emails from the spring of 2020, Cahill wrote to me: “In the years that the synagogue was being dug, they did not really record “context” or “deposit” the way we think about those concepts: for instance, they usually don’t specify whether a coin was found under a floor, or in a bench or a niche or a bema, but often simply give grid coordinates and levels. These can sometimes be “translated” into archaeological contexts, but that usually requires rather intense work with the field books and other records, and there will always be slippage and uncertainty. Even the grid coordinates were not always measured with strings and tapes and such, but were estimated from marks on the walls, which were ca. 20 m apart; and the marks themselves were revised over the years as the building was re-surveyed, introducing inconsistencies. Excavators couldn’t be on the spot at all times; they were often responsible for several widely separated areas of excavation and often were absent when coins (and other artifacts) were found. Often the person digging removed small objects like coins and pointed to the place where he found it when the supervisor returned. Even when coins are found in the process of removing the floor or another feature, it is often unclear whether the coin was really sealed in that feature, or whether the feature was preserved at the point where the coin was found. It is also often unclear what the situation was after the Synagogue ceased to be used as a synagogue, so the majority of the coins can’t necessarily be associated with the use of this as a building. In short, it’s a mess.”

<sup>1024</sup> Bates 1971. He gives a total of 53 coins as coming from the forecourt of the synagogue in Appendix A of his catalogue (p. 150). However, of these 53, I dropped Nos. 16, 253, and 421 (since these were found in Hoard B, and thus form a separate deposit), Nos. 76, 99, 174, 199 (found during sifting ABOVE the mosaic), Nos. 286, 401, 442, 754 (found in a water channel), No. 563 (found in collapse OVER floor), No. 810 (found during cleaning of the floor), and No. 905 (found in a wall). I believe the remaining 39 coins may be assumed as coming from fill under the mosaic floor.

Based on the 70 known coins, the deposit ranges in date from 378-383 CE (Valentinian II) to 612-613 CE (Heraclius I), with an even spread of coins throughout this period. Coins of Justinian I and Maurice (Tiberius) are the most frequent, with 13 and 10 coins respectively. Of the coins identified, 14 are pentanummi (32%), 10 are decanummi (23%), 9 are half folles (20%), 7 are folles (16%), and 4 are nummi (9%). Most of the coins were minted in Constantinople, but one coin was struck at Constantine in Numidia (a half follis of Justin II, 572-573 CE), the only coin from Algeria found in an ancient synagogue deposit.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place					Unknown	Total
		Constantine in ..	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Thessalonica		
Null	Null						341	341
	383		1				1	2
	392		1			1		2
	395		1					1
	408						2	2
	450						1	1
	455						2	2
	457						2	2
	474						1	1
	491		1					1
	500						1	1
	518		2					2
	527		4					4
	555		1					1
	556		1					1
	557		1				2	3
	561		1		1		1	3
	563						1	1
	565		5					5
	568		1					1
	571					1		1
	573	1						1
	576				1			1
	577		1	1				2
	578		1			1		2
	580		1					1
	585					1		1
	590				1			1
	592						1	1
	595				1			1
	602		6					6
	606			1				1
	608				1			1
	610		1				1	2
	613				1			1
Grand Total		1	30	2	6	4	15 342	58 342

Date Certainty  
■ Certain  
■ Uncertain

**FIGURE 56. SARDIS, DEPOSIT 2. COINS FOUND UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE FORECOURT OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF SARDIS. ALL 150 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

### **Deposit 3:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** 1958-1972

**Deposit Location:** Under the floor in the main hall of the synagogue

**Archaeological Information:** /

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** 65 coins found under the mosaics of the main hall of the synagogue at different spots where the mosaic panels have been lifted.<sup>1025</sup> Here, the same caveat must be mentioned as to the coins found in the forecourt of the synagogue: Cahill, together with Seager and Evans, are still working on the final publication of these coins. Thus, any conclusions about the context and function of these coins need to be approached with caution.<sup>1026</sup>

**Container Present?** No

**Description of Coins:** According to Hanfmann, a total of 65 identifiable coins was found, 27 of which came from sealed loci.<sup>1027</sup> Magness published 12 coins from this deposit dated after 380 CE in her 2005 article. The catalogue of Byzantine coins published by Bates in 1971 contains another 12 coins.<sup>1028</sup> This leaves us with a remaining 41 unknown coins. The coins range in date from 308-337 CE (Constantine I?) to 615-616 CE (Heraclius I), following more

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<sup>1025</sup> For example, in 1956 a trench was excavated in the southeast corner of the main hall, between E 87-93 and N 1.20-2.95. Three coins were found here, embedded in the foundation for the mosaics (Hanfmann *et al.* 1966, p. 40).

