

ETHNICITY, IDENTITY, AND INSTITUTION

ETHNICITY, IDENTITY, AND INSTITUTION: THE RELEVANCE OF ETHNIC
IDENTITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIASPORA SYNAGOGUES

BY: WHITNEY ROSS, B.A.

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the relevance of ethnic boundary maintenance for the development of Diaspora synagogues in the Graeco-Roman world. By investigating the possible relationship between ethnicity and synagogue development, the synagogue will be analyzed as a communal and 'religious' institution that contributed to the maintenance of a specific ethnic identity within a Diaspora context that challenged its very survival and existence. The main goal of the present study is to provide a new perspective of development and maintenance for Diaspora synagogues that eschews the idea of a dichotomous relationship between these synagogues and the Jerusalem Temple. Instead, a socio-historical approach will be presented that focuses on Jewish communities as a distinctive ethnic group that existed alongside other similar groups in the Graeco-Roman world and sought to maintain their collective ethnic identity. The synagogue served as a key driving force within this process of maintenance.

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1. Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

The Graeco-Roman Diaspora was a cultural context in which Jewish communities engaged and interacted with pagan associations and factions of the Jesus movement (in the later Roman period), and lived under foreign rule. The position that these Diaspora Jewish communities found themselves within was one of a foreign culture in which their own traditions and practices differed from those alongside which they existed. The presence of these Jewish communities within a Diaspora context indicates that some kind of maintenance of their specific ethnic and religious identity took place. One possible institutional setting for this identity maintenance was that of the ancient synagogue. The present study seeks to explore the relevance of Jewish ethnic identity for the development of Diaspora synagogues. In investigating the possible relationship between ethnicity and synagogue development, the synagogue will be analyzed as a communal and religious institution that contributed to the maintenance of a specific ethnic identity within a context that challenged its very survival and existence. While such aspects of Diaspora synagogues have previously sometimes been assumed, no in-depth study exists that has argued this case in detail and in dialogue with contemporary studies on ethnic identity. The available archaeological evidence situates the examination of this perspective within the Graeco-Roman Diaspora. Specifically, this inquiry will explore the Diaspora from the mid second century BCE to the first century CE with a detailed analysis of the oldest synagogue buildings of the Diaspora, namely, Delos and Ostia.

1.2. Diaspora Synagogues and Previous Scholarship

A variety of perspectives concerning the development of the synagogue in the Diaspora exist in contemporary scholarship. Prominent to many of these considerations is the nature of the Diaspora synagogue itself, and its relationship to the structures and religious institutions in Jerusalem. Quite often, the Diaspora synagogue is viewed within a dichotomous relationship with the Jerusalem temple and its functions. A common trend is to place a strong emphasis upon the need of Jewish communities to reconstruct an institution that could parallel functions of the Jerusalem temple, both in ideological and symbolic terms. Discussion concerning the development of these synagogues as connected to the removed nature of Jewish communities from the Jerusalem Temple are valid, but at the same time problematic. It cannot be assumed that this was the only, or even the main, underlying force behind the development.¹

Similarly, this relationship between the Diaspora synagogue and Jerusalem is further extended by many studies that construe the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE as a point of departure. For instance, Paul V.M. Flesher has suggested that following the destruction of the Temple the synagogue was enabled to develop in new directions.² This widely held perspective is relevant for the examination of synagogues after 70 CE, but it obscures the reality and existence of Diaspora Judaism and synagogues prior to this date.³

¹ Cf. Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2001), 110-123.

² Paul V.M. Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a Theory of Early Synagogue Development," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity III: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, vol. 4: The Problem of the Ancient Synagogue*, (ed. Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 121.

³ Flesher does provide his own theory of synagogue development within the Diaspora prior to 70 CE and this will be discussed extensively in chapter two.

A glaring discrepancy, therefore, exists in the examination of the Diaspora synagogue outside of this relationship with the Land and the fall of the Temple in 70 CE. In the Graeco-Roman Diaspora in particular, we must ask what possible factors motivated the development and maintenance of synagogues by Jewish communities. Above all, the need to consider the establishment of synagogues in the Diaspora firmly within a socio-historical context in the Diaspora itself must be acknowledged. Specifically, any exploration of the development of these synagogues must emphasize the socio-historical and religious reality of the Jewish community that these institutions served. In doing so, we must look more closely at these communities with regard to their collective identity. While Jewish communities existed alongside other diverse groups and communities that may have challenged this collective identity, they were still able to retain their identity. This negotiation of intersecting identities that Jews in antiquity were immersed within leads us to consider what comprised this collective identity and how it was able to continue. The collective identity that was maintained and expressed by Jewish communities was a specific ethnic identity that was connected to their religious practices and traditions. The Diaspora synagogue can, and should, be examined with this expression and continuance of Jewish ethnic identity in mind. Specifically, we may consider Jewish ethnic identity as one possible factor that influenced the development of synagogues in the Diaspora. It is important, however, that the hypothesis that Jewish communities established centers of communal identity formation, such as synagogues, be considered alongside, not directly within, the perceived relationship with the Jerusalem Temple and the Land of Israel.

1.3 Methods, Approaches, Perspective

A socio-historical approach to the question of the Diaspora synagogue and its development is necessary. I define socio-historical to mean an approach within which the source material is grounded in an analysis that seeks to explore and examine various social, cultural, and political factors within the given historical period of investigation. The interdisciplinary nature of synagogue studies allows for the consideration of new perspectives of synagogue development and maintenance in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora with this specific contextual setting in mind. I intend to demonstrate the ways in which Jewish ethnic identity contributed to Diaspora synagogue development through the use of a social scientific model that builds upon constructs of ethnicity in antiquity, and modern perspectives of ethnicity. Modern theories of ethnicity have continually stressed that ethnic identity and a common ethnic bond exists, and is observable, due to contexts that require group interaction. Ethnicity is thus dependent upon a social relationship or context that allows distinctive groups to exist and interact amongst one another. A particular ethnic identity was maintained through the development of ethnic boundaries that emerged through such a social context. These boundaries served as the markers of identity, and functioned to crystalize the common ethnic bond within the given group. In regards to Jewish communities, we may consider that a common Jewish ethnic bond was developed, and reinforced, through ethnic boundaries in relation to other groups within the Diaspora. The synagogue served as a communal space through which Jews were able to maintain their ethnic bond and construct ethnic boundaries in a foreign environment.

A hazard of approaching any object of historical investigation with sociological tools is the possibility of the incorporation of anachronistic tendencies, which may result in a misguided, and far-reaching, theoretical foundation. These modern frameworks are thus used here in a heuristic manner; they are not absolute or conclusive, nor are they to be seen as exhaustive. Rather, such an understanding of ethnicity and identity is meant to allow for the possibility of conceiving the development of the Diaspora synagogue in a new, and hopefully better, light than previous approaches have allowed for.

With a theoretical framework in place, evidence will be sought from the available sources of this time period. Any socio-historical investigation of the synagogue must engage with material culture and the social realia of antiquity. Key to the understanding of synagogues as part of Jewish ethnic boundaries is the available archaeological evidence. Archaeological evidence is imperative in understanding the location and function of the synagogues in the context of the ancient cities in which they were found. In order to grasp the significance of these institutions within Jewish communities, one must first understand the physical reality of these structures within their ancient context. This, however, requires a certain level of interpretation, as consensus regarding archaeological evidence is often difficult. An essential part of this interpretive process exists in relation to relevant textual sources contemporary to the period of study. The archaeological remains of these synagogues cannot be divorced from literary evidence if one desires to achieve an interpretation that is as objective as the complex

nature of the sources will allow. The inclusion of textual sources within this study is thus fundamental, but will serve as only one component of a larger method.

The aim of the current study's approach is grounded upon the belief that by working with archaeological data and material culture, alongside textual sources, an emphasis on the socio-historical reality of Jews in the Diaspora may be established. As such, any conclusions drawn will be situated within, and remain responsible to, this very context of life in the ancient Diaspora. Overall, such a framework will allow one to contribute to an important point of discussion within synagogue studies: What lies behind a Jewish community in antiquity that allowed it to maintain itself, and to develop a shared communal space to reinforce this maintenance? In order to provide possible answers to this question, the development of these synagogues and the factors behind their continued maintenance will be discussed from a position that emphasizes the social history of Jewish communities in antiquity.

1.4 Procedure

A summary and analysis of past and current scholarship is necessary for one to understand the need for new considerations regarding the development of the Diaspora synagogue. An examination of the state of the question reveals that many perspectives are constructed upon assumptions and presuppositions that are commonly associated with the Diaspora synagogue, but may not be entirely accurate. Through this detailed analysis of theories put forth by scholars (chapter two), the place of the present study in current scholarship will be clearly demonstrated. A major focus of this analysis will be the

respective works of A.T. Kraabel and Paul V.M. Flesher. These represent the most comprehensive models of synagogue development and maintenance that have been proposed in recent scholarship, and will thus be discussed.

Having established the necessity within current scholarship for a socio-historical emphasis on the Diaspora and Jewish ethnic identity, chapter three will provide such a theoretical framework and approach. Discussions concerning ethnic and religious identity in antiquity, institutional realities, as well as the important task of defining what a synagogue was in antiquity will be presented. From there, modern discourses concerning ethnicity and identity formation will be consulted in light of the consensus reached regarding the synagogue and ethnicity in antiquity.

With a theoretical model and new approach to the Diaspora synagogue regarding ethnic identity firmly in place, chapter four will involve two archaeological case studies against which the present hypothesis may be tested. This chapter is divided in two parts; the first presents a comprehensive examination of the Delos synagogue, while the second focuses on the synagogue at Ostia. These two synagogues represent the oldest archaeological remains of synagogues in the Diaspora and thus serve as the most effective case studies to be undertaken.

Lastly, in chapter five, the conclusions of the study, as well as suggestions for further research, will be presented. These conclusions will briefly summarize the results and queries raised within the previous chapters, including the case studies. In doing so, questions will be raised, which point to the necessity of establishing a new

perspective concerning commonly held perceptions of the Diaspora synagogue and Jewish Diaspora communities.

2. The Diaspora Synagogue and Previous Scholarship

2.1 Common Trends in the Study of Diaspora Synagogues

The Diaspora synagogue, as an object of study, has generated considerable debate in recent scholarship. The majority of scholarship can be categorized into two common trends that have both clarified, yet problematized, the image of the Diaspora synagogue held in contemporary scholarship today. The first trend seeks to understand and examine the Diaspora synagogue solely in a post 70 CE climate; that is, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple during the revolt against Rome is viewed as a main point of departure and synagogues prior to this event do not receive adequate attention. The second trend situates the Diaspora synagogue within a dichotomous relationship with the structures and religious institutions in Jerusalem, specifically the Temple and the sacrificial cult. Anders Runesson has termed this trend as the ‘deprivation argument’; according to this argument the synagogue is seen as a response to the absence of, or distance from, the Jerusalem Temple within specific Jewish communities.⁴ As we are dealing with Diaspora synagogues within a pre 70 CE context, this deprivation argument appears often in scholarly discourse, and dominates many of the leading perspectives in contemporary scholarship.

These two trends fluctuate between concerns with the origins of Diaspora synagogues and the survival of these synagogues in a Diaspora context. The present study is primarily concerned with issues regarding the survival and maintenance of Diaspora synagogues, but as we shall see, the question of origins regularly factors into theories and

⁴ Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue*, 163.

assumptions on which scholars draw their conclusions. While these two trends have increased our knowledge and awareness of several aspects of the Diaspora synagogue, they have also overlooked other possible factors and considerations. Our main concern with Diaspora synagogues in the Graeco-Roman context will largely confine the current analysis to works found within the second trend of synagogue scholarship, but discussions concerning 70 CE as a point of departure are still prevalent. The majority of the analysis will focus on the two most thoroughly argued models of Diaspora synagogue development, by Kraabel and Flesher. A close, critical evaluation of these two scholars will demonstrate that they are grounded upon general assumptions that may contribute to an inaccurate characterization of Diaspora synagogues and the Jewish communities that developed these institutions. Thus, in order to understand the present need for a reorganization of scholarly discourse pertaining to Diaspora synagogues, an analysis of these current trends must be conducted.

2.2 The City Gate as Forerunner for Diaspora Synagogues

Lee Levine has produced one of the more comprehensive studies on the ancient synagogue, in which he champions the city gate as the early forerunner of this ancient institution. According to Levine, the city gate is a possible framework for the synagogue that served similar purposes in previous centuries, particular in Judaea.⁵ While this theory may not directly pertain to the Graeco-Roman Diaspora, Levine suggests that a city gate was not a viable option for Jewish communities living in the Diaspora; in a

⁵ Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 29.

pagan city, Jewish communities would have been unable to use the city-gate area.⁶ This lack of a city gate option may have contributed to the development of synagogues in the Diaspora, with the synagogues paralleling many similar functions of the city gate. Levine asserts that it was vital for these communities to establish a new framework by which they could sustain their communal identity within a foreign context.⁷ That is, because Jews in the Diaspora were unable to assemble in the city-gate area like their Judaeian counterparts, they were required to adapt to a new environment. The city gate argument is compelling, but it too becomes, in a way, its own version of the ‘deprivation argument’ without the Temple. In this manner, the synagogue is once again viewed as filling the void of a previous institution or similar phenomenon. This certainly was one possible factor for the existence of synagogues in the Diaspora, but it is important to consider other influences outside of a deprivation ideology. The question of origins Diaspora synagogues, pertaining to their origins and maintenance, is never quite resolved in Levine’s approach. The city-gate theory is primarily concentrated on synagogues in Palestine, and Diaspora synagogues are much more of a secondary focus.

One of the strengths of Levine’s approach, however, is the importance he bestows upon the synagogue with regard to its function in ancient Jewish communities. He believes that the synagogue was a central institution, especially for those Jews that wished to preserve their own unique identity; he claims that the synagogue was a *sine qua non* for Jewish communities and their identity preservation.⁸ Perceiving the synagogue as

⁶ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 44.

⁷ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 44.

⁸ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 127.

essential in order to preserve and maintain one's own identity is significant, as it provides another possible factor alongside those associated with the deprivation argument. This is not one of Levine's most developed points, as it falls outside of the scope of his study, but it is, perhaps, one of the most valuable suggestions he raises.

Donald Binder proposed a similar theory of synagogue origins with the city gate and temple courts as forerunners of the ancient synagogue. He claims that the synagogue allowed Jews to be connected with the Temple, despite being at a removed distance. He suggests that this was possible because the synagogues "served as spatial vortices" that created a relationship between the community and the Temple.⁹ This argument was developed at length by Binder for Palestinian synagogues, and was also applied to Diaspora synagogues. He suggests that Diaspora synagogues were similar sacred precincts that allowed Jewish individuals to be connected with the Temple in Jerusalem.¹⁰ His main proposal regarding Diaspora synagogues is that these buildings arose from similar gatherings that were held outside the cities or near public squares.¹¹ Binder's Temple Court hypothesis is quite compelling as a theory of origins, but it is not entirely concerned with the survival and maintenance of these Diaspora synagogues after their establishment. As a result, we need to explore other models for synagogue development, which views the institution in the Diaspora in direct relation to the Jerusalem Temple.

⁹ Donald D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 38.

¹⁰ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 232-233.

¹¹ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 232-233.

2.3 Egyptian Diaspora and the Jerusalem Temple

Aryeh Kasher's study of Diaspora synagogues focuses on Jewish communities in Egypt. It is still relevant to the present discussion, however, since it is a good example of the deprivation argument. His discussion begins with the acknowledgement that synagogues were built with "the deliberate intention that they should resemble the Jerusalem Temple in their functions."¹² Kasher sees this desire to resemble and recreate an institution similar to the Jerusalem Temple as the main underlying factor behind the development of synagogues within this Diaspora. An important distinction that Kasher makes, which should be highlighted, is that these synagogues were erected to resemble, but not replace, the Temple.¹³ A similar view is that of Steven Fine's who suggests that being part of synagogue life did not restrict one's commitment and devotion to the central sanctuary, the Temple.¹⁴ This distinction by Kasher marks a broadening of the common deprivation argument, as it suggests that the desire was not to replace the Temple. The reality is, however, that the argument still understands the development of the Diaspora synagogue in relation to an absence of the Jerusalem Temple in the life of Jewish communities in Egypt.

There are, however, some important points brought forth by Kasher, in addition to the synagogue and its relationship with the Temple. In particular, the significant role he attributes to the synagogue within these Jewish communities should be

¹² Aryeh Kasher, "Synagogues as 'Houses of Prayer' and 'Holy Places' in the Jewish Communities of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery* (ed. Dan Urman and Paul V.M. Flesher; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 206.

¹³ Kasher, "Synagogues as 'Houses of Prayer'," 206.

¹⁴ Steven Fine, "From Meeting House to Sacred Realm: Holiness and the Ancient Synagogue," in *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World* (ed. Steven Fine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22.

acknowledged. He focuses heavily on the socio-historical reality of these synagogues and the Jewish communities that they served. He further asserts that the synagogue held a central place in Jewish religious life, and consequently held a central place in its social and organization life.¹⁵ This connection between the religious life and social life of Jewish communities is quite often overlooked in earlier synagogue studies. Runesson, in his extensive overview of scholarship, notes that the synagogue is often defined as either a social or religious institution, creating a false dichotomy between the two.¹⁶ This dichotomy is something that continually re-emerges in scholarship and needs to be abandoned. There is today a need to focus on the fuller picture of Jewish Diaspora communities and their socio-historical context as it relates to the synagogue.