<sup>1026</sup> For example, according to Hanfmann, floor mosaics “were repaired periodically, and some whole panels were replaced, each time giving a possibility for dropping coins” (Hanfmann 1983, p. 174). However, this conclusion was made AFTER later coins were identified as coming from under these panels. In other words, it may be that all the panels were placed at the same time, with the early 7<sup>th</sup> century as *terminus post quem!*

<sup>1027</sup> Hanfmann and Scott 1981, p. xxii; Hanfmann 1983, p. 173.

<sup>1028</sup> Bates 1971. He gives a total of 17 coins as coming from the main hall of the synagogue in Appendix A of his catalogue (p. 150). However, of those 17, I omitted No. 290 (found in a closet ABOVE the floor), No. 613 (found ON floor), No. 616 (found during cleaning of mosaic floor), and Nos 1139 and 171 (dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE and thus intrusive). I believe the remaining 12 coins may be assumed to be coins from fill under the mosaic floor.

or less the same date range as the coins found under the floor of the forecourt. Coins of Heraclius I comprise the largest group (8 coins). As for denominations, of the 13 coins that could be identified, 11 were folles, one was a decanummium, and one was a pentanummium. Most of the coins were minted in Constantinople, with two from Cyzicus, and two from Nicomedia.

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place				Total
		Constantinople	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Unknown	
Null	Null				41	41
	337				1	1
	339				1	1
	375				1	1
	395		1		1	2
	408				1	1
	455				2	2
	474				1	1
	500				1	1
	518	1			1	2
	538	1				1
	566			1		1
	602	1				1
	612		1	1		2
	613	2				2
	614	3				3
	616	2				2
Grand Total		10	2	2	8 43	22 43
<b>Date Certainty</b>						
■ Certain						
■ Uncertain						

**FIGURE 57. SARDIS, DEPOSIT 3. COINS FOUND UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE MAIN HALL OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF SARDIS. ALL 65 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

## 10. Italy

### X. Ostia

URL: <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue/ostia/>

Longitude: 41.733244 Latitude: 12.278939

**Bibliography:** Floriani Squarciapino M. 1961, "La Sinagoga di Ostia," in: *Bollettino d'arte*, Vol. 46, pp. 326–337; Zovatto P. 1961, "Le antiche Sinagoghe di Aquileia e di Ostia," in: *Memorie storiche forogiuliesi*, Vol. 44, pp. 53–63; Floriani Squarciapino M. 1962, "La Sinagoga recentemente scoperta ad Ostia," in: *RednPontAcc*, Vol. 34, pp. 119–132; Hempel H.L. 1962, "Synagogenfund in Ostia Antica," in: *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Vol. 74, pp. 72–73; Floriani Squarciapino M. 1963a, "Ebrei a Roma e ad Ostia," in: *StRom*, Vol. 11, pp. 129–141; Floriani Squarciapino M. 1963b, "The Synagogue at Ostia," in: *Archaeology*, Vol. 16, pp. 194–203; Floriani Squarciapino M. 1963c, "Die Synagoge von Ostia nach der Zweiten Ausgrabungskampagne," in: *Raggi. Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie*, Vol. 5, pp. 13–17; Floriani Squarciapino M. 1963d, "The Most Ancient Synagogue Known from Monumental Remains," in: *Illustrated London News*, Vol.28, pp. 468–471; Floriani Squarciapino M. 1964, *La Sinagoga di Ostia*, Rome; Becatti G. 1969, *Scavi di Ostia, 6. Edificio con opus sectile fuori Porta Marina*, Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato; Floriani Squarciapino M. 1972, "Plotius Fortunatus archisynagogus," in: *La Rassegna mensile di Israel*, Vol. 36, pp. 183–191; Zevi F. 1972, "La Sinagoga di Ostia," in: *Rassegna mensile di Israel*, Vol. 38, pp. 131–145; Meiggs R. 1973, *Roman Ostia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Kraabel, A.T. 1974, "Synagogues, Ancient," in: *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement*, pp. 436–439; Foerster G. 1981, "A survey of Ancient Diaspora Synagogues," in: Levine L. (ed.), *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, pp. 164–171; Kraabel, A.T. 1981, "Social Systems of Six Diaspora Synagogues," in: Gutman J. (ed.), *Ancient Synagogues: The State of Research*, Chico CA, pp. 79–91; Kraabel, A.T. 1982a, "The Excavated Synagogues of Late Antiquity from Asia Minor to Italy," in: *Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress*, Vol. 16.2.2, pp. 227–236; Boersma J. 1985, *Amoenissima Civitas: Block 5.2 at Ostia, Description and Analysis of Visible Remains*, Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum; Fine, S. and Della Pergola S, 1995, "The Synagogue of Ostia and Its Torah Shrine," in: Goodnick J. (ed.), *The Jewish Presence in Ancient Rome*, Jerusalem, pp. 42–57; Kraabel, A.T. 1995, "The Diaspora Synagogue: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence since Sukenik," in: Urman D. and Flesher P. (eds.), *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery, Vol. 1*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 95–126 (reprint); White M. 1997, "Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence," in: *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1, pp. 23–58; White M. 1998, "Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia. Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence," in: Donfried K.P. and Richardson P. (eds.), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, Grand Rapids, pp. 30–68; Binder D. 1999, *Into the Temple Courts. The Place of the Synagogue in the Second Temple Period*, pp. 322–335;