2.4 A.T. Kraabel and ‘Exile Ideology’

Moving away from specific theories of origins, A.T. Kraabel’s work on Diaspora synagogues has largely focused on factors that contributed to its survival and success outside of Judaea. His hypothesis concerning Diaspora synagogues falls within the second trend of scholarship that focuses on the synagogue in relation to the Jerusalem Temple; although, the relationship with the Temple refers not to the Second Temple period but rather to the Babylonian period. It is important to note that the intent of his hypothesis is “to account for the survival and even the success of synagogue Judaism in the cities of the Greco-Roman world”.¹⁷ Thus, he is not as concerned with the origins of the Diaspora

¹⁵ Kasher, “Synagogues as ‘Houses of Prayer,’” 213.

¹⁶ Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue*, 167.

¹⁷ A.T. Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity Among Diaspora Synagogues,” in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel* (ed. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S.

synagogue as with the factors that contributed to the continued existence of this institution within its Diaspora context. His hypothesis for the survival of the Diaspora synagogue is founded upon a notion of ideological perceptions of past exile and survival. His main thesis states that the Judaism of the synagogue in the Diaspora should be understood as “the grafting of a transformed biblical ‘exile’ ideology onto a Greco-Roman form of social organization.”¹⁸ He claims that this grafting did not result in just an ideological mentality, but the building and community of the synagogue itself.¹⁹ According to Kraabel, the time between Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire of Augustus resulted in the demise of social units. In order to combat the loss of these social units, groups began taking shape as voluntary organizations that allowed them to cope with being within a diverse context with various other groups.²⁰

This brief summary of Kraabel’s hypothesis for the development and survival of Diaspora synagogues leads to several observations. In particular, his suggestion of a transformed exile ideology as a main contributing factor to the Diaspora synagogue’s success merits further attention. According to Kraabel, the success of Diaspora Jews, and their synagogues, can be attributed to them being prepared to survive by three historical events: the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria, the Babylonian exile, and the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans. As the third event falls outside of our pre-70 context, it is primarily the first two events we shall be concerned with here.

MacLennan; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 21; repr. from *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee I. Levine; Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987).

¹⁸ Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity,” 21.

¹⁹ Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity,” 21.

²⁰ Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity,” 24.

While Kraabel claims that both of these first two events profoundly affected Judaism with the result that ‘exile’ became a “permanent element” within it, he focuses predominantly on the Babylonian exile.²¹ Regarding the Northern Kingdom’s fall, Kraabel states that many Jews assimilated into the Assyrian population, whereas the Babylonian exile had profoundly different results. It is not made clear as to how an event that occurred in 722 BCE, hundreds of years prior to the Graeco-Roman Diaspora context Kraabel is working within, prepared, or encouraged Jews to build synagogues. This problem appears to have troubled Kraabel as well, as indicated by his underdeveloped discussion of the topic. It appears that the inclusion of this event was a way to create a fuller depiction of his ‘exile ideology’, although Kraabel himself asserts that it was particularly the second event that had a greater impact.²²

Turning to the Babylonian exile, it is evident that Kraabel places a lot of emphasis on this event and the later development of synagogues in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora. Despite stating that he is concerned with the survival of the Diaspora synagogue, Kraabel makes a bold statement concerning the question of synagogue origins when he writes that, “ideologically and socially the Babylonian exile was where the synagogue began.”²³ For Kraabel then, the Diaspora synagogues’ origins and continued development is concentrated upon the separation of Jewish communities from Judaea, and the Temple cult, and presumes a strict dependence upon a Diaspora versus land relationship. Further, he claims that following the return from Babylonia, the exile

²¹ Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity,” 28.

²² Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity,” 28.

²³ Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity,” 29.

ideology that was developed there would remain within the Jewish religion. This exile ideology, Kraabel claims, provided Jewish communities in the Graeco-Roman period with “religious symbols, the theology, and a form of social organization sanctioned by earlier generations that would allow Jews to maintain an existence outside of the Holy Land.”²⁴

Kraabel’s conclusions raise at least two issues. First, how did this exile ideology function, and how did it affect the behavior of Jews living within the Graeco-Roman Diaspora? Were the Jewish communities aware of the existence of this ideology and regularly engaged with it while trying to survive in a foreign context? Or, was this an unconscious ideology that still motivated their development of synagogues? The main questions left unanswered here concern how these Jewish communities would have acted within the bounds of this exile ideology, and whether or not they were aware of it. It is unclear how this ideology directly affected, and motivated, the behavior of Jews within the Graeco-Roman Diaspora.

Second, the static use of the word exile within Kraabel’s hypothesis is quite problematic. Using such a term seemingly presumes a commonality between Jewish ideologies and communities from the time of the Babylonian exile to a Graeco-Roman context. To assume such a commonality obscures the historical realities of these two very different periods, not to mention the long period of time between the two. Interestingly, Kraabel asserts that after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, exile theology was transformed into Diaspora theology, losing the problematic term altogether.

²⁴ Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity,” 29.

Overall, Kraabel's account of the survival of the synagogue in the Graeco-Roman period does not actually focus on the contemporary situation of the Diaspora synagogue. Instead of producing an approach specific to the Graeco-Roman Diaspora, Kraabel creates a sweeping historical phenomenon that stretches over seven centuries, from 587/6 BCE to 70 CE. This phenomenon, what he calls the exile ideology, is considered to be the main factor that allowed Jewish communities to develop and maintain synagogues within the Diaspora. Such an approach is reminiscent of earlier theories of synagogue origins and maintenance that argued that the Babylonian period was where the synagogue emerged. Writing in 1934, E.L. Sukenik suggested that dating the origin of the Synagogue in the Babylonian period was a plausible option.²⁵ This view continued to influence scholarship produced after Sukenik. H.H. Rowley claimed that the widely accepted, and right, view is that the institution of the synagogue began among the exiles in Babylon.²⁶ The assumption for this view is that without the Temple, the exiles were forced to meet together in an informal manner to preserve their religion, and in these informal meetings we find the beginnings of the synagogue.²⁷ This position, however, was not without its challengers. Gutmann has argued that the lack of textual or archaeological evidence lends very little credence to the theory of synagogue origins in Babylonia.²⁸ Despite such challenges to this view, it maintained a strong level of support within scholarship. It appears that this view was still popular around the time that Kraabel

²⁵ E.L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 1.

²⁶ H.H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel. Its Forms and Meanings* (London: S.P.C.K., 1967), 224.

²⁷ Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 225.

²⁸ Joseph Gutmann, "The Origin of the Synagogue: The Current State of Research," in *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture* ed. Joseph Gutmann (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1975), 74.

was writing. Just a year prior to proposing his model, Geoffrey Wigoder wrote that the theory that the synagogue was a product of the Babylonian exile was the “most widespread and probable”.²⁹ The influence of this view appears within Kraabel’s model, which asserts the Babylonian exile’s influence to be a primary factor in the development and maintenance of Diaspora synagogues.

The merit in Kraabel’s approach is tied to the emphasis he places upon the Diaspora experience and how Jewish communities would have reacted to it. Unfortunately, Kraabel’s exile ideology is far too general to create an explicit depiction of the socio-historical reality of an individual Jewish community within the Diaspora. This does not mean Kraabel is incorrect in positing such a connection between the Diaspora synagogue and a so-called ‘exile’ from Judaea. Rather, such a suggestion is simply not exhaustive enough; it is possible that this was a factor, but it is not the only one relevant for consideration.

2.5 Paul V.M. Flesher and the Graeco-Roman Temple Genus

Another study that proposes a model for Diaspora synagogue development and survival is that of Paul V.M. Flesher. From the outset, he acknowledges the significance of 70 CE as a point of departure in synagogue studies. He contends that the loss of the Temple was the motivating factor that allowed the role of the synagogue in Jewish communities to expand in new directions.³⁰ The view that it was only after the

²⁹ Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Story of the Synagogue: A Diaspora Museum Book* (London: Weinfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 9.

³⁰ Flesher, “Prolegomenon to a Theory of Early Synagogue Development,” 121.

destruction of the Temple in 70 CE that the synagogue developed into a recognized Jewish institution was a common assumption within earlier scholarship. S.B. Hoenig, for instance, argued that only after the destruction of the Temple did the full emergence of the synagogue begin, and that it is only to be found flourishing after this event.³¹ Support for this view is found widely in later scholarship concerning the synagogue. Rachel Hachlili proposes that prior to 70 CE the synagogue was a marginal institution that flourished only later out of necessity to become sites of local worship and community centers.³² Such a view ignores the function and influence the synagogue as an institution had within Jewish communities prior to the destruction of the Temple.

Despite this acknowledgment on Flesher's part, he focuses his model within a pre 70 CE context; that is, inquiring how synagogues survived prior to the destruction of the Temple. His main goal, however, in hypothesizing about Diaspora synagogues is to understand from where the synagogues in the Galilee and Golan came. He claims that the Palestinian synagogue could not have developed without the Diaspora synagogue's influence.³³ For Flesher then, any attempt to conceive the early stages of Palestinian synagogues must begin with an analysis of Diaspora synagogues. This is somewhat of an inversion of the common dependent relationship between the Diaspora and the Land, and is important to keep this in mind when considering Flesher's model for Diaspora synagogues; the scope and goal of his study of these synagogues is intertwined with those

³¹ S.B. Hoenig, "The Supposititious Temple-Synagogue," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 54.2 (Oct., 1963): 130.

³² Rachel Hachlili, "The Origin of the Synagogue: A Re-Assessment," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 28 (1997): 43.

³³ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 123.

found within the Land. His main goal is to understand the synagogues of the Galilee and Golan, not necessarily Diaspora synagogues.

Flesher's main thesis posits that the synagogue was able to survive in Graeco-Roman society because non-Jews accepted it. He asserts that in order for the synagogue to survive, it had to be accepted by non-Jews; in order for non-Jews to accept the synagogue, they had to perceive of it in terms of their own institutions. Specifically, he suggests that Graeco-Romans understood the Jewish synagogues as belonging to the genus of their own temples, thus allowing the synagogue to survive and flourish.³⁴ In other words, Flesher is more interested in how Graeco-Romans understood the synagogue, not why Jewish communities developed them. In analyzing the synagogue in relation to this temple genus, Flesher's examination is centered upon the notion of shared functions and activities between the two institutions. Before his analysis begins, the presupposition that the synagogue has these similar features is already present; he notes that he shall discuss how an analysis of the synagogue's temple characteristics demands its categorization within the temple genus.³⁵ These temple characteristics are what Flesher deems to be the shared features between the two institutions.

Flesher, working from Walter Burkert's analysis of the Greek temple, isolates three primary activities practiced within Graeco-Roman temples: prayer, sacrifice (not practiced in synagogues according to him), and votive offerings.³⁶ Using evidence from Philo's *Flacc.* (122-4) and Josephus' discussion of ancestral prayers at Sardis (*Ant.*

³⁴ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 123.

³⁵ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 125.

³⁶ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 126.

14:259-61), Flesher supports his claim that prayer existed in synagogues. For proof of the practice of votive offerings, Flesher again turns to Josephus,³⁷ in which he recounts the story of Antiochus Epiphanes' successors giving back the votives from the Jerusalem Temple to the synagogue in Antioch.³⁸ Flesher argues that the synagogues "receipt and display of them makes it like a temple."³⁹ This, however, may be too far-reaching of a conclusion to draw. If we accept Josephus' story as historically accurate, we must consider the special circumstances of this votive offering. This was not a standard giving and reception of votive offerings on behalf of Graeco-Roman pagans; this was an action that bore historical and cultural significance to the recipients. The givers were connected to a historical figure that once plundered the holy shrine of Jerusalem, and these votives were once housed there. Using such an extraordinary account of this practice as the primary piece of supporting evidence compromises the strength of Flesher's argument. Above all, while Flesher can tentatively prove that these activities took place in certain synagogues, this does not 'prove' that the communities consciously understood these practices as part of the Graeco-Roman temple's genus. For instance, he argues that because the community in Antioch displayed the votive offerings in the appropriate manner, they ultimately knew the importance of this practice and consciously "used their synagogue to function as a Graeco-Roman temple in this way."⁴⁰

Donald Binder has written on the display of votives in synagogues and suggests some other plausible connections. While he acknowledges that the display of

³⁷ *J.W.* 7:44-5.

³⁸ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 127-28.

³⁹ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 128.

⁴⁰ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 128.

votive offerings was quite common in Greek or Roman temples,⁴¹ he does not claim that this was the main influence for similar votive displays found in synagogues. Instead, Binder focuses on this practice within the Jerusalem Temple, which occurred with some regularity in the Second Temple period.⁴² He suggests that the display of votive offerings in synagogues was a reflection of this key function of the Jerusalem Temple, and was a way in which these institutions could mirror the center of their tradition.⁴³ Flesher, however, does not examine the possible connections of votive displays and offerings in synagogues with the Jerusalem Temple. He overlooks this parallel within the Temple tradition of ancient Judaism and focuses instead on the Graeco-Roman traditions.

In addition, the dependence upon literary passages to support these claims of primary activities as temple characteristics is problematic. First, the accuracy of these accounts needs consideration. Second, and more importantly, is the isolated nature of these accounts. If a practice occurs in a synagogue in Antioch, does this mean it also occurred in a synagogue in Egypt? In all Diaspora synagogues? One must be very careful in drawing broad conclusions across the diverse Diaspora contexts that we encounter in antiquity. As Kasher has emphasized, “there is no comparing one dispersion to another.”⁴⁴ Flesher is not incorrect in relying on such literary evidence, but his model lacks a specific case study by which it can be corroborated.

Despite this oversight, Flesher makes the assertion that:

when analyzed in taxonomic terms, it becomes clear that the similarities between synagogues and Graeco-Roman temples are not

⁴¹ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 430.

⁴² Cf. *Ant.* 18.313

⁴³ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 431.

⁴⁴ Kasher, “Synagogues as Houses of Prayer,” 206.

random and ad hoc, but indicate that the synagogue belonged to the genus of the Graeco-Roman Temple.⁴⁵

Yet, these similarities could very well be just that: random and ad hoc. Levine has critiqued Flesher's assessment of the synagogue as a Graeco-Roman temple on the basis that the pivotal activity of each was different (public reading of Torah in the synagogue and sacrifices in the temples, respectively).⁴⁶ Leonard Rutgers has similarly argued that it is precisely because worship among Diaspora Jews took other forms besides sacrifice that synagogue buildings differed from both the Temple in Jerusalem, and Greek and Roman temples.⁴⁷ Although Flesher acknowledges this variance, and offers another difference concerning the lack of images in synagogues, he is not concerned with how this dissonance may affect his model, which is built upon similarity. He even goes so far as to admit that the synagogue was likely not a perfect fit within the temple genus, but still attempts to force this classification.⁴⁸ The conclusions that he draws are far too definite for such a hypothesis; a more tentative approach would have served Flesher's theory more appropriately.

Further, the manner in which Flesher construes these shared activities projects the perception that Jews intentionally included these activities in order to have their synagogue fit the genus of the Graeco-Roman temple. He does not adequately deal with what these activities meant to Jewish communities and thus overlooks their importance within a communal setting. It is incorrect to assume that these communities

⁴⁵ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 124.

⁴⁶ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 131.

⁴⁷ Leonard Rutgers, "Diaspora Synagogues: Synagogue Archaeology in the Greco-Roman World," in *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World* (ed. Steven Fine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 69.

⁴⁸ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to an Early Theory of Synagogue Development," 123.

constructed their synagogues solely on the basis of appeasing their non-Jewish counterparts. Therefore, the scope to which he confines his analysis to dictates his approach concerning the development and maintenance of Diaspora synagogues. Essentially, he looks to external forces, rather than internal ones. One of the glaring oversights of this approach is the absence of a discussion specific to what purpose the synagogue served in these Jewish communities. A secondary aspect of his approach does consider the Jewish communities within this temple genus equation, but is chiefly concerned with whether or not the Jews would have viewed their own synagogues within this genus. It does not clearly articulate how the synagogue functioned within these Jewish communities, and what significant roles and functions it served. This is not entirely detrimental, as it is important to understand how non-Jews understood the synagogue. It seems pertinent, however, that when constructing a model of synagogue development and maintenance, the community that this institution served should be considered. To be sure, Graeco-Roman influence and negotiating a place in a foreign context may have dictated some aspects of synagogue development, but it was not the only factor involved. We must seek to explore the development of these institutions from within the very communities in which they were established and maintained. We must probe further into the complex institution that was the ancient synagogue and ask what role it held within, and what it meant to, Jewish communities, not just their non-Jewish counterparts.