Runesson A. 1999, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora. A Response to L. Michael White," in: *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 92, pp. 409–433; White M. 1999, "Reading the Ostia synagogue: A reply to A. Runesson," in: *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4, pp. 435–464; Olsson B. Mitternacht D. and Brandt O. (eds.), 2001, *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome*, Stockholm; Runesson A. 2002, "A Monumental Synagogue from the First Century," in: *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 33, pp. 171–220; Spagnoli E. 2007, "Evidenze numismatiche dal territorio di Ostia antica (età repubblicana– età flavia)," in: *Presenza e circolazione della moneta in area vesuviana. Atti del XIII Convegno organizzato dal Centro internazionale di studi numismatici e dall'Università di Napoli "Federico II", Napoli 30 maggio–1 giugno 2003*, Rome: Istituto italiano di numismatica, pp. 233–388; Williams D. 2014, "Digging in the Archives: A Late Roman Coin Assemblage from the Synagogue at Ancient Ostia (Italy)," in: *American Journal of Numismatics*, Vol. 26, pp. 245–273; Nongbri B. 2015, "Archival Research on the Excavation of the Synagogue of Ostia: A Preliminary Report," in: *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, Vol. 46, pp. 366–402

#### Websites:

- The Ostia Foundation:

<https://www.ostia-foundation.org/ostia-synagogue-series/>

- Fasti Online:

[http://www.fastionline.org/micro\\_view.php?itemkey=fst\\_cd&fst\\_cd=AIAC\\_2521](http://www.fastionline.org/micro_view.php?itemkey=fst_cd&fst_cd=AIAC_2521)

- The Ostia synagogue Area Excavations (OSMAP):

[https://www.laits.utexas.edu/isac/web/OSMAP/OSMAP\\_Home.html](https://www.laits.utexas.edu/isac/web/OSMAP/OSMAP_Home.html)

<https://ostiasynagogue.wordpress.com/>

**Region:** Latium

**Date Excavated:** 1. 1961-1964  
2. 1977

**Excavators:** 1. Maria Floriani Squarciapino  
2. Maria Floriani Squarciapino

**Archaeological Information:** Areas A, B, C, D, E, F, and G in Building IV.17.1

**Date of Construction of the Building:** 1. Phase I: second half 1st century CE  
2. Intermediary Period: first half 2<sup>nd</sup> century  
3. Phase II: 4<sup>th</sup> century, after 340 CE<sup>1029</sup>

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<sup>1029</sup> These are the three phases as laid out by Maria Floriani Squarciapino and later researchers of the Ostia synagogue. However, renewed research by Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht and Olof Brandt, as well as archaeological and archival research conducted by Brent Nongbri, as well as L. Michael White of the University of Texas at Austin under the auspices of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici di Ostia has revealed that these

**Place of the Building within the Settlement:** Near the ancient seashore along the Via Severiana, outside the official city walls.<sup>1030</sup>

**Description of the Building:**<sup>1031</sup>

Phase I: This complex consisted of rooms B, C, D, and G only, forming a large, rectangular building with a concave wall on the western side. The main hall of the synagogue building was room D; a room with benches (described as “masonry seats for the faithful”<sup>1032</sup>) and a podium on the west side. To the east of this hall lay three rooms, Area C, consisting of four columns forming a square with partition walls with doors on either side of the pairs of columns (the vestibule). Areas B and G to the east had no divisions, making this area one room.<sup>1033</sup> There were three entrances to the complex from the north and three from the east (the direction of Jerusalem). All floors were covered with *cocciopesto* floors (= *opus signinum*). In front of the complex to the east were a well and cistern.