Therefore, we have seen how Flesher's model of Diaspora synagogues as Graeco-Roman temples may not be the most ideal line of reasoning if we seek to

understand the development and survival of the Diaspora synagogue. Despite this, Flesher's model does present some important discussions of the synagogue and its role in the community that should be carried forward. Following Burkert's suggestion that the Graeco-Roman temple is a 'monument of common identity', Flesher attributes a similar function to the ancient Diaspora synagogue.⁴⁹ He suggests that a direct link exists between the synagogue and its Jewish community; the synagogue becomes a representation of the community by which it could communicate to the non-Jewish world.⁵⁰ Here, Flesher makes a significant contribution: the synagogue is both an institution by which Jewish communities understand and craft their representation of themselves and the means by which outsiders understand their representation. He, however, does not tie this so-called representation to what it arguably alludes to: that of collective identity. Instead, he deems that the synagogue allowed Jews to negotiate their place in the Diaspora by adapting themselves and their religion to the categories of society.⁵¹ This view of the synagogue as not just a representation of its community, but also a means by which to communicate to the surrounding society about itself is compelling and could offer new perspectives when divorced from the specific category of the Graeco-Roman temple.

⁴⁹ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 140.

⁵⁰ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 141.

⁵¹ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to a theory of Early Synagogue Development," 142.

2.6 Conclusion

The present overview of scholarship has revealed some weaknesses and areas to be further explored, but also some of the strengths of current scholarship. A common trait found within some of these models is the assumption that the collective identity of a Jewish community was intertwined with the synagogue. As we have seen, Levine dubbed the synagogue as a *sine qua non* to preserve Jewish identity,⁵² while Flesher deemed the institution to be a representation of the community that it could display to others.⁵³ In each of these instances, valid observations are set forth, but not developed further; that is, the connection between identity and synagogue has been assumed, but not fully investigated. This assumption is one that should be pursued further; it may shed light on other possible factors that contributed to the development and maintenance of the Diaspora synagogue.

Another strength that should be one of the main foci of any proposed new perspective is the interpretation of the synagogue as a communal institution that incorporated both social and religious elements. This emphasis of communal, social and religious aspects associated with the synagogue is one that should be continually engaged in future models of synagogue development. Not only does it embrace a socio-historical understanding of the institution and its community, it deconstructs the false perception of the synagogue as either a social or religious building.

In terms of some of the gaps that have been revealed, significant areas are lacking critical discussion. One shortcoming illustrated by this overview is the absence of

⁵² Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 127.

⁵³ Flesher, “Prolegomenon to a Early Theory of Synagogue Development,” 141.

a model that can disengage, as much as possible, with the so-called deprivation argument. A model that moves away from observing the synagogue solely in relation to the Jerusalem Temple is needed to move the field forward. In providing such a model, we will be able to construct a fuller picture of Jewish communities living away from the homeland; the absence of the temple was but one difficulty with which these communities had to deal. Such a model of development needs to be expanded to consider less dichotomous scenarios, while acknowledging the significance of the Diaspora experience. Questions that demand consideration include problems pertaining directly to the Jewish communities themselves: how did Jews survive, as Jews, within a foreign context? How did they maintain their Jewishness? Was the synagogue involved in this process? Above all, it is clear that a perspective needs to be proposed that can account for the negotiation of intersecting identities that Jews in antiquity were immersed in under foreign cultural influence and rule.

Conceiving such a new understanding would also solve another issue: the lack of emphasis placed upon the Jewish understanding of their own institutions. As we have seen, some models of development focus less on what the synagogue meant to Jewish communities, and more on their Graeco-Roman counterparts. We must ask more direct questions pertaining to the communities that these institutions served. These include: what did synagogues provide Jewish communities with? How might the functions of this institution benefit the community?

Lastly, perhaps the aspect most needed within a new perspective of Diaspora synagogue development is that of a more specific and concrete approach. Although the

nature of the sources generally encourages the tendency to engage in a more general discussion, this is not always a fruitful endeavor. In short, generalizations will not provide an accurate representation of the Diaspora. The Graeco-Roman Diaspora was not a monolithic entity; any model must observe the realities and characteristics of Jewish communities and their synagogues in the Diaspora as fluid. Acknowledging this fluidity means that these Jewish communities were able to change and react to their own specific Diaspora contexts. With this in mind, any study that lacks concrete case studies to be measured against does not account for the uniqueness of each Diaspora synagogue and its surrounding society. Ideally, any proposed hypothesis should be tested against the earliest available evidence for Graeco-Roman Diaspora synagogues.

3. Ethnicity, Identity, and Institution

3.1 Introductory Remarks

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, a new model for Diaspora synagogue development and survival is necessary. While taking into consideration the distinctive nature of Jewish communities within the Graeco-Roman world, such a model needs to be firmly grounded within the socio-historical context of the Diaspora. Two issues must be addressed before proceeding with constructing such a model. First, a definition of the synagogue must be formulated in order to establish the framework for the model. As we have seen from the previous discussion, one must be careful to not isolate the synagogue as strictly a liturgical, social, or institutional entity; a less restrictive definition is needed. For the purposes of the present study, a synagogue in antiquity is best defined as an institution that served a variety of liturgical, social, and communal purposes for the Jewish community associated with it. The perspective of Erich S. Gruen seems pertinent to such a definition. He defines the synagogue as “a structure in which or an institution through which Jews could engage in a communal activity that helped to define or express a collective identity.”⁵⁴ Emphasis should be placed upon *communal activity to express a collective identity*. The activity could be liturgical, non-liturgical, social et cetera in nature; the product of collective identity, however, remains unchanged. The synagogue was thus a space in which members of a Jewish community could participate and engage with one another in specific activities that expressed aspects of their own communal identity.

⁵⁴ Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 105.

Second, the issue of terminology must be addressed. Any historical investigation of the past lends itself to anachronistic tendencies; whether it is terminology, categories, or the disciplines of analysis, we are left with modern tools to describe that which falls outside of modernity. The perspective presented below routinely refers to ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic identity’ to describe aspects of this communal identity; this is, of course, problematic, as the term ethnicity is a modern category and invention. Despite this problem, as long as one acknowledges the gap that exists between an object of historical investigation and modern terminology such terms may still be useful. The term ethnicity is thus used in a heuristic manner; it is, all things considered, the best available term when discussing ἔθνος/*ethnos* and a communal bond that bound a group of individuals together. By no means is the modern term used here as an exact synonym of the ancient word, as Denise Eileen McCoskey has correctly cautioned scholars.⁵⁵ Instead, when referring to Jews as an *ethnos* or ethnic group, we are doing so with the acknowledgment that these terms encapsulate features different from what we commonly associate with the modern construction of ethnicity.

Another problematic term within current scholarly discourse is “religion” and its use to refer to ancient phenomena. As a term loaded with connotations grounded in modern and Western taxonomy, “religion” forces a modern classification upon a past phenomenon. Steve Mason has suggested that “we misunderstand the ancient homeland of Judaism and Christianity when we impose the modern category of religion upon it.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Denise Eileen McCoskey, “By Any Other Name? Ethnicity and the Study of Ancient Identity,” *Classical Bulletin* 79.1 (2003): 97.

⁵⁶ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 481.

Mason is correct in pointing this out, largely because modern conceptions of “religion” indicate a separate, isolated category of life that did not exist in the ancient world. When describing practices or traditions that we may deem as “religious” in nature or part of “religion” in antiquity, it is imperative that we acknowledge the discrepancies that exist in such a reference.

3.2 Antiquity, Ethnicity, and ἔθνος

3.2.1 Antiquity and Ethnicity

If we are to understand the synagogue as an institution that expressed Jewish communal identity, we must explore the tenets of this communal identity. Before that exploration, however, we must first consider identity on its own within the context of the ancient world. The communal identity of some ethnically based groups or associations in antiquity was bound to what we may term a ‘common ethnic bond.’ This ethnic bond must not be conceived of as a strictly biological or physical phenomenon; biological or physical characteristics were just one part of such a bond. An ethnic, or communal, identity encompassed several aspects of one’s identity. This includes genealogy, “religion,” kinship, custom and other distinguishable phenomena that we often consider in modern discourse to be separable aspects of one’s own identity. Such an understanding of ethnic identity is imperative for any examination of identity constructs in antiquity.

Paula Fredriksen argues that ethnic identity was intertwined with cult/religion. In her words, “ancient religion was inherited. It characterized ethnic groups. In antiquity,

gods ran in the blood.”⁵⁷ For her, cult, a person’s relationship to his or her god, functioned as an ethnic designation; it comprised one aspect of the ethnic bond. In another instance she writes, “‘ethnicity’ expressed ‘religion’, and ‘religion’ expressed ‘ethnicity’.”⁵⁸ Fredriksen is correct in acknowledging that the cultic bond was an ethnic one, and that ethnicity and religion should be conceived of within a reciprocal relationship. Cult, or religion, was not separate from one’s ethnic identity; instead, it represented one discernible aspect of a larger identity.

In a related manner, John M.G. Barclay, in his discussion of Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, takes ethnic identity to “refer to a combination of kinship and custom, reflecting both shared genealogy and common behavior.”⁵⁹ This common behaviour was not confined to cultic or religious practices, but to social aspects as well. Barclay stresses that ancestry and cultural practice were a combination of interlocking features.⁶⁰ An ethnic bond did not just refer to genealogy, but practices, traditions, and behaviors as well.

Jonathan M. Hall’s study, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, has effectively shown that ethnic identity is not confined strictly to biology; it falls into the realms of the social world with an ethnic group expressing itself through social aspects. For Hall, ethnicity is “defined by social and discursively constructed criteria rather than by physical

⁵⁷ Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews – A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 7.

⁵⁸ Paula Fredriksen, “What Parting of the ways? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 39.

⁵⁹ John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 402.

⁶⁰ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 403.

indicia.”⁶¹ In particular, Hall isolates two specific criteria as the most important: (1) a connection with a specific territory, and (2) a common myth of descent.⁶² This suggestion has been critiqued by David Konstan who observes that Hall limits the range of ethnic criteria to putative relations of kinship.⁶³ Instead, Konstan aptly identifies ethnicity as a discursive phenomenon. According to him, “one can only be sure that a given trait or distinction enters into the construction of ethnic identity if it is verbalized as such.”⁶⁴ Despite their differences in approach and definition, both of these discussions of ethnic identity in Greek antiquity illustrate that ethnicity was a complex phenomenon that went beyond shared ancestry. To be sure, the genealogical aspect of a shared ancestry was a precursor of ethnicity in the ancient world, but within such ethnic identity there were also discernible aspects of religion, customs, norms, and other practices.

3.2.2. Jewish Communities and ἔθνος

Steve Mason has recently argued that we should understand the Jews/Judaeans/Ἰουδαῖοι⁶⁵ as “an ethnic group comparable to other ethnic groups with their distinctive laws, traditions, customs, and God.”⁶⁶ The identification of the Jews as an *ethnos*, comparable to other ethnic groups in antiquity, is a welcome shift in terminology

⁶¹ Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32.

⁶² Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 25.

⁶³ David Konstan, “Defining Ancient Greek Ethnicity,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6.1 (Spring 1997): 99.

⁶⁴ Konstan, “Defining Ancient Greek Ethnicity,” 100.

⁶⁵ The term Ἰουδαῖοι and its proper translation has become a source of debate in contemporary scholarship. For a detailed discussion of the current state of this problem see David M. Miller, “The Meaning of *Ioudaios* and its Relationship to Other Group Labels in Ancient Judaism,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9 (2010): 98-126. See also Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I.,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. Bengt Holmberg; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 59-92.

⁶⁶ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 457.

as it avoids the false category of “religion” that may be problematic. As Mason suggests, the category of *ethnos* has distinctive features that include what we, from a modern perspective, would deem as religious elements.⁶⁷ Working from Said’s discourse of identity in Greek antiquity,⁶⁸ Mason establishes the following criteria of *ethnos*:

Each *ethnos* had its distinctive nature or character (φύσις, ἦθος), expressed in unique ancestral traditions (τὰ πάτρια), which typically reflected a shared (if fictive) ancestry (συγγενεία); each had its charter stories (μῦθοι), customs, norms, conventions, mores, laws (νόμοι, ἔθη, νόμιμα), and political arrangements or constitution (πολιτεία).⁶⁹

These aspects coincide with many of the previously discussed approaches to ethnic identity in antiquity. Understanding Jewish communities as an *ethnos*, not as a religion, allows us to envision these communities in a manner more appropriately suited to the context of antiquity. The Jews were one group of many in the Graeco-Roman world that shared a collective identity, or *ethnos*, that was comprised of specific customs and traditions. The fundamental aspect to understand regarding ethnic identity in antiquity is its “comprehensive” nature; bound to an *ethnos* were myths of common descent, particular customs, including ancestral traditions, and often, but not always, a common shared loyalty toward a particular god.

3.2.3 Literary Evidence for Jews as an ἔθνος

References to the Jewish *ethnos* and its distinctive features are quite prevalent in the available literary sources. Perhaps one of the most telling instances comes from

⁶⁷ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 484.

⁶⁸ Cf. S. Saïd, “The Discourse of Identity in Greek Rhetoric from Isocrates to Aristides,” in *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (ed. I. Malkin; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 75.

⁶⁹ Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 484.

Philo's account of newcomers⁷⁰ to the Jewish *ethnos* in *Virt.* 102-103. In discussing these newcomers, it is said that they should be given consideration because they have *left behind kinsfolk by blood, homeland, customs, sacred rites, images of the gods, gift and honors* (γενεὰν μὲν τὴν ἀφ' αἵματος καὶ πατρίδα καὶ ἔθνη καὶ ἱερὰ καὶ ἀφιδρύματα θεῶν γέρα τε καὶ τιμὰς ἀπολελοιπότας). It is further written that those of the *ethnos* are to love the newcomers not only as friends and kin (συγγενής), but as themselves in body and soul. The terminology used here demonstrates the wide range of features that are representative of an *ethnos*; becoming part of a new *ethnos* meant adopting new kinsfolk, customs, cult practices etc. All members of the *ethnos* are expected to share and embrace these commonalities. The command that all members of the *ethnos* are to love the newcomers as part of themselves indicates how strong the notion of collective identity was within a particular *ethnos*.⁷¹ Furthermore, the change details the abandonment of one's kinsfolk by blood. This calls to mind the earlier observation discussed by Fredriksen that 'gods ran in the blood.' Joining a new *ethnos* required not just a change of practices and customs, but of kinsfolk as well. As Mason argues, "it was a change of ethnic-ancestral culture, the joining of another people."⁷²

In other instances, Philo routinely refers to the Jews as an *ethnos*, or Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος.⁷³ In *Spec.* 4.179, he writes that the whole Jewish *ethnos* (σύμπαν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος) is like an orphan when compared to others. The implication in the text is that others possess allies due to their intermingling with one another, whereas the Jews do not

⁷⁰ In modern terms what we may deem converts.

⁷¹ Cf. Lev. 19:17-18.

⁷² Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism," 491.

⁷³ For other instances see *Mos.* 1.7; *Dec.* 96; *Spec.* 2.163, 166, 4.224; *Virt.* 212, 226; *Flacc.* 170; *Legat.* 117, 373.

because of their adherence to their chosen laws (νόμοις ἐξαιρέτοις). This passage is quite telling, as we are provided with an instance in which the Jewish *ethnos* is distinguished from others due to the practices specific to their own distinctive *ethnos*. In *Legat.* 210, Philo writes that all men preserve their own customs (τῶν ἰδίων ἔθῶν), especially the Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος. Again, we receive discussion of the Jewish *ethnos* and their distinctive customs that serve as a distinguishable trait within their collective identity.

In a comparable manner, Josephus often refers to the particular customs and features of these Jewish communities, and their distinctive quality. In *Ant.* 20.17 he details how Helena, queen of Adiabene, and her son changed their course of life and embraced the customs of the Jews (τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνη).⁷⁴ In Josephus' account of Claudius' edict to Alexandria and Syria we see the common features of an *ethnos*, τὰ πατρία and ἔθνη, being defended.⁷⁵ The edict details how Gaius humiliated the Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος because they would not transgress their ancestral worship (religion) (τὴν πατριὸν θρησκείαν) and call him a god.⁷⁶ Josephus attributes to Claudius the demand that τῷ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνει will lose none of their rights due to Gaius, and they will continue in their own customs (τοῖς ἰδίῳις ἔθεσιν).⁷⁷

Similar discussions of the Jewish *ethnos* can also be found in non-Jewish writers of the period. Strabo, for example, writes that, “Some writers divide Syria as a whole into Coele-Syrians and Syrians and Phoenicians, and say that four other tribes (ἔθνη) are

⁷⁴ For other similar passages see *Ant.* 20.38, 41, 75, 139.

⁷⁵ *Ant.* 19.279-285.

⁷⁶ *Ant.* 19.284.

⁷⁷ *Ant.* 19.285.

mixed up with these, namely, Judaeans, Idumaeans, Gazaeans, and Azotians, and that they are partly farmers, as the Syrians and Coele-Syrians, and partly merchants as the Phoenicians.”⁷⁸ In this instance, we see Judaeans/Jews being described alongside other ἔθνη. This brief survey of ancient literary sources indicates that Jews were construed in antiquity as a particular ἔθνος with their own distinctive features. With this in mind, it is beneficial to consider how the Jews, as an *ethnos*, constructed their identity and interacted with other similar groups in antiquity. Within the confines of a socio-historical model of Diaspora synagogue development and maintenance, it is useful to consider contemporary social scientific approaches so as to consider how ethnic identity may have influenced interactions in the Graeco-Roman world.

3.3. Modern Perspectives on Ethnicity

In order to further explore the nature of a shared Jewish ethnic identity it is both practical, and helpful, to consider frameworks developed by the social sciences concerning identity and ethnicity. These frameworks are, of course, situated within modern discourses of ethnicity and identity theory. In referring to them, one must be careful to avoid anachronistic tendencies that may threaten the historical investigation. These frameworks are thus used here in a heuristic manner; they are not absolute or conclusive, nor are they to be understood as exhaustive. Rather, such understandings of ethnicity and identity is meant to allow for the possibility of conceiving of the

⁷⁸ Strabo *Geographica* (16.2.2), Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism Vol. I* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976), 287.

development of the synagogue in the Diaspora in a much different, and more historical, light than previously done.

In what has become a foundational study in ethnicity studies and discourses, Fredrik Barth asserted that ethnic identity must be explored from the perspective of ethnic boundaries. Such an approach is centered upon two main premises. First, an ethnic distinction depends not on the absence of social interaction, but rather upon the existence of such interaction.⁷⁹ In other words, an ethnic distinction or identity exists only in relation to another.⁸⁰ Second, the persistence of an ethnic group and its difference is dependent upon ethnic boundaries. In Barth's words, the "nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary."⁸¹ The significance of the ethnic boundary cannot be overstated; it is through the maintenance of such boundaries that ethnic identity is both established and expressed.

Barth's conception of ethnic boundaries has significantly influenced later perspectives on ethnicity, which take a social anthropological approach. Thomas Hylland Eriksen has used Barth as a point of departure for exploring the social nature of ethnicity. He defines ethnicity as "an aspect of social relationship between persons who consider themselves as essentially distinctive from members of other groups of whom they are aware and with whom they enter into relationships."⁸² That is, ethnicity is essentially established and represented through social contact with others. It is thus dependent upon a social relationship within a context that allows distinctive groups to exist and interact

⁷⁹ Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Differences* (ed. Fredrik Barth; Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 10.

⁸⁰ Cf. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 32-33.

⁸¹ Barth, "Introduction," 14.

⁸² Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism 3rd Edition* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 16-17.

amongst one another. The ways in which collective identity is expressed and maintained are found within the established parameters of the ethnic boundaries that emerge within such social relationships. The Diaspora of Graeco-Roman antiquity seems to fit this notion adequately. The Diaspora certainly involved aspects of a social relationship in which Jewish communities emerged as distinctive from members of Graeco-Roman society. In his study on identity in the ancient world, Philip Harland takes a similar approach to ethnicity and the different interactions between ethnic groups. He states that, “ethnic identities are dependent on the everyday interactions among members of the group and between members and other groups. These interactions result in the formulation of notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’.”⁸³ If we apply such a perspective to ethnic collective identity in antiquity, we may understand the ways in which Jewish communities, as part of an *ethnos*, related to their Diaspora counterparts. In particular, we will be able to explore the factors and features that contributed to the maintenance of Jewish collective identity, aspects which were specific to their *ethnos*.

3.4 Diaspora and Identity Maintenance

3.4.1 The Diaspora Context

The discussion above has raised many questions regarding the Jewish Diaspora, especially in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora. One must remember that, as Barclay has stated, “there were no 'typical' Diaspora conditions.”⁸⁴ Speaking of the Diaspora with a

⁸³ Philip A. Harland, “Introduction” in *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians – Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009), 11.

⁸⁴ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 399.

'typical,' or even 'stereotypical' conception in mind can be problematic. Yet, discussing the Diaspora in very specific terms is equally problematic, as Diaspora itself is an umbrella term that does not lend itself to a precise or exact rendering. Any discussions concerning synagogue development in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora will be generalizations at best; but, unfortunately, the nature of the Jewish Diaspora can only lend itself to discussions of this kind.

With that in mind, what exactly can be said about the Jewish Diaspora in the Graeco Roman world? Above all, it must be noted that this Diaspora was a rich environment filled with various ethnic groups that each had their own specific practices, customs, and traditions. The Jewish *ethnos* was immersed in diverse cultural contexts and practices that both challenged and influenced their own particular customs. In writing about the Hellenistic Diaspora, John Collins correctly observes that, in his words, the “basic problem in the Jewish Diaspora was how to maintain the Jewish tradition in an environment dominated by Gentiles.”⁸⁵ Collins' study demonstrates that a major concern for Diaspora Jews was the maintenance of their own traditions and identity in a non-Jewish setting. This does not mean, however, that the maintenance of Jewish tradition eclipsed its Diaspora context, or that it was not accommodating to such a context of cultural influences. As Gruen has suggested, maintenance and accommodation of identity and tradition in the Diaspora were intertwined with one another.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 3.

⁸⁶ Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, 6.

3.4.2 Boundary Maintenance and Tradition

If the main challenge that faced Diaspora Jews was how to retain their distinct identity, it is helpful to consider the act of boundary maintenance and its relation to this shared ethnic identity. From our earlier discussion concerning modern approaches to ethnicity, we have seen that ethnicity is dependent upon a social relationship; it is represented continually through social contact between different ethnic groups. The collective identity of a group is maintained through ethnic boundaries. Within the Graeco-Roman Diaspora, the Jews, as a particular ethnic group within a foreign context, would engage with other diverse ethnic groups. These interactions provided opportunities to establish identity and boundaries. In other words, by such contact with other ethnic groups, Jews were required to display their own ethnic bond and its accompanying boundaries. Tied to the concept of boundary maintenance could very well be the distinctive features of their particular *ethnos*. These features served as the boundary markers by which Jews distinguished themselves from others within the Diaspora and reinforced their collective identity. This collective identity of their *ethnos* was intertwined with the Jewish tradition. As Collins has noted, reliance on the Jewish tradition was ultimately the common thread of identity for Jewish communities.⁸⁷ The foundations of an *ethnos*, its nature, ancestral customs, laws, and norms foregrounded the Jewish tradition and solidified the ethnic bond within the *ethnos*. As Jews participated in the activities and customs particular to their *ethnos*, they expressed their ethnic bond not only to themselves, but to others as well. Living within a foreign cultural context such as the

⁸⁷ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 274.

Graeco-Roman Diaspora did not weaken their common ethnic identity, but provided the opportunity to reinforce and maintain it.⁸⁸

The common Jewish ethnic bond was dependent upon not only a shared ancestry and kinship, but distinctive traditions and cultural practices as well. These ancestral customs, practices, and traditions were part of the unique composition of Jewish identity within the Diaspora. More importantly, these unique features contributed to, and reinforced, their communal and collective identity through ethnic boundaries and interactions with the various ethnic groups of the Graeco-Roman Diaspora. These ethnic boundaries can be conceived of as the sum of the particular customs that distinguish one *ethnos* from another. Through interactions with one another, such boundaries identified similarities and differences while contributing to notions of “us” and “them”. Each group had particular practices and customs that contributed not only to the existence of the boundaries, but its maintenance as well.

3.4.3 Sabbath Observance and Other Distinct Jewish Practices

One of the cornerstones of the Jewish tradition, both for its regular observance, and its distinctive nature, was the Sabbath. Jewish writers, e.g., Philo and Josephus regularly commented on the importance of this practice in their writings. Non-Jewish writers discussed this practice as a peculiar ancestral custom of the Jews, often with derision and mockery. Sabbath observance was one custom of the Jewish *ethnos* that expressed their common ethnic bond and the boundaries of that bond. It was an identity

⁸⁸ Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, 94.

marker that reflected the central aspects of the Jewish *ethnos* not only to themselves, but to surrounding groups as well.

References to the Sabbath are quite numerous in the writings of Philo; these often apply the distinctive language used to describe the features of an ethnic group, and some even include references to synagogues. In *Mos.* 2.215, Philo writes that it was the custom (ἔθος) on the seventh day to study philosophical matters. He continues with his discussion of the Sabbath to describe places of prayer (προσευκτήρια) in the different cities as schools of wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, piety, holiness, and every virtue by which men and divine things are considered.⁸⁹ In this passage we encounter the Sabbath described as a unique custom (ἔθος) of the Jews that is practiced regularly in places of prayer (likely a reference to synagogues) throughout the different cities, not just an isolated geographical spot. A similar discussion occurs in *Spec.* 2.62 with the same vocabulary used to describe these “schools,” which exist in every city. In *Legat.* 156, Philo writes that Augustus knew they had synagogues (προσευχᾶς) and gathered there, especially on the sacred seventh day.

In *Legat.* we are further presented with two letters (one attributed to Augustus, the other to Flaccus) that detail not only the practice of the Sabbath, but also state that it should be permitted as it was particular to their ancestral customs. The letter of Augustus was sent to the governors of Asia ordering them to permit the Jews alone to come together in synagogues (συναγωγή).⁹⁰ It continues by stating that these gatherings were not places of drunkenness and intoxication, but were schools of temperance and

⁸⁹ *Mos.* 2.216.

⁹⁰ *Legat.* 311.

justice.⁹¹ The letter from Flaccus details what had been written to him by Caesar and states that the Jews are accustomed to gather together according to their own ancient custom (ἰδίῳ ἀρχαίῳ ἔθισμῶ).⁹² It ends with Flaccus saying he has written to the governors in order that the Jews are allowed to do so.

The earliest reference of the Sabbath by a pagan author is attributed to Agatharchides of Cnidus, who lived approximately in the second century BCE.⁹³ Josephus attributes to Agatharchides a series of statements in which the people known as Jews are accustomed to abstain, on the seventh day, from bearing arms (ὄπλα βαστάζειν), engaging in agricultural activities (γεωργίας), and public services (λειτουργίας)⁹⁴. Instead of participating in such practices, Agatharchides states that the Jews stretch out their hands in prayer in their temples (ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς) until evening. Feldman has suggested that the reference to temples is likely an allusion to synagogues, and that Agatharchides use of “Jews”, and not some or most Jews, indicates that the Sabbath practice at this time was quite common, if not universal.⁹⁵ Agatharchides continues to detail that when Ptolemy son of Lagus entered the city on the Sabbath, the Jews, instead of guarding their city, maintained their practice, which resulted in their law (νόμος) being considered inferior (φάυλον). As Feldman has detailed, the refusal to engage in combat on the Sabbath became a common source of ridicule among pagans.⁹⁶ In addition, the Sabbath faced further mockery from pagans largely because of the

⁹¹ *Legat.* 312.

⁹² *Legat.* 314-315.

⁹³ Louis Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 159.

⁹⁴ *C. Ap.* 1.209-10.

⁹⁵ Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 159.

⁹⁶ Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 160-162. Cf. Frontinus (*Strategemata* 2.1.17) and Strabo (16.2.40.763).

numerous restrictions that it placed upon the Jews.⁹⁷ This also contributed to the accusation that the Jews were lazy. Tacitus writes⁹⁸ that in the beginning the seventh day was chosen as a day of rest, and later, due to the “insolent nature of the Jews”, they established the seventh year as a period of rest.⁹⁹

The Sabbath was a unique practice of Jewish communities that contributed to their distinct ethnic bond. As the above sources have demonstrated, it was a well-known practice that distinguished Jews from other groups within the Diaspora. The fact that it became a source of derision indicates just how pervasive this practice was; it was distinctively Jewish, and served to reinforce the common identity of Jewish communities. Non-Jews considered it an unfamiliar, peculiar practice that was bound to Jewish ancestral customs. As Tacitus wrote, these unique rites were maintained by their antiquity, or rather their precedence.¹⁰⁰

The distinguishing of time and abstention from work was just one way in which the Sabbath served as a particular custom expressing Jewish identity. In fact, just as important as the recognition of the Sabbath day was the participation of Jews in the main activity of the Sabbath: communal instruction within the synagogue. References to communal instruction are found frequently within Philo’s discussion of the Sabbath.¹⁰¹ For instance, in *Hyp.* 7.12, a command states that all the people were to gather together and sit with one another in order to listen to the laws (τῶν νόμων) with reverence and

⁹⁷ Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 162.

⁹⁸ *Histories* 5.4.3.

⁹⁹ Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism Vol. II* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980), 25.

¹⁰⁰ *Histories* 5.5.1. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism Vol. II*, 26.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Mos* 2.215-216.

order so that none would be ignorant of them. Similarly, Josephus writes that the seventh day was a day for learning customs (ἔθῶν) and laws (νόμου).¹⁰² New Testament references also allude to the synagogue as a place of teaching and learning on the Sabbath.¹⁰³

Instruction on the Sabbath was one more way by which observance of the seventh day served as a contributing factor to a collective ethnic identity among Jewish communities. As these communities gathered to listen and learn about their customs and laws, they were gaining knowledge about their distinctive practices and traditions. Such knowledge served as the basis for the continuance of these practices. As Barclay notes, it was this regular instruction that helped to legitimize the distinctive Jewish way of life, as well as contribute to the socialization of its adherents.¹⁰⁴ Fredriksen has gone as far as to state that the synagogue functioned as an ‘ethnic reading house,’ in which Jews gathered to receive instruction in their ancestral laws.¹⁰⁵

One example of Jewish ancestral laws that we may consider here is the Jewish custom of food laws. It has been suggested that ethnic groups commonly retained customs pertaining to food restrictions and dietary laws within the Graeco-Roman period.¹⁰⁶ The Jews, of course, were no different. Such dietary laws that outline rules for food consumption are found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy for the Jews. These dietary laws were one of the main peculiar customs (ἔθῆ) of the Jews that attracted attention from non-Jews. Of course, one cannot assume that these restrictions were always adhered to,

¹⁰² *Ant.* 16.43. Cf. *C. Ap.* 2.175

¹⁰³ Cf. Mk. 1:21-22, 6:2; Lk. 4:16, 6:6, 13:10; Jn. 6:59; Acts 13:42, 15:21.

¹⁰⁴ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 417.

¹⁰⁵ Fredriksen, “What Parting of the Ways,” 48.

¹⁰⁶ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 434.

but the repeated mention of them by Jewish and non-Jewish sources implies that they were followed to a certain degree.

One of the prominent customs pertaining to Jewish food laws that attracted considerable attention from non-Jews was their abstention from eating pork. This abstention from pork was likely quite striking due to the fact that both Greeks and Romans considered it a delicacy.¹⁰⁷ In a remark that Plutarch attributes to his brother, it is said that, “my grandfather used to say on every occasion, in derision of the Jews, that what they abstained from was precisely the most legitimate meat.”¹⁰⁸ Plutarch’s discussion of abstention from pork continues with him speculating about the possible reasons for it. Similarly, Tacitus claims that the Jews abstain from pork in recollection of a plague they suffered.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, Philo acknowledges that the pig is agreed to be the sweetest of meats by those who eat it, but it is avoided so as to avoid gluttony.¹¹⁰ Apion also derides the Jews for their abstention from pork to which Josephus responds by establishing a precedent for such a practice by asserting that Egyptian priests also adhered to this abstention.¹¹¹

Such food laws confirmed a common trait in Jewish identity and served to distinguish Judaism from other ethnic groups and their particular customs. The instruction received on the Sabbath in the synagogue served as one of the ways, aside from socialization and home instruction, that Jews were familiarized with their particular food

¹⁰⁷ Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 167.

¹⁰⁸ *Quaestiones Convivales* 4.4.4.669D Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors Vol. I*, 554.

¹⁰⁹ *Histories* 5.4.2. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors Vol. II*, 25. Cf. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 169.

¹¹⁰ *Spec.* 4.101.

¹¹¹ *C. Ap.* 2.137-2.141.

laws. Such education encouraged the basis of adherence to ancestral customs of the group, and ultimately reinforced one strand of their particular Jewish identity. These strands of identity were intertwined with the group's ethnic bond and maintenance of identity; participating in particular customs served to crystallize the collective identity of the group and distinguished it from others. Therefore, as we have seen, the observance of the Sabbath, including its particular time, restrictions on daily life, and aspects of instruction, gave definition to a shared Jewish ethnic identity within the Diaspora.

The Jewish tradition thus served as both a basis and reinforcement of a common Jewish ethnic identity within antiquity. If the Jews were a distinctive ethnic group in antiquity, what does this mean for the development of synagogues in the Diaspora? Is it possible to argue that a common ethnic bond permitted, and even encouraged, the development of shared communal spaces that allowed Jews to express and reinforce this common identity? Possible answers to this question will be discussed further below as we shall see that comparative material exists with other ethnic associations in antiquity who gathered together in a similar manner and for like purposes.

3.5 The Synagogue and Identity

3.5.1 Synagogue as Boundary Marker

In his study on Jewish ethnic identity, Barclay asks the following, important questions about the Jewish Diaspora: What bound Jews together and prevented the disintegration of their communities? What were the boundaries that made clear to

themselves and to others the difference between a Jew and non-Jew?¹¹² The answer, of course, was a collective identity maintained through communal practices and traditions. Similarly, Gruen has stated that, “communal life sustained the Jews of the Diaspora.”¹¹³ These perspectives are correct, but we may pursue this matter one step further. What provided Jews with the opportunity to express their common ethnic identity? What allowed communal life to sustain itself? Within the Graeco-Roman Diaspora, it was the synagogue, the focus of Jewish Diaspora life, that provided the space in which Jews could continually express and reinforce that which was integral to the composition of their *ethnos*. In order for communal life to sustain the Jewish ethnic bond, an institution was needed to fulfill the needs required for this bond’s maintenance.