Intermediary Phase: It is not clear what features this phase included.<sup>1034</sup> Perhaps Area B was now divided by wooden walls. Perhaps a Torah shrine, which Floriani Squarciapino repeatedly mentions in her publication but of which there are no archaeological remains, was installed in this phase. Perhaps the mosaic floor of room 10/G (“the room with the oven”) was laid in this Phase. This phase remains unclear but probably contained many renovations and adaptations to the building.

Phase II: The building complex was enlarged and Areas A, F, and E were added. Area A, to the

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phases are no longer accurate. The synagogue building seems to have been in use between the first and fifth century and had many separate renovation or reconstruction phases, probably often only conducted in one area of the complex. Magness believes there is no definite evidence that the building was used as a synagogue before the 4<sup>th</sup> century. However, because no final report of the new research has been published yet, I am following the old division of the architectural history of the building.

<sup>1030</sup> The synagogue was discovered by accident in 1961 during work on an expressway leading to the international airport of Fiumicino (Floriani Squarciapino 1963b, p. 195).

<sup>1031</sup> Based on Olsson *et al.* 2001, pp. 30-34, who base their analysis on the many published but often contradictory reports by Squarciapino. From their research, it is clear that there is still much confusion about the architectural history of the building and its precise dates. The intermediate phase and its date, for example, have not been treated as thoroughly as they should, and many features and measurements of the building are not mentioned at all (See also the debates between White and Runesson, who place different floor levels and installations found in Room G in different construction phases). Hopefully, the renewed excavations by UT Austin will provide much needed clarity on the history of the building.

<sup>1032</sup> Squarciapino 1963d, p. 469.

<sup>1033</sup> Perhaps this Phase had benches in rooms G and B, and this area acted as a triclinium (Runesson 1999 and 2002).

<sup>1034</sup> Olsson *et al.* 2001, p. 33.



east of the building, became the new vestibule, containing the well but covering the cistern, and having one entrance on the east side and one on the north. The entrance from the north was flanked by two marble columns; the room had a marble floor in which was found part of an inscription known as the Mindius Faustus inscription. Area B was divided into three rooms and was separated from room G. All these rooms had mosaic floors. The northern-most room (B1) had a shallow water basin with a floor paved in *cocciopesto*. Perhaps Area G now received an oven as well as a table with a marble top, and some amphorae were sunk into the pavement. At a later point, the mosaic floor was covered by a rough floor of earth, ash, and fragments of marble and terracotta. Beneath this rough floor but above the mosaic floor, several terracotta oil lamps of the 5<sup>th</sup> century were found, decorated with menorahs. The main hall of the synagogue was paved with *opus sectile* and the benches were removed. The podium was retained and renovated. Later, a Torah shrine was added, standing on a podium that could be reached by four steps. At a later date, this podium was enlarged. All doors coming from the north were blocked and more supporting walls and columns were added, suggesting a vaulted roof. Room F is a short corridor to the west of room G, giving access to room E: a room with broad benches, perhaps a triclinium.

**Deposit 1:**

**Date Deposit Excavated:** June 7, 1962

**Deposit Location:** Under the mosaic floor of a side room of the intermediary phase of the synagogue

**Archaeological Information:** Quadro 4B, in room 10 of Building IV.17.1 (Area/Room G)

**Certain Association with the Building itself?** Yes

**Deposit Retrievable?** No

**Deposit Type:** IB6

**Deposit Description:** The final phase of Room 10 or G (“the chamber with the oven”) had a rough floor of earth, ash, and fragments of marble and terracotta, which may have been connected to the cooking area in the room or the marble-topped table found there.<sup>1035</sup> Underneath this floor, archaeologists discovered a fine white and black mosaic floor with a variety of decorative motifs. According to the excavators, the cooking installations were added on top of this floor, at which point also large jars, connected to each other by low plinths, were sunk into the floor.<sup>1036</sup> Underneath this fine mosaic floor was a floor of

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<sup>1035</sup> Squarciapino 1963b, p. 200; White 1997, p. 31.

<sup>1036</sup> Squarciapino 1963b, p. 200; Squarciapino 1964, p. 24. Unfortunately, this is one of the excavated areas that is still very confusing. The archaeologists took out the rough, upper floor in this room completely, making it impossible to check how this floor connected with the oven and table. Was the table, for example, introduced later than the oven or at the same time? Were they both placed on top of the mosaic floor as Squarciapino claims, or