It is possible, indeed very reasonable, to consider the shared communal space of the synagogue as a part of Jewish ethnicity in the ancient Diaspora. Returning to our original definition of the synagogue as a space in which a Jewish community could participate and engage with one another in specific activities that not only expressed, but reinforced, aspects of their own identity and tradition, we can see how the synagogue may have contributed to the boundaries of Jewish ethnicity. The synagogue provided a space in which the Jewish community could distance themselves from the surrounding society and participate in activities that reinforced their collective identity and tradition. Whether it be an activity related to Sabbath observance or something different, the synagogue provided a forum that allowed Jews to maintain a common ethnic bond. This common ethnic bond served to crystallize the ethnicity of the Jewish community; that is, it made

¹¹² Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 400.

¹¹³ Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, 105.

visible the ethnicity of the Jews, which we have defined as a relationship between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish community of the Diaspora.

By understanding the synagogue as one of the ways in which the Jewish community marked and reinforced its common ethnic bond against non-Jewish Diaspora communities, we are able to situate ourselves within the socio-historical and “religious” context that was life in the ancient Diaspora. Further, this approach allows us to distance the synagogue from a theory of overt dependency upon the Jerusalem Temple and the conception of a 'homeland' that was Israel. The need to maintain a Jewish ethnic bond was related to the removed location of a Jewish community from the land of Israel, but it was not exclusively dependent upon this. It is not, therefore, enough to surmise that Jewish communities established synagogues because of their separation from the Jerusalem Temple itself. The deprivation argument concerning Israel and the Temple does not adequately represent the socio-historical reality of Jews in antiquity. Rather, one can hypothetically posit that Jewish communities established synagogues as part of their need to maintain their ethnicity in relation to the diverse setting that was found within the Diaspora. As Eriksen has suggested, social and ethnic identity becomes crucial when boundaries are threatened or are under pressure; when such is the case, boundary maintenance becomes all the more important.¹¹⁴ 'Threatened' is perhaps too strong a word, but it is plausible that Jewish ethnic boundaries were, at the very least, questioned or challenged within the ancient Diaspora. The reality of Diaspora life entailed that acts of not only accommodation, but maintenance, of social identity occurred among the

¹¹⁴ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 81.

Jewish community. Viewing the synagogue as one part of boundary maintenance in relation to Jewish ethnicity in antiquity allows us to acknowledge the reality of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Specifically, we can hypothesize that Jews were actively engaged in the maintenance of their common ethnic bond over and against other ethnic groups in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora. The establishment and continued emergence of synagogues in the Diaspora may lend credence to such a hypothesis.

Although we are looking particularly at a model of Diaspora synagogue maintenance, such an understanding may be practical when considering the question of the origins of the synagogue. The need for Jews to maintain their particular ethnic identity, and have a space in which they could participate in traditional customs, may have been a driving force behind Jewish communities creating an original institution such as the synagogue.

3.5.2 Synagogue Functions and the Jewish *Ethnos*

To understand the synagogue as part of a development that allows ethnic boundaries to influence both social life and identity, we must consider the various functions and activities that this institution served within these Jewish communities. We have previously discussed Sabbath observance as one activity that was related to the synagogue and served to reinforce the Jewish ethnic bond. There are, however, many more functions of the synagogue that we can consider part of the particular practices that contributed to, and expressed, the collective identity of the Jews as an ethnic group within the Graeco-Roman Diaspora.

Jewish groups in antiquity observed purity laws, and were concerned with ritual purity, as part of their ancestral tradition. The connection between ritual purity and synagogues will be discussed in greater detail when we consider the Ostia synagogue, but a general note about the location of synagogues may be outlined here. As Binder has noted, Diaspora synagogues were often located near natural bodies of water, and it seems that Diaspora Jews made greater use of these natural bodies of water for purification rituals than their Judaeian counterparts.¹¹⁵ In Acts 16:13, Paul and his associates set out on the Sabbath day to a river as they supposed that a synagogue (προσευχή) would be there. The connection between the locations of Diaspora synagogues near natural bodies of water can imply a level of concern for ritual purity in association with the activities that took place within these institutions. The decree from Halicarnassus, recorded by Josephus¹¹⁶ declares that Jews be permitted to build their synagogues (προσευχᾶς) near the sea according to their ancestral custom (τὸ πατριον ἔθος). Concern for ritual purity, with the use of water for purification purposes, was one part of the Jewish tradition that served to reinforce the unique identity of the Jews. The synagogue provided a space in which these needs could be met and acted out within the community.

The synagogue also functioned as a community centre of sorts, in which local concerns would be dealt with and, at times, judicial practices took place.¹¹⁷ A decree preserved in *Ant.* 14.235 outlines how Jews demonstrated that they had an association of their own according to their ancestral laws (πατρίους νόμους). It goes on to state that

¹¹⁵ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 395.

¹¹⁶ *Ant.* 14.256-258

¹¹⁷ Cf. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 445-449. Cf. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 395-396.

within this place they decided their affairs and controversies with one another.¹¹⁸ A similar decree of the Sardians in *Ant.* 14.259-261 states that permission be given to the Jews to gather together on stated days to do things which are in accordance with their own laws. These decrees outline that adjudication was one of the privileges granted to these Diaspora communities and their institutions.¹¹⁹ In the New Testament numerous passages detail the synagogue as an institution in which judicial practices took place, including trials.¹²⁰ Having one's own judicial constitution (πολιτεία) was a common feature of an *ethnos* in antiquity. The synagogue served as a communal space in which Jewish communities could partake in this particular feature of their ethnic group and distribute their own rulings based on their ancestral customs. These actions served to reinforce their collective ethnic bond, as both social cohesion and participation were facets of these communal gatherings.

The various functions that took place within the synagogue contributed to the communal identity of the Jewish community it served. The synagogue was, as a physical space, the place in which Jews could actively engage with the particular customs and laws inherent to their formation as an ethnic group. The development of these synagogues provided Jewish communities with the opportunity and means to engage with their own community, and, ultimately, reinforce their identity as an ethnic group different from others within the Graeco-Roman Diaspora.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Life* 271-98 in which communities gathered in the local *proseuche* to debate whether or not to join the rebellion in Tiberias in 66-67 CE.

¹¹⁹ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 143.

¹²⁰ Mk 13:9, Lk 12:11, Acts 22:19.

3.5.3 Relation to Non-Jews

The discussion above focused on the synagogue as a physical structure that provided the place in which Jewish communities could partake in their own unique practices and traditions, thereby strengthening their ethnic bond amongst one another. Another possible function, however, was the symbolic representation of the synagogue as an identity marker to non-Jewish groups within the Diaspora. The earlier analysis of Flesher's theory gave merit to his observation that the synagogue represents a 'monument of common identity.'¹²¹ That is, the synagogue functioned as a representation of the community by which the Jewish group could communicate to the surrounding non-Jewish world its unique collective identity. A general basic tenet of group identity is that it must always be defined in relation to what it is not, specifically in relation to non-members of the group.¹²² As the Jewish community put forth its representation of its identity through the synagogue, it confirmed this identity through interaction with non-Jewish groups.

Fredriksen has argued correctly that, in social and 'religious' terms, Diaspora Jewish communities were extremely permeable.¹²³ Non-Jews could participate in and engage with the distinctive features of the Jews as an *ethnos* without compromising their own identity and unique traditions. As Fredriksen puts it, "pagans *as pagans* could be found together with Jews in the Diaspora synagogue."¹²⁴ The activities that took place within the synagogue did not mean that the Jews themselves were isolated from the wider society, but they established the continuing adherence to the traditions and features that

¹²¹ Flesher, "Prolegomenon to an Early Theory of Synagogue Development," 140.

¹²² Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 14.

¹²³ Fredriksen, "What Parting of the Ways?" 51.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 52.

supported their ethnic bond.¹²⁵ As non-Jews and Jews interacted within the synagogue and its surrounding culture, the Jewish ethnic bond was displayed; non-Jews would witness the particulars that distinguished the Jewish *ethnos* from surrounding groups and society. Such interaction provided the opportunity for non-Jews to witness the distinctive features of the Jewish *ethnos* that distinguished them from other ethnic groups within the local context. The work of Fredriksen again seems relevant here: “exclusive for insiders (Jews in principle should not worship foreign gods), the synagogue was inclusive for outsiders (interested Gentiles were welcomed).”¹²⁶ The synagogue, however, was still distinctive of the Jewish community and thus remained a marker of its unique ethnic bond.

Jewish communities were not the only groups in the Diaspora that gathered together and promoted a collective identity. As Harland has effectively demonstrated, Jewish synagogues, and later Christian assemblies, existed alongside guilds and associations within their cultural landscape.¹²⁷ These associations served a variety of social and ‘religious’ functions and provided members with a certain sense of belonging and identity.¹²⁸ Harland has gone as far as to suggest that a better understanding of Jewish communities in antiquity is reached when we view them alongside these associations of the Graeco-Roman world.¹²⁹ The existence of these associations alongside Jewish communities is well documented, as we shall see in our later discussions of the

¹²⁵ Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, 115.

¹²⁶ Fredriksen, “What Parting of the Ways?” 52.

¹²⁷ Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 2.

¹²⁸ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 55.

¹²⁹ Harland, “Associations and Group Identity among Judeans and Christians,” in *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians*, 25.

Delos and Ostia synagogues. It may be helpful, however, to first consider a definition of such associations. Harland defines associations as “social groupings in antiquity that shared certain characteristics in common and that were often recognized as analogous groups by people and by governmental institutions.”¹³⁰ Such a definition could easily be applicable to Judean groups within the Diaspora. As we have already seen, Roman officials and ancient historians alike acknowledged these communities as a distinctive group and their common traits were bound together by ancestral customs and a shared kinship.

One important contribution of such a comparison of associations and Jewish communities is, perhaps, a more accurate picture of the Diaspora experience as a whole. Harland has argued that understanding the ways in which groups based on shared ethnic identity existed in antiquity can work to actively counter assumptions of “widespread rootlessness.”¹³¹ Such a notion implies that Jews, and other immigrant groups, were “at a loss” outside of their respective homelands. He argues, however, that “associations based on shared ethnic identity were a further means by which immigrants were in some significant ways firmly planted not only in traditions of the homeland but also, to various degrees, in their societies of settlement.”¹³² That is, by forming a group based on ethnic identity, members not only engaged with their previous traditions, but also established others specific to their new surroundings. The Diaspora was, to be sure, a place in which

¹³⁰ Harland, “Associations and Group Identity among Judeans and Christians,” in *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians*, 26.

¹³¹ Harland, “Other Diasporas – Immigrants, Ethnic identities, and Acculturation,” in *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians*, 101.

¹³² Harland, “Other Diasporas – Immigrants, Ethnic identities, and Acculturation,” in *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians*, 101.

acculturation¹³³ of identity was necessary, but these associations and their members were not affected adversely by such an experience. In the Graeco-Roman Diaspora, Jewish communities and other associations were gathering together and engaging with the particular features of their groups that communicated their shared collective identity to others. The synagogue served as an important part of this process; as Gruen has suggested, the synagogue served as a middle way by which Jewish communities expressed their own identity while also fitting within the framework of Graeco-Roman society.¹³⁴

3.6 Conclusion

Understanding the Diaspora synagogue as a communal space through which Jews were able to maintain their ethnic bond and institute ethnic boundaries in a diverse foreign environment provides us with a new perspective concerning Diaspora synagogue development and maintenance. Overall, this new model responds to many of the previously discussed gaps and omissions present in earlier models of development and maintenance.

First, as the preceding investigation has demonstrated, by understanding the Jews as a distinct ethnic group, *ethnos*/ἔθνος, we are able to approach constructs of identity within antiquity from a perspective that more fully incorporates the socio-historical context of antiquity. In particular, we are quite plausibly understanding these Jewish communities as they understood themselves, and how other groups understood them: as a

¹³³ I am using this term following Harland's definition: "cultural interchanges and processes of boundary negotiation associated with encounters between two different groups with distinctive cultural traits." See Harland, "Other Diasporas: Immigrants, Ethnic Identities, and Acculturation," in *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians*, 102.

¹³⁴ Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, 123.

common ethnic group that shared a variety of traditions, ancestral customs, laws and rights that contributed to a communal identity.

By understanding the Jews as a particular *ethnos* we are then able to perceive the manner in which they related to other groups, including ethnic ones, within the Diaspora. It is helpful to think that a common Jewish ethnic bond was developed, and reinforced, through ethnic boundaries in relation to other groups within the Diaspora. Such a perspective allows us to more accurately consider the nature and experience of the Diaspora within antiquity for many of the Jewish communities that existed there. In particular, it accounts for the negotiation of intersecting identities that occurred on a regular basis in the Diaspora. The presence of these Jewish communities within a Diaspora context indicates that some kind of maintenance of their specific ethnic and religious identity took place. The synagogue, as an institution that expresses this collective ethnic identity, thus functioned as part of the maintenance process. Conceiving of the synagogue in such light allows us to answer questions about how the Jews survived, as a people, within a foreign context while maintaining their distinct Jewish identity; this has previously been lacking in models of development and maintenance.

In addition, we may understand the development of the synagogue as a response to both the internal and external needs of Jewish communities. First, internally, an institution such as the synagogue was needed in order for the Jews to practice their own traditions – the very features and ancestral customs that defined them as an *ethnos*. Second, on the external level, the synagogue acted as a symbolic representation of the Jewish community to its surrounding society and local context. It provided the means by

which non-Jews could understand the Jewish community, as well as encounter the particular customs and laws that defined them.

4. Delos and Ostia: Case Studies for Diaspora Synagogue Development

4.1 Introduction

One of the requisites needed for any model of Diaspora synagogue development and maintenance is the use of concrete case studies. A proposed model requires specific Diaspora contexts against which to be tested, in order to avoid sweeping generalizations that ignore the distinctiveness of each Jewish community within its respective non-Jewish environment. As the present study seeks to explore the development and maintenance of synagogues in a pre-70 CE Diaspora context, the earliest available evidence for the Graeco-Roman Diaspora are the cases of Delos and Ostia. As we shall see, recent scholarship has suggested that both of these cities had possible Jewish synagogues that existed prior to the fall of the Jerusalem Temple. As the earlier of the two, the synagogue edifice and the Jewish community of Delos will be explored first. Following this, a detailed analysis of the Ostia synagogue will be presented. These archaeological case studies will allow the current proposed model of Diaspora synagogue development and maintenance to be situated within the socio-historical context of these particular Diaspora sites.

For each synagogue, a discussion of the history of its geographical setting will be first given. Within this discussion, textual sources and epigraphic evidence will be consulted in order to explore the existence of Jewish communities within these settings. Once a historical context of these cities and Jewish communities has been established, a detailed examination of each of the synagogue buildings will be presented. To understand the significance of these institutions within their Jewish communities it is conducive first

to understand the physical reality and surrounding of these structures within their ancient context. The current state of research and scholarly consensus regarding these synagogue buildings raise their own questions and complexities, which must be addressed in order to establish these buildings as pre-70 CE Jewish institutions. The location and architectural structure of these buildings will provide opportunities to consider the relevance of Jewish ethnic boundaries for the development of the Diaspora synagogue. Both Delos and Ostia had a variety of ethnic groups, including Jewish communities and non-Jewish associations, which lived amongst one another. As such, we can further explore the question of ethnic identity and these synagogue buildings in relation to other non-Jewish association meeting halls. Ultimately, the goal of these case studies is to shed light on the ways in which the maintenance of Jewish ethnic identity was a factor in the development of these particular synagogues.

4.2 The Delos Synagogue

4.2.1 The History of Delos and its Jewish Community

The island of Delos is situated in the center of the Cyclades and has a long history as a foreign trade center in antiquity. The island itself measures only 5km by 1.3km and is thus one of the smallest Greek islands.¹³⁵ In addition to its status as a cosmopolitan trade center, Delos held a place of reverence in antiquity, as it was celebrated as the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis.¹³⁶ A variety of groups, associations, merchants, shippers and

¹³⁵ B. Hudson McLean, “The place of Cult in Voluntary Associations and Christian Churches on Delos,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; New York: Routledge, 1996), 186.

¹³⁶ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 297.

others resided on the island; as B. Hudson McLean has suggested, “the island of Delos manifests in a microcosm the social pluralism of Graeco-Roman antiquity.”¹³⁷

From 540-314 BCE, the island was under Athenian control until the Athenians were defeated in the Peloponnesian war. It was during this time, around 426/425 BCE, that the Athenians conducted a purification of the island; all graves were removed and giving birth or dying on the island was forbade in the future.¹³⁸ Following this, the Delians had a period of independence in which its trade and commerce flourished.¹³⁹ A second period of Athenian rule began and lasted from 166-88 BCE following the Third Macedonian War, during which Rome established Delos as a free port, leading to an influx of immigration to the area.¹⁴⁰ It is within this period that we encounter the first evidence of the presence of Jews on Delos, which will be discussed extensively below. The next period of Delian history saw the island face two attacks that caused extensive damage. The first, in 88 BCE, occurred when Menophaneses, the Mithridatic general, plundered Delos for its allegiance with Rome during what has become known as the Mithridatic war.¹⁴¹ Rome was able to return the island to Athenian governance, during which it faced a second attack, in 69 BCE, by pirates, and suffered more damage.¹⁴² Rebuilding and repair work took place under the Romans, but the prosperity of the island

¹³⁷ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 186.

¹³⁸ A. Schacter, “The Nyktohylaxia of Delos,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 119 (1999): 172. Schacter suggests that the few burials discovered on the island indicate that such a prohibition was likely taken seriously.

¹³⁹ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 187.

¹⁴⁰ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 187-188.

¹⁴¹ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 188.

¹⁴² McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 188.

was affected following these two attacks.¹⁴³ The periods of Delian history that will be most important for our exploration of the Jewish community on the island and the construction of the synagogue building are the Second period of Athenian rule and the subsequent attacks of the island by foreign forces.

Within these periods, there are a few literary and epigraphic references that suggest the existence of a Jewish community on Delos, some as early as the second century BCE. 1 Macc 15:23 contains a letter of friendship attributed to a Roman consul Lucius, dated to approximately 139 BCE, and details that the Romans have renewed their friendship with the Jews. The letter was sent to a list of different locations, one of which was Delos. Now, using this text as evidence for the presence of a Jewish community in Delos at this time is, of course, speculative. As Lidia Matassa suggests, the letter does not directly make reference to Jews on Delos and we must be careful about the inferences we draw from the mention of Delos.¹⁴⁴ L. Michael White,¹⁴⁵ Donald Binder,¹⁴⁶ and Monika Trümper,¹⁴⁷ however, make reference to this letter when discussing the presence of Jews on Delos in the second century BCE. Binder contends that the discovery of two-second century Jewish epitaphs (*CIJ* 1.725a, b) in Rhenea, the burial island of Delos, confirm the existence of Jews on Delos roughly contemporary to the time this letter was

¹⁴³ McLean, "The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations," 188-189.

¹⁴⁴ Lidia Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 25 (2007): 85. Matassa, however, does not take into account the evidence presented by White, Binder, and Trümper.

¹⁴⁵ L. Michael White, "The Delos Synagogue Revisited: Recent fieldwork in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora," *The Harvard Theological Review* 80.2 (Apr., 1987): 136-137, n. 14.

¹⁴⁶ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 297.

¹⁴⁷ Monika Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora: The Delos Synagogue Reconsidered," *Hesperia* 73.4 (Oct.-Dec. 2004): 589.

written.¹⁴⁸ These same epitaphs were previously also cited by Belle Mazur as evidence for the presence of Jews on Delos in the second century BCE.¹⁴⁹

Perhaps the most important literary reference for the existence of a Jewish community on Delos is found in Josephus' *Ant.* 213-216, which contains a decree in response to complaints from a Jewish community regarding the poor treatment they were receiving.

[213] Julius Gaius, commander, consul of the Romans, to the magistrates, council and people of Parium, greeting. The Jews in Delos and some other Jews being dwellers there, some of your envoys also being present, have appealed to me and declared that you by statute prevent them from performing their native customs and sacred rituals. [214] Now it is not acceptable to me that such statues should be made against our friends and allies and that they are prevented to live according to their customs, to collect money for common meals and to perform sacred rituals: not even in Rome are they prohibited to do this. [216] For in fact Gaius Caesar, our commander and consul, by edict forbade religious guilds to assemble in the city but, as a single exception, he did not forbid these people to do so, or to collect money or to have common meals. [216] Likewise do I prohibit other religious guilds exempting only these people whom I permit to assemble and feast according to their native customs and laws. And if you have made any statue against our friends and allies you will do well to revoke them because of their good service and goodwill toward us.¹⁵⁰

Generally, this text has been taken as evidence for the presence of a Jewish community in Delos.¹⁵¹ White understands the text to preserve an edict that upheld the privileges

¹⁴⁸ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 298. Cf. ed., David Noy, Alexander Panayotov Hanswulf Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* vol.1: Eastern Europe, 235-242. Both inscriptions contain prayers of vengeance on behalf of two murdered women and are dated to the 2nd - early 1st century BCE. The first contains the name Heraclea, which is not otherwise attested in Jewish inscriptions, but the second includes the name Martina, which occurs in a Jewish epitaph from Rome (*JJWE* ii 582).

¹⁴⁹ Belle Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece* (Athens: Hestia, 1935), 9.

¹⁵⁰ Translation from Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 124.

¹⁵¹ According to Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue*, in a forthcoming publication Claude Eilers argues that the Greek ἐν Δήλῳ refers to where the meeting was held, not where the Jews came from. Cf n.1, 124. Gruen, however, disagrees with this claiming that the word order of the Greek argues against such a construct, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, n.52 pp. 92-93. Trümper has

granted to Delian Jews as “friends” of Rome. He suggests that the reference to *The Jews in Delos* is a special designation that distinguishes them from a second group of Jews on the island.¹⁵² This position, however, is only briefly explained and does not appear to be discussed or supported elsewhere by others. Binder, likewise, states that the text was written in response to objections from the community of Jews on Delos. He further argues that the mention of common meals and sacred rites/rituals suggests the possible existence of a synagogue on the island that included some kind of banquet hall used for gatherings on sacred days.¹⁵³ Levine translates the text similarly and designates it as evidence for the presence of a Delos Jewish community that was encountering problems with its surrounding neighbours.¹⁵⁴ Matassa, one of the more recent scholars to publish on the Delos synagogue, advocates this position as well; she states that the text clearly indicates that within the middle of the first century BCE a community of Jews on the island of Delos was prohibited from observing their sacred rites.¹⁵⁵

The above literary and epigraphic sources tentatively suggest that there was a strong Jewish presence on Delos, possibly as early as the second century BCE. It is plausible that Jews were part of the many different groups that came to Delos to establish businesses and communities following Rome’s decision to declare the island a free port in the middle of the second century BCE. If we understand *Ant.* 213-216 to confirm the

suggested that it is uncertain if this decree was referring to the Jews on Delos. She later goes on to state that “regardless of the location of the privileged Jews, it seems fairly safe to imagine that sacred rites and customs of Jews on neighbouring Cycladic islands did not differ considerably, and that common dining played an important role in all of them,” suggesting that she is comfortable using this decree as possible evidence for the existence of a synagogue on Delos, “The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora,” 589-590.

¹⁵² White, “The Delos Synagogue Revisited,” 146.

¹⁵³ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 299.

¹⁵⁴ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 112.

¹⁵⁵ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 86.

presence of a Jewish community during the first century BCE, we can further suggest that this community was considerable in size, and well organized; it is unlikely that a smaller Jewish presence would be able to appeal to Rome in this manner.

4.2.2. The Synagogue Building

The synagogue building on Delos, termed *GD 80*, was excavated in 1912-1913 by the French School of Archaeology led by André Plassart. *GD 80* is located in an area now called the ‘quartier du stade.’ The building is located immediately on the shore, and the surrounding area consists mostly of residential buildings, a gymnasium (*GD 76*), a guild house (*GD 79a*), and, of course, a stadium (*GD 78*).¹⁵⁶ According to Trümper, the stadium was built sometime during the period of Delian independence, but despite this construction, the ‘quartier du stade’ was developed mostly during the second period of Athenian rule when the Romans established Delos as a free port.¹⁵⁷ In addition to the discovery of the synagogue building, numerous inscriptions were found, either within the structure or elsewhere nearby.

The first five inscriptions, listed below, were found on votives discovered within *GD 80*.

1. *ID 2331*
Ζωσᾶς
Πάριος
Θεῷ
Ἰψίστῳ
εὐχὴν.

¹⁵⁶ Trümper, “The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora,” 514.

¹⁵⁷ Trümper, “The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora,” 514.

Zosas of Paros to God Most High, (in fulfillment of) a vow.¹⁵⁸

2. *ID 2332*

Ἵψις-
τω εὐ-
χὴν Μ-
αρκία.

Marcia to the Most High (in fulfillment of) a vow.

3. *ID 2330*

Λαωδίκη Θεῶι
Ἵψίστωι σωθεῖ-
σα ταῖς ὑφ' αὐτο-
ῦ θαραπήαις
εὐχὴν.

Laodice, to God Most High, having been saved by his therapies, (in fulfillment of) a vow.

4. *ID 2328*

Λυσίμαχος
ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ
Θεῷ Ἵψίστῳ
χαριστήριον.

Lysimachus on behalf on himself to God Most High, a thank-offering.

5. *ID 2333*

.....
(rosette) (rosette)
γενόμενος
ἐλεύθερος.

...having been set free.

The following inscription was not discovered in *GD 80*, but in a nearby insula (*GD 79*).

6. *ID 2329*

Ἀγαθοκλῆς
καὶ Λυσίμα-
χος ἐπὶ
προσευχῇ.

¹⁵⁸ All inscriptions and their translations taken from Runesson, Binder, and Brandt, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, 123-131.

Agathocles and Lysimachus for the prayer hall

The last two inscriptions were discovered in 1979-1980 on marble stelai found along the east shore of the island approximately 90m north of *GD* 80 and are considered to be of Samaritan origin.¹⁵⁹

7. Inscription IJO 1, Ach66 (*SEG* 32.810)

[? Οἱ ἐν Δήλῳ]

Ἰσραηλιται οἱ ἀπαρχόμενοι εἰς ἱερὸν ἅγιον Ἄρ-
γαρζεῖν ἐτίμησά *vacat* Μένιππον Ἄρτεμιδώρου Ἡρα-
κλειον αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἐγγόνους αὐτοῦ κατασκευ-
άσαντα καὶ ἀναθένθα ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἐπὶ προσευχῆ τοῦ
θε[οῦ] ΤΟΝ [- - - - -]
ΟΛΟΝΚΑΙΤΟ [- - ca 6-8 - - καὶ ἐστεφάνωσαν] χρυσῶ στε[φά-]
νω καὶ [- - - - -]
ΚΑ - -
Τ - -

The Israelites [on Delos?] who make first-fruit offerings to the temple on holy Mt. Gerizim honour Menippus, son of Artemidorus, of Herakleion, both himself and his descendants, for constructing and dedicating from his own funds for the prayer hall of God the... and the..., and crown him with a golden crown and...

7. Inscription IJO 1, Ach67 (*SEG* 32.809)

Οἱ ἐν Δήλῳ Ἰσραελεῖται οἱ ἀ-
Παρχόμενοι εἰς ἱερὸν Ἄρχα-
ριζεῖν στεφανοῦσιν χρυσῶ
στεφάνῳ Σαραπίωνα Ἰάσο-
νος Κνώσιον εὐεργεσίας
ἐνεκεν τῆς εἰς ἑαυτούς.

The Israelites on Delos, who make first-fruit offerings to the temple on Mt. Gerizim crown with a golden crown Serapion, son of Jason, of Knossos for his benefactions toward them.

¹⁵⁹ White, “The Delos Synagogue Revisited,” 141.

The above seven inscriptions have played a major role in discussions concerning *GD 80* and different approaches to them will be examined below within the discussion concerning the current state of research.

The first publications on *GD 80* occurred following the excavations in 1912-1913 when Plassart published a short report, in French, detailing the aspects of the building plan and identified it as a synagogue.¹⁶⁰ Mazur, however, later challenged Plassart's identification of the building as a synagogue. She suggested that the plan of the original building is comparable to a Hellenistic house type on a larger scale similar to the House of the Poseidoniasts on Delos.¹⁶¹ From this similarity, Mazur argued that *GD 80* "belongs to a social institution similar to that of the Poseidoniasts."¹⁶² Having identified the older building as belonging to an unknown association, she suggested that a restoration occurred after the pirate raids of 69 BCE.¹⁶³ She further argued that the Jewish community on Delos, as described in Josephus, did not match what she called "the poor patchwork of the second structure."¹⁶⁴ Instead, her final claim asserted that, based on the votive inscriptions found inside, "what we meet in this building is the pagan cult of Theos Hypsistos, unquestionably brought from the Orient, and not essentially different from that existing elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world of the Hellenistic times."¹⁶⁵ Following Mazur, Philippe Bruneau published extensively on the structure and he distinguished three different building phases. He argued that during the second phase (after 88 BCE)

¹⁶⁰ For a summary of Plassart's findings see Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, 16-17.

¹⁶¹ Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, 18.

¹⁶² Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, 18.

¹⁶³ Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, 19.

¹⁶⁴ Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, 22.

¹⁶⁵ Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, 22.

the structure served as a Jewish synagogue.¹⁶⁶ Since Bruneau's publications, the general scholarly consensus holds that *GD* 80 was, at some point between the mid-second century BCE and first century CE, a synagogue edifice.¹⁶⁷

4.2.3 The State of Research

As we shall see, in the current state of research certain aspects regarding the synagogue building are contested. Disagreements exist primarily concerning the number of building phases and what took place within the building during its different phases. Another area of contention pertains to the original use of the building and its subsequent function in later years. Options include that the structure was originally a private house later converted into a synagogue, a cultic meeting place transformed into a synagogue, a synagogue edifice from its inception, or a public building that never functioned as a synagogue. Four scholars and their respective works will be analyzed in this section: L. Michael White, Donald Binder, Monika Trümper, and Lidia Matassa.

L. Michael White

In 1987, White wrote an article for *Harvard Theological Review* asserting that a reconsideration of Diaspora synagogue evidence was needed in order to clarify problems concerning the forms of early synagogue buildings. His focus on the Delos synagogue was based upon its status as the earliest archaeological evidence we have of a synagogue,

¹⁶⁶ For a brief summary of Bruneau's position see Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 518-519 and 570.

¹⁶⁷ Lidia Matassa is one voice that has challenged the identification of *GD* 80 as a synagogue. Her arguments will be analyzed below.

both in the Diaspora and Judaea.¹⁶⁸ He described the building plan of *GD* 80 as rather simple, and his layout of the structure is as follows:

On the west side are three rooms or areas (A, B, D) faced on the east by a court (C). Area D (L:ca9.50-10.20/W:15.055m) was subdivided into several small chambers, one of which gave access to a cistern in the northwest corner. Room A (L:7.85/W:15.04m) represents the main area of assembly as indicated by the benches lining the wall. Its axial orientation is toward the west, where a *thronos* (or *cathedra*) stands in the middle of the bench-lined wall, opposite the northernmost doorway from C. Access to A is either from C or through Room B (L:8.22/W:15.038m) by a triportal in the partition wall.

White established three stages of construction for *GD* 80. He suggested that the original building was most likely a house constructed in the 2nd century BCE.¹⁶⁹ Following this, he proposed that there were two stages of renovations. The first stage, White argues, consisted of a formal renovation that saw the original house transformed into a synagogue. The main features he attributes to this phase included an embellishment of the Portico and possibly the construction of the wall dividing the large hall (A/B).¹⁷⁰ He concludes that the second renovation (the third building phase) commenced after the Mithridatic raids, and included the rebuilding of the eastern wall of A/B and possible embellishments in the rooms.¹⁷¹ White's building phases are, therefore as follows: the construction of the building as a domestic home in the 2nd century BCE, followed by the transformation of the home into a synagogue sometime between the later 2nd century and early 1st century BCE, and lastly, a phase of rebuilding and repair after 88 BCE.

¹⁶⁸ White, "The Delos Synagogue Revisited," 136.

¹⁶⁹ White, "The Delos Synagogue Revisited," 151.

¹⁷⁰ White, "The Delos Synagogue Revisited," 151.

¹⁷¹ White, "The Delos Synagogue Revisited," 152.

White further suggests that there are architectural precedents on Delos for the building after its renovation, and he draws comparisons with the House of the Comedians and the House of the Poseidoniasts. Additionally, he suggests that a precedent exists on the island for the practice of adapting private domestic buildings for cultic usage and offers the building of Sarapeion A as an example.¹⁷² In regards to whether or not *GD* 80 was a Jewish or Samaritan institution, White suggests the existence of different synagogues for each community. He proposes that there were two establishments “representing ethnic enclaves”; one refers to the Samaritan institution, and White suggests that the “little building (*GD* no.80) may be designated as the house of ‘the Jewish Hypsistians in Delos’.”¹⁷³ He does, however, further acknowledge that it cannot be ruled out that *GD* 80 belonged to the Samaritan community on Delos.¹⁷⁴

The most influential factor of White’s building history of *GD* 80 has been his suggestion that the structure was originally a private house and later converted to a synagogue edifice.¹⁷⁵ Many have followed White’s proposal, and group the Delos synagogue among other Diaspora synagogues that may have originally served as private homes, such as Dura Europos, Priene and Stobi.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² White, “The Delos Synagogue Revisited” 152-153. The buildings of the Poseidoniasts and Sarapeion will be discussed in detail below concerning other ethnic groups on the island of Delos.

¹⁷³ White, “The Delos Synagogue Revisited,” 154.

¹⁷⁴ White, “The Delos Synagogue Revisited,” 154 n.84.

¹⁷⁵ White repeated this assertion elsewhere stating, “the building was originally a private house near the shore; it was taken over by a local Jewish community and adapted architecturally as a place of worship and community center,” *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture. Building’s God house in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* Vol. 1 (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 64.