*cocciopesto*, or “pounded pottery.” It is in this layer between the mosaic floor and the *cocciopesto* surface (also called *opus signinum*, a building technique made of tiles broken into very small pieces mixed with mortar and then beaten down) that 51 bronze coins were found together. Room 10 is located southeast of the synagogue hall but is part of the larger synagogue complex. The coin deposit was found under the mosaic floor in the northern half of this room (in the southwest corner of “Quadro 4B”), 60 cm away from the table with a marble slab towards the southwest corner of the room.<sup>1037</sup> The coins were found stuck in a layer composed of the lime setting for the mosaic, about 13 cm above the *cocciopesto* surface.<sup>1038</sup> Because, according to Floriani Squarciapino, the kitchen installations were not connected with the *cocciopesto* floor, the function of this room in its initial phase was interpreted as a “large chamber for prayer,” a street-front shop, or a triclinium.<sup>1039</sup>

### Container Present? No

**Description of Coins:** The 51 bronze coins found in this deposit were published by Daniella Williams in 2014 after her research in the Ostia archives.<sup>1040</sup> The card catalogue that she discovered on the coins is very detailed and gives, in addition to the obverse and reverse of each coins, also the state of preservation, weight, provenance [=context], date of acquisition, and bibliography.<sup>1041</sup>

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were they placed on top of the *cocciopesto* floor, in which case they are older than the second phase of the building complex. Were there one or multiple *cocciopesto* floors in this area? (see also the debate between White and Runesson, in which White believes there were at least five different floors in Area G, and that the original building was not a synagogue, but a private two-story building with street-front shops). Patterns on the mosaics further suggest that at some point this room was divided by wooden walls into smaller sections, but we do not know the reason for this. Lamps found between the rough floor and the mosaic floor suggest a date for the rough floor in the 5th century. The coin deposit found underneath the mosaic has a *terminus post quem* of 340 CE, giving this floor a considerably later date than any date proposed by the excavators or later researchers. Perhaps the architectural history of the building needs to be divided up into many more phases than assumed. Renewed archaeological and archival research of the synagogue building by the University of Texas at Austin between 2000 and 2010 will hopefully shed more light on these issues, as already demonstrated by Nongbri’s preliminary report from 2015 (Nongbri 2015, pp. 380-381).

<sup>1037</sup> Williams 2014, p. 246. See her article for an overview of what happened to the coins after their discovery.

<sup>1038</sup> Nongbri 2015, p. 380, note 41: Nongbri gives the report on the find as it was written in the *Giornali* by Floriani Squarciapino on June 7, 1962. The translation from Italian to English is mine.

<sup>1039</sup> Squarciapino 1963b, p. 201; White 1997 and 1999; Runesson 1999 and 2002.

<sup>1040</sup> Williams 2014, p. 247: she notes that, “Unfortunately, it has not been possible to retrieve the actual group of specimens from the synagogue, which leaves the card catalogue in the archives (ex ASBAO) as the only record of their existence (record 9-59).” The catalogue was published in Italian: the English translations are mine.

<sup>1041</sup> Williams 2014, p. 248. Unfortunately, the bibliography only refers to the 1888 coin catalogue of Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l’empire romain communément appelées médailles imperiales*, which is outdated.

The group of coins is chronologically uniform, ranging from 327-328 CE to 337-347 CE, with coins minted by Constans I (31.5%), Constantine I (27.5%), Constantius II (21.5%), and Constantine II (19.5%). Coins minted at eastern mints are rare, with most of the coins minted in Rome, in contrast to the synagogue deposits found in Israel. One coin was minted at Lugdunum (Constantine I?, 335 CE). 28 coins are of the GLORIA EXERCITVS type (55%),<sup>1042</sup> while eleven coins are of the SECVRITAS type (21%), six are of the CONSTANTINOPOLIS with Victoria on a prow type (12%), four coins are of the VIRTVS AVGVSTI type (8%), and two are VRBS ROMA with She-wolf coins (4%).<sup>1043</sup>

Locus..	End Date..	Minting Place							Total	
		Antioch	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Lugdunum	Nicomedia	Rome	Thessalonica		Unknown
Null	328		1							1
	330						1			1
	333							1		1
	334			2						2
	335	1			1	1	4		1	8
	336		1				3	1		5
	337						2	1	1	4
	340						25		2	27
	347								2	2
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Date Certainty</b>										
■ Certain										

**FIGURE 58. OSTIA, DEPOSIT 1. COINS FOUND UNDER THE MOSAIC FLOOR OF THE ROOM G (THE ROOM WITH THE OVEN) OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF OSTIA. ALL 51 COINS ARE BRONZE.**

<sup>1042</sup> Only one belongs to the heavier series: Constantine I, 327-328 CE (3.1 grams, with Constantine in military dress on the reverse).

<sup>1043</sup> Williams believes they were accidental losses because “of the deposit’s small size, together with the fact that they were actually found embedded in the preparation layer of the mosaic floor” (Williams 2014, p. 249).

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