¹⁷⁶ Cf, Eric M. Meyers, “Ancient Synagogues: An Archaeological Introduction” in *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World* (ed. Steven Fine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12-13; Louis Feldman and Leonard Rutgers project the same perspective elsewhere in this volume (62, 94).

The influence of White's proposal is unfortunate, however, as it is highly unlikely that the structure was originally a domestic home. Binder was one of the first to challenge this perception, followed later by Trümper. Binder's challenge to this theory is based on several factors, of which the first concerns the size and overall structure of *GD 80*. He asserts that Room A/B is far too large to be erected as part of a private abode.¹⁷⁷ To illustrate this point conceptually, Binder points out that "at one quarter of the size of the gymnasium courtyard (*GD 76*), it could enclose the whole of the Masada synagogue inside with room to spare."¹⁷⁸

In addition to the great size of Room A/B in comparison to private architecture on the island, Binder also argues that the size of the stylobate is quite large. He notes that at over 18m long it is considerably larger than private homes, which generally have stylobates less than 10m in length.¹⁷⁹ The width of the stylobate (0.725m) also suggests a column width slightly smaller and Binder argues that even the grandest of Delian homes do not have such dimensions.¹⁸⁰ Runesson, who argues that there is no comparable domestic structure on the island as the columns, the edifice as a whole, and the building plan all contrast with what we find in private architecture, has further advocated this position.¹⁸¹ Based on the lack of corroborating evidence from domestic Delian architecture, it can be assumed that *GD 80* was not constructed as a private house of any kind, but likely as some sort of public building. Exactly what kind of building *GD 80*

¹⁷⁷ According to Binder, the room stands at 16.90m x 14.40m, whereas domestic buildings on the island had smaller rooms, roughly 5x5m in size, *Into the Temple Courts*, 307.

¹⁷⁸ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 307.

¹⁷⁹ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 308.

¹⁸⁰ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 308.

¹⁸¹ Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue*, 186.

began as is difficult to determine and various suggestions have been put forth, including those of Binder and Trümper.

Donald Binder

Binder established two different construction stages and suggests that the building functioned as a synagogue in the second phase. He is, however, uncertain how the building operated during the first. He dates the first phase to the second century BCE, with the Rooms A/B at this point undivided.¹⁸² Binder's second phase is dated to after 88 BCE, based on his claim that the partition wall, erected to divide A/B, incorporates elements from the gymnasium ruined during the Mithridatic raids.¹⁸³ He contends that the benches and the central placement of the throne in Room A existed during the second phase, but it is uncertain if they may have belonged to an earlier stage.¹⁸⁴

As discussed above, Binder rejects White's theory that the building was erected in the first phase as a domestic dwelling; instead, he suggests that it was constructed as a public building of some kind. Binder argues firmly, however, that the building functioned as a synagogue during the second phase. He offers four pieces of evidence to support this claim. First, he suggests that the presence of the "God Most High" inscriptions and the association of the inscription dedicated 'for the proseuche' (*ID 2329*) indicate its function as a synagogue.¹⁸⁵ The benches, arranged in Rooms A/B, are also a decisive factor for Binder. He posits that the benches in *GD 80* resemble similar

¹⁸² Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 299.

¹⁸³ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 299.

¹⁸⁴ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 301.

¹⁸⁵ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 306.

arrangements¹⁸⁶ that are found in Galilean style synagogues from the Second Temple period and onwards. Artistic features mark the third piece of evidence Binder brings forth. He notes that the palmette that graces the back of the throne and rosettes that were found on one of the inscriptions suggest a Jewish or Samaritan provenance.¹⁸⁷ Lastly, the building's location near the shore and the presence of water are considered. Binder suggests that a stone water basin near the entrance of the building, as well as the cistern, may have been used for ritual purification.¹⁸⁸ This suggests, to him, that the building served either a Jewish or Samaritan community that was concerned with ritual ablutions of some kind.

Having established his building phases and functions, Binder proposes two different scenarios for the occupation history of *GD* 80. One possibility is that the building was built as a cultic hall and transformed into a synagogue after 88 BCE: the second scenario sees the structure as originally a synagogue.¹⁸⁹ Binder, himself, notes that determining which scenario is correct is quite difficult.¹⁹⁰ With regard to the presence of the Samaritan inscriptions, he acknowledges that it is uncertain whether the building was Jewish or Samaritan; only further excavations will provide clarification.¹⁹¹ Regardless of which scenario is correct, Binder's analysis confirms the presence of a Jewish (or possibly Samaritan) synagogue in the Diaspora sometime during the first century BCE.

¹⁸⁶ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 306.

¹⁸⁷ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 306. In a previous chapter of his work, Binder, when discussing the Gamla synagogue notes that these two motifs were common in Jewish art and alludes to their presence in the Jerusalem Temple, 168-169.

¹⁸⁸ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 306.

¹⁸⁹ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 314.

¹⁹⁰ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 314.

¹⁹¹ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 315-316.

Monika Trümper

The most extensive work on Delos, in terms of archaeological detail and discussion of architectural features, is that of Monika Trümper's who completed field work on the site over three summers from 2000-2003. She puts forth the most detailed construction history of *GD 80* based on the different wall structures of the building, and isolates five different phases of construction. Trümper's first phase conceives *GD 80* as a monumental hall. She argues that the "edifice was conceived as a freestanding building and comprised the large undivided hall A/B, with three doorways equipped with marble thresholds, and the large water reservoir, which was accessible from the south."¹⁹² The eastern part of the building likely consisted of a colonnade that was accessible from all sides.¹⁹³ Similar to Binder, Trümper asserts that the building, in its first phase, could not have been a private house based on the large dimensions of *GD 80*, which exceed general standards of Delian private architecture.¹⁹⁴ She acknowledges that, in comparison to private homes, *GD 80* has more parallels with public meeting places on Delos, such as the House of the Poseidoniasts, but that it still lacks common features associated with these establishments.¹⁹⁵ Trümper's second phase of construction consists largely of the extension of the building to the south and the addition of area D, which comprised several

¹⁹² Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 557.

¹⁹³ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 557-558.

¹⁹⁴ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 558-560.

¹⁹⁵ As Trümper notes, *GD 80* lacks "a large peristyle-courtyard; a latrine; commercial space such as shops, magazines, or workshops; and 'sacred' space or objects such as shrines, niches, altars, stelai, and figurines that attest the veneration of gods," 560.

small rooms.¹⁹⁶ She rightly asserts that the function and purpose of these rooms cannot be determined due to a lack of archaeological evidence within the area.¹⁹⁷

Trümper assigns the first and second building phases of *GD 80* to the period prior to the Mithridatic raids of 88 BCE. Her remaining three phases are all attributed to the period after these raids. Trümper's third building phase saw the remodeling of the eastern wall of the hall A/B, which integrated reused marble material.¹⁹⁸ According to her, the main goal of this phase was simply to rebuild and stabilize the wall, which was likely damaged during the raids.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, the fourth phase saw minor changes to the building, with an enlargement of the building to the east with the portico and peristyle being altered.²⁰⁰

The fifth, and final, phase isolated by Trümper consisted of the division of the main hall A/B into two similar rooms with a large wall.²⁰¹ According to her, "the two rooms would have formed a kind of interconnected room-suite, with B as a better-lighted large vestibule or front room and A as a darker, more secluded back room."²⁰² She further argues that this phase can be safely attributed to a period after 69 BCE, due to the marble elements present in the wall; such reuse of this type of marble was normal in Delos after this time.²⁰³ In concluding her discussion concerning the construction history of *GD 80*,

¹⁹⁶ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 562.

¹⁹⁷ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 562.

¹⁹⁸ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 563.

¹⁹⁹ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 564.

²⁰⁰ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 564.

²⁰¹ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 567.

²⁰² Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 567.

²⁰³ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 567-568.

Trümper states that, while the first two phases took place prior to 88 BCE, only further research on the site will determine a more precise original date of construction.²⁰⁴

The most distinctive feature of Trümper's analysis of *GD* 80 is her argument that the building functioned as a synagogue from earliest phase of construction. She focuses, however, not on the inscriptional evidence and furnishings of the building to support this claim, but rather the architectural elements and the overall design of the structure. She suggests that "the overall plan, structure, and elements of the edifice, and (2) its location on the seashore" show a Jewish or Samaritan initiative regarding the original purpose of the building.²⁰⁵ As noted above, Trümper argues that *GD* 80 lacks prominent features of buildings used for the meetings of associations. She further supports the claim that the edifice was not originally a cultic hall by asserting that its unusual location by the shore distinguishes it from the general needs of such association meeting places.²⁰⁶ Trümper mainly argues that the remote location of *GD* 80 in a noncommercial area does not fit the commercial aspects generally associated with association meeting places on the island.²⁰⁷ Further to this claim, Trümper notes that before even the fourth or fifth phase, there is no evidence suggesting large alterations to the building that may possibly suggest a change of ownership or function of the building.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 569.

²⁰⁵ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 578.

²⁰⁶ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 580.

²⁰⁷ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 581.

²⁰⁸ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 580.

Lidia Matassa

One of the most recent publications on the Delos synagogue comes from Lidia Matassa who is skeptical about the scholarly consensus concerning *GD* 80 as a synagogue. She largely disagrees with this identification and claims that there is no evidence that it was a synagogue. She contends that the identification of *GD* 80 as a synagogue has persisted because of loosely founded assumptions and preconceived notions regarding the evidence referred to in current scholarship.

One of Matassa's main sources of contention for the identification of *GD* 80 as a synagogue rests on her interpretation of the epigraphic evidence. Her main issues relate to one of the votive inscriptions (*ID* 2329) and one of the Samaritan inscriptions (*SEG* 32.810), both of which contain the word *προσευχή*. For the votive inscription, Matassa argues that it should be translated as 'Agathokles and lysimachos for an offering/prayer'.²⁰⁹ Her rendering of the phrase *ἐπὶ προσευχῇ* as 'for an offering/prayer,' rather than for the prayer hall, is based on her assertion that because there is no definite article, it cannot refer to a building.²¹⁰ This line of argumentation follows that of Mazur who made the same claim in her early work on *GD* 80.²¹¹ Matassa follows her argument with the statement that "this basic point is often ignored in the scholarship on the subject or dismissed as irrelevant."²¹² This, however, is not the case since almost all who have translated this inscription in relation to *GD* 80 have addressed the issue of *ἐπὶ προσευχῇ* in one way or another.

²⁰⁹ Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 87.

²¹⁰ Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 88.

²¹¹ Mazur, *Studies on Jewry in Greece*, 21. She states that the phrase can only mean 'in fulfillment or in pursuance of a prayer'.

²¹² Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 88.

We may begin by looking at Matassa’s translation of the Samaritan inscription, since connections can be drawn between it and the previous inscription. Matassa renders the pairing of ἐπὶ προσευχῆ as ‘for an offering/prayer, rather than prayer hall.’²¹³ She also suggests that Plassart’s original translation of the phrase on the votive offering (*ID* 2329) has caused many to translate the portion of the Samaritan inscription in the same way.²¹⁴ Matassa comments that “there is no other way to translate the phrase, and to attempt to do so is to manipulate the evidence to fit a preconceived idea of what it is ‘supposed’ to mean.”²¹⁵

Matassa’s translation of the phrase in both accounts, and her argument for doing so, is problematic because she does not engage with any of the scholarly discussion regarding these two translations. Returning to the first instance of ἐπὶ προσευχῆ, Matassa claims that others often ignore the lack of a definite article, but this is not accurate. Yet, both Binder²¹⁶ and Trümper (in reference to the Samaritan inscription)²¹⁷ acknowledge the challenging nature of this phrase. Additionally, Matassa’s claim that many translate the phrase in the Samaritan inscription in light of the earlier votive inscription is, in fact, wrong; the reverse is actually true. To understand this, we must look first at White’s discussion of the Samaritan inscription. He argues that the verb κατασκευάσαντα (ll. 4-5) is regularly used in connection with the construction of a synagogue.²¹⁸ This implies that the phrase ἐπὶ προσευχῆ can be translated as ‘for the

²¹³ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 92.

²¹⁴ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 92.

²¹⁵ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 94.

²¹⁶ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 303-305.

²¹⁷ Trümper, “The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora,” 588.

²¹⁸ White, “The Delos Synagogue Revisited,” 143.

prayer hall’ despite the lack of a definite article.²¹⁹ Binder, when discussing the Samaritan inscription, references White’s analysis of the verb, and suggests that this provides an example of a local analogy for the use of ἐπὶ προσευχῇ without a definite article, and suggests that the votive inscription (*ID* 2329) should be translated as ‘for the prayer hall.’²²⁰ Matassa’s translation of the phrase is thus problematic. Her argument for the correct translation to be ‘for an offering/prayer’ is substantially weakened by not engaging in dialogue with other perspectives available concerning this issue.

In a related manner, Matassa ignores evidence from other inscriptions when she dismisses the possibility of some names on the votive offerings being Jewish. In her discussion of *ID* 2332, which reads, “Marcia to the Most High (in fulfillment of) a vow,” she notes that it was found on a bench in Room A and claims the name Marcia was identified as Jewish solely based on Plassart’s original identification.²²¹ The name, however, is attested in other inscriptions, particularly in Jewish monuments from Rome.²²² Likewise, pertaining to the previously discussed inscription *ID* 2329, which contains the names, Agathocles and Lysimachus, Matassa argues that Plassart’s identification of these names as Jewish on the basis of *GD* 80 being a synagogue has “created an entirely circular argument for anyone looking for external corroborating evidence concerning these names.”²²³ Yet, both of these names are attested elsewhere in

²¹⁹ This translation is further supported by Runesson, Binder and Olsson who suggest that *proseuche* clearly refers to a synagogue since the “construction of one or more of its parts or features is mentioned in ll. 4-5,” *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source book*, 130.

²²⁰ Binder, *Into the Temple Courts*, 305.

²²¹ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 90.

²²² Runesson, Binder, and Brandt, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, 126. (cf. *JJWE* 2.128, 208, 233, 431, 490).

²²³ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 88.

Jewish inscriptions. Lysimachus, in addition to being found on one of the votive inscriptions in *GD 80 (ID 2328)*, is found in a Jewish inscription from Cyrenaica (CJZ 45b).²²⁴ Similarly, the name Agathocles is found elsewhere in Jewish inscriptions from both Egypt (JIGRE 36 and 46) and Cyrenaica (CJZ 7a, 10).²²⁵ Now, Matassa does identify other instances of these names found on inscriptions on Delos that are non-Jewish,²²⁶ which could indicate that the inscriptions associated with *GD 80* may not refer to Jewish individuals. Yet, her strong assertion that these names are “no indicator of Jewishness on Delos” is weak.²²⁷ At the very least, she must acknowledge the possibility of these names being both Jewish and non-Jewish, and address it within her argument. While Matassa raises important questions concerning the use of epigraphic evidence to identify *GD 80* as a synagogue, her arguments are compromised by a lack of engagement with scholarly dialogue and ignorance of comparative evidence.

Another problem with Matassa’s argument is that her discussion of the building lacks precise details concerning archaeological and architectural features. One of the biggest omissions is that she does not provide clear phases of construction like White, Binder, and Trümper do. This would have helped strengthen her case, and at the very least, provide a source of useful engagement with the other scholars. For example, in one instance she claims that others (Mazur, Bruneau, White, Binder, and Trümper) have produced varying interpretations of the first and second building phases, but the only

²²⁴ Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, 128.

²²⁵ Runesson, Binder and Brandt, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, 129.

²²⁶ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 88-89.

²²⁷ Matassa, “Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos,” 89.

feature that may have a bearing on the buildings identification as a synagogue is that the final phase had benches around the walls room A/B.²²⁸ Yet, it is unclear whose final building phase Matassa is referring to (White identified three phases, Binder two, and Trümper five). She also claims that the style and arrangement of the benches are similar to non-Jewish buildings found elsewhere on Delos, thus challenging the claim that the benches lend credence to the identification of the building as a synagogue. First, she notes that *GD 80*'s benches appear "identical" to those found within the *Ephebeium* of the gymnasium (*GD 76*).²²⁹ She also suggests that the arrangement of benches in *GD 80* is similar to the configuration found in two non-Jewish public buildings, Sarapeion A and Sarapeion C.²³⁰ Matassa, however, does not demonstrate how the benches and their arrangements are identical, or similar to, those found in non-Jewish buildings. No dimensions or other architectural features are given to support her claim. It is, therefore, not clear how these benches may be similar to others found in non-Jewish buildings.

Another unsupported argument occurs when Matassa discusses the niche found in the wall of room A. Trümper posits that the niche, located just 2.20m north of the throne's position, was crudely made and is best explained as providing a place for a lamp subsequent to the partition wall of A/B being constructed, since the lighting of Room A would have been insufficient.²³¹ Matassa, however, dismisses Trümper's claim that the niche was a later addition to the wall and was crudely made. Matassa asserts that,

this is incorrect, as anyone who has looked at other structures on the island will see. The niche is an integral part of the original Hellenistic construction.

²²⁸ Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 97-98.

²²⁹ Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 97.

²³⁰ Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 97-98.

²³¹ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 585.

I found numerous other such niches, constructed and dressed in precisely the same manner and these niches are common all over the island and elsewhere.

Despite this strong assertion, Matassa does not discuss the features of the niche found in *GD 80* in relation to the dimensions and features of these other niches. In fact, she does not provide any discussion or information concerning the latter. Instead, she provides three photos of niches found within the Theatre District on Delos, but this is hardly enough to support her claim.²³²

Overall, the conclusions drawn by Matassa are questionable. In her concluding remarks she claims that all of the hypotheses concerning *GD 80* as a synagogue are based upon Plassart's translations of the inscriptions,²³³ but this information is incorrect. As we have seen, Trümper's identification of *GD 80* as a synagogue is largely based on archaeological and architectural arguments. The cursory nature of her engagement with Trümper, who provides the most extensive and detailed argument for the Delos synagogue, is especially problematic and affects her arguments adversely. Furthermore, the nature of Matassa's argument against the building's function(s) is itself quite tenuous. In one instance she even admits that, "it is safe to say that while there is nothing that would exclude *GD 80* from being a synagogue, there is not one piece of evidence that would suggest it was a synagogue."²³⁴ Such a statement leaves a sense of ambiguity, despite Matassa's adamant assertions that it is impossible to identify the building as a synagogue based on the available evidence. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of

²³² Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 110 (Fig.13.).

²³³ Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 111.

²³⁴ Matassa, "Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos," 111.

Matassa's approach to *GD 80* is that, while she dismisses the possibility of the building as a synagogue, she does not provide another, alternative option. Simply put, if *GD 80* was not a synagogue, then what was it? By rejecting the scholarly consensus regarding the building, the onus falls on Matassa to provide another possible, and credible, identification, but she does not.

4.2.4 Associations and Guilds on Delos

The island of Delos was a diverse port that had a variety of different communities interacting and engaging with one another. According to recent surveys of the island, inscriptional evidence presents us with close to thirty different associations and groups ranging from the third century BCE to the second century CE.²³⁵ A large influx of various merchants and shippers arrived on the island following the Roman declaration of Delos as a free port in the mid-second century BCE. As Trümper notes, many of these groups were formed around a single ethnic group that had their own cults from their respective homelands, built sanctuaries for their patron gods, and assembled in particular locations.²³⁶ These different associations all contributed to the diverse and pluralistic environment that existed on Delos in antiquity. In his 1996 study of associations on Delos, B. Hudson McLean remarked that these groups were often under the patronage of

²³⁵ Trümper, "Where the non-Delians Met in Delos: The Meeting-Places of Foreign Associations and Ethnic Communities in Late Hellenistic Delos," in *Political Culture in the Greek City after the Classic Age*. (ed. O. van Nijf and R. Alston; Leuven: Groningen-Royal Holloway Studies on the Greek City after the Classical Age 2011), 51.

²³⁶ Trümper, "Where the non-Delians Met in Delos," 49.

an ethnic deity according to their national identity and/or profession.²³⁷ McLean isolates two different dimensions to these associations: congregational and cultic. He suggests that the congregational dimension provided group members with a sense of kinship and national identity, whereas the cultic aspect provided an opportunity for members to worship the gods of their respective homelands.²³⁸

Such an understanding of associations is similar to Harland's approach concerning groups in an ancient Mediterranean context. Harland isolates five characteristics of a principal social network basis for associations in antiquity that were often interrelated; these include household, ethnic, neighbourhood, occupation and cult/temple.²³⁹ He notes that groups that were establishing themselves in new cities or towns of residence could maintain "lively attention" to ethnic origins and identity.²⁴⁰ This ethnic dimension to associations is parallel to the ethnic bond that existed amongst Jewish individuals within their respective communities; as Harland suggests, when discussing the maintenance of ethnic identity among associations, "it is not surprising to find Judaeans (*Ioudaioi*) in the cities of Asia (and "Israelites" or Samaritans on the island of Delos, for instance) forming similar groups."²⁴¹ Thus Jewish and Samaritan communities brought to Delos their own ancestral customs and sacred rites particular to their distinctive *ethnos*, just as did other groups.

²³⁷ B. Hudson McLean, "The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations and Christian Churches on Delos," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; New York: Routledge, 1996), 189.

²³⁸ McLean, "The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations," 189. See also Nicholas K. Rauh, *The Sacred Bonds of Commerce – Religion, Economy, and Trade Society at Hellenistic Roman Delos* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1993). He similarly notes that such associations organized themselves "religiously as well as ethnically according to the worship of the gods of their homelands", 28.

²³⁹ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 29.

²⁴⁰ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 33.

²⁴¹ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 34.

As noted above, *GD* 80 has been compared often to the House of Poseidoniasts. It would, therefore, be useful to take a closer look at this group and their meeting place. This association was of Phoenician origin and was a predominantly commercial group under the Patronage of Poseidon; they were affiliated with shipping, warehousing, and merchandising on the island.²⁴² Harland classifies them as an ethnic-based association hailing from Berytus in Syria that gathered together until their building's destruction in 69 BCE.²⁴³

The clubhouse of the Poseidoniasts was situated on the island within a residential quarter just north of the Sanctuary of Apollo and has an area of around 1500m².²⁴⁴ Trümper describes the layout of the building as, “a multifunctional building including a sanctuary in Rooms X-V, an assembly centre in the peristyle courtyard F, a stock exchange in the courtyard E, and a hotel in the richly decorated xenon 2.”²⁴⁵ The construction of the building has been dated to sometime around the middle of the second century BCE with at least one later renovation.²⁴⁶ If we accept Trümper's building history of *GD* 80, we then have a non-Jewish meeting place being constructed at about the same time as the synagogue was built. Even if we accept 88 BCE as the first period of *GD* 80's function as a synagogue, there still exists an example of a community that participated in their own meeting rituals and traditions similar to the ways in which Jewish communities may have used their synagogue. The House of the Poseidoniasts appears to have been

²⁴² McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 196.

²⁴³ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 66.

²⁴⁴ Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 53.

²⁴⁵ Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 53.

²⁴⁶ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 196. See also, Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 55.

designed to fulfill the cultic functions of the group, which likely reinforced their sense of kinship and identity. Trümper has analyzed the building and suggests that the space facilitated three different functions that served the association; according to her, 70% of the space was congregational, while commercial and honorary space each represented 15% of the building.²⁴⁷ Location is an important feature of the clubhouse that contrasts with *GD 80*. Unlike *GD 80*, which was situated in a secluded place, the clubhouse was located in a residential quarter, surrounding by other buildings, and was close to the city centre.²⁴⁸

Another prominent group of associations on Delos was the cult of Sarapis that arrived on the island from Egypt sometime during the early third century BCE, according to inscriptional evidence.²⁴⁹ The cult appears to have thrived in Delos as indicated by three different *Sarapeia* (association buildings) that existed on the island. The Delian cult of Sarapis was unique in that it was connected with an additional three other gods: Isis, Anubis, and Harpocrates.²⁵⁰ The oldest of the *Sarapeia*, *Sarapeion A*, is dated to approximately 220 BCE and functioned as the primary cultic centre for Egyptian residents on Delos.²⁵¹ The function of the building as a cultic hall is quite clear from the architectural plan and features. It contains an elevated temple within its court in which three different altars were situated.²⁵² A large dining hall also existed in the building with

²⁴⁷ Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 55.

²⁴⁸ Trümper “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 57.

²⁴⁹ White, *Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, 33.

²⁵⁰ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 205.

²⁵¹ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 205.

²⁵² McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 209.

marble benches lining the walls.²⁵³ These typical features of cultic halls (the altars and large peristyle court) are absent from *GD* 80.²⁵⁴ Sarapeion B is known to have been connected with five different associations, but unfortunately, the remains are quite sparse, and are not conducive to a thorough archaeological evaluation.²⁵⁵ Similar to Sarapeion A, it had a temple, numerous altars and a meeting room.²⁵⁶

A meeting place similar to the Poseidoniasts, but smaller, is, like *GD* 80, situated in the ‘quartier du stade’, and served as the building for an association that produced perfume and was likely involved in trading.²⁵⁷ The identification of the building as a perfumery is based on the presence of two large oil presses that likely functioned as wedge presses and furnaces presumably used for the hot enfleurage of fragrant oils.²⁵⁸ Like other association meeting places, the Perfumery (*GD* 79) had a large courtyard with a peristyle, a large hall for meetings, sacred space with a Nymphaeum, and commercial space.²⁵⁹ In terms of construction history, the building was likely built during the last quarter of the second century BCE with a subsequent renovation at the beginning of the first century BCE.²⁶⁰ The building is roughly contemporary with *GD* 80 and provides an example of another association meeting place in close proximity to the synagogue edifice. Jean-Pierre Brun has suggested that the Perfumery belonged to a group of Italian

²⁵³ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 210.

²⁵⁴ Some have suggested the possibility that rooms D1-7 in *GD* 80 functioned as banquet rooms, but Trümper argues that their sizes largely rule this out. She further notes that A/B could have served for banquets but “nothing hints at a pagan cultic use of this room.” Trümper, “The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora,” 562, 580.

²⁵⁵ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 211.

²⁵⁶ McLean, “The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations,” 211-212.

²⁵⁷ Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 58.

²⁵⁸ Jean-Pierre Brun, “The Production of Perfumes in Antiquity: The Cases of Delos and Paestum,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 104.2 (Apr., 2000): 287-288.

²⁵⁹ Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 59.

²⁶⁰ Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos,” 59-60.

merchants based on inscriptional evidence and the large number of Italians that lived in the ‘quartier du stade.’²⁶¹ If this is the case, such a group may be classified as an ethnic and occupational based association. The possible proximity of another ethnic group to the Jewish community may be thought of in light of ethnic boundary maintenance; Jewish ethnic boundaries became all the more important in a social relationship with other ethnic groups. It is plausible that the Jewish community interacted with this group of Italian merchants and through such interactions distinctions of ethnicity were made clear. This brief look at some associations on Delos gives a sense of context of ethnic based cults on the island in antiquity.

4.2.5. The Delos Synagogue and Ethnic Boundary Maintenance

As a likely Jewish edifice existing prior to the fall of the Jerusalem temple, the Delos synagogue provides us with an opportunity to explore a model of Diaspora synagogue development and maintenance in relation to one expression of Jewish ethnic identity. Several factors regarding *GD* 80 and the surrounding environment lend credence to a possible theory of ethnic boundary maintenance in relation to Diaspora synagogue development. First, the early date of construction (second century to first century BCE) weakens arguments that propose that synagogues were developed out of the need for a replacement of the destroyed Jerusalem temple. While the removed nature of the Delian Jewish community from the temple may have been an influence, it is equally, if not more, plausible to assume that it was not distance from the temple, but the issues developing as

²⁶¹ Brun, “The Production of Perfumes in Antiquity,” 289.

a consequence of the Jews living in a non-Jewish environment that demanded attention from the community. The Delos synagogue was most likely not viewed as a direct replacement for the Jerusalem Temple; if it were, we should have expected to see a different architectural layout that included altars for possible sacrifices. That is, if the synagogue was developed to fulfill the needs of the Temple within the Diaspora, altars would likely be present.²⁶²

Instead, the edifice presents a picture of a large public building with a meeting hall in which a group of individuals could assemble. Such a place would have provided the Jewish community space in which they could participate in activities pertaining to the ancient customs, and other distinguishing features of their *ethnos*. It is not difficult to imagine the rooms A/B of *GD* 80 as a space in which the reading and expounding of scripture took place. These activities not only reinforced the traditions of Judaism, but also contributed to the common ethnic bond of the community. Overall, the various functions associated with the synagogue, as discussed in chapter three, provided the Jewish community a space in which they could engage with customs and laws inherent to their ethnic group.

The location of *GD* 80 may also support the function of ethnic boundaries in relation to Diaspora synagogues. First, the location by the shore could be assumed coincidental, but it is also possible to consider it as not completely arbitrary. It can hardly be explained away by assuming possible antagonistic relations between Jews and non-

²⁶² A so called ‘replacement theory’ for the development of the Diaspora synagogue is further irrelevant when we consider the existence of Jewish Temples outside of ancient Palestine, such as Leontopolis, while the Jerusalem Temple was still considered the central sanctuary.

Jews. There is no evidence suggesting a so-called Jewish neighborhood that would require the community to situate itself in a remote location. The proximity to the sea may be best explained by needs pertaining to water supply, possibly for ritual purity reasons. Ablutions provide one more factor that promotes an understanding of the synagogue as a communal identity centre that, sociologically, reinforced Jewish ethnic identity. Concern with ritual purity is in accordance with the sacred rites of the Jewish ethnos; their traditions necessitated ritual ablutions particularly in relation to activities practiced within the synagogue. As has been argued above, the Jewish tradition was the main proponent of Jewish ethnic boundary maintenance; it reinforced the common ethnic bond that was intertwined with social, religious, and civil aspects of the Jewish community.

The possibility of *GD* 80 as a marker of Jewish identity becomes all the more probable when we consider the diverse nature of Delos and its related associations. As discussed in chapter three, the collective identity of Jews was maintained through communal practices and traditions, and the synagogue provided the space in which these traditions were continued. In Delos, the Jewish community gathered together and participated in such activities that reinforced their collective ethnic identity. Such a reinforcement of this identity becomes all the more important in a non-Jewish environment. The distinct Jewish ethnic bond became crucial when it was under pressure in such a diverse context as Delos. The establishment of an institution that would allow Jews to gather and maintain their ethnic identity could easily counter a threat to boundary maintenance. Further to this, the Jewish synagogue, although existing far away from the city centre, was not entirely isolated. The ‘quarter du stade’ featured many different

buildings, and numerous other ethnic-based associations existed on the island. The synagogue, as a marker of Jewish identity, acted as a representation of the Jewish community to its surrounding society and local context. It is not implausible to propose that non-Jews interacted with Jews within their synagogue and witnessed such ancestral customs that were particular to their ethnic identity. If this was the case, it was one particular way by which the Jewish community could express its unique ethnic identity to the surrounding Delian society.

4.3. The Ostia Synagogue

4.3.1 Ostia and its Jewish Community

Ostia was one of Rome's prominent harbours and the discovery of its synagogue in the 1960s has provided new evidence for the existence of a Jewish community there. According to Russell Meiggs, Roman Ostia was first occupied in the fourth century BCE and it served primarily to defend the coast.²⁶³ Its prominent location on the river Tiber, however, would lead to the settlement's transformation from a naval base into a successful harbor city. By around the second century BCE and after, Ostia's primary importance to Rome lay in its function as a commercial town, rather than defending the coast.²⁶⁴ In fact, the success of Ostia as a Roman port has been suggested as one possible factor for the decline of Delos as a port city in the latter half of the first century BCE.²⁶⁵ The commercial expansion of Ostia continued in the first century CE; such growth and

²⁶³ Russell Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 13.

²⁶⁴ Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 27.

²⁶⁵ Trümper, "The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 514.

expansion of the city rendered the original river harbour no longer adequate.²⁶⁶ Such inadequacy led to the construction of a new harbour by Claudius that ushered in a new wave of commercial expansion.²⁶⁷ This is, perhaps, one of the more significant events in Ostia's development in relation to the construction of the synagogue. The expansion of Ostia as a successful commercial trading post continued into the second century CE, leading Trajan to build another harbour fairly close to that of Claudius'.²⁶⁸ Perhaps the most important aspect for understanding this ancient port city is that it was not merely a harbour settlement. Rather, as Meiggs contends, the commercial aspects of the city (its warehouses and shops) were equally balanced by the marks of a thriving city including temples, basilicas, baths, theatres, and other public buildings.²⁶⁹

Prior to the discovery of the synagogue at Ostia, evidence for the existence of a Jewish community in the city was rather scant. Indeed, the primary evidence for, and our knowledge of, the Jewish community at Ostia is the synagogue, which heightens its significance for not only the study of Diaspora synagogues, but of Diaspora Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period on a whole. The main source of evidence indicative of an Ostian Jewish community, aside from the synagogue and its related inscriptions, is a Latin tomb inscription (*CIJ* 1.533) found nearby at Castel Porziano, just south of Ostia. Parts of the inscription have been reconstructed, which complicates the translation and its use as evidence for a Jewish community at Ostia. The inscription reads as follows:

²⁶⁶ Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 51.

²⁶⁷ Olof Brandt, "The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue at Ostia," in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome – Interdisciplinary Studies* (ed. Birger Olsson, Deiter Mitternach and Olof Brandt; Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag, 2001), 21.

²⁶⁸ Brandt, "The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue," 21.

²⁶⁹ Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 14.

[The congregation/community/association?] of the Jews living [in the colony of Ostia?], who received the plot [from a contribution, gave?] it to Gaius Julius Justus [ruler of the council (*gerusiarch*)] to erect a monument. [On the motion?] of Livius Dionysis the father [*pater*] and...NUS the ruler of the council [*gerusiarch*], built it for himself and his wife, and his freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants. Eighteen feet wide, seventeen feet deep.²⁷⁰

The inscription has been associated with Ostia, not only due to the reconstructed text, but because it was found in an area commonly used for Ostian burials. Karin Hedner-Zetterholm suggests that while Ostia is not explicitly mentioned in the inscription, it is often widely assumed that it was connected to a Jewish community in the city because of the connection with the burial site.²⁷¹ Since the discovery of the synagogue, such assumptions have carried more weight. Meiggs, for instance, who took a skeptical approach to this inscription noting that it was “found some miles outside Ostia,”²⁷² later asserted after the synagogue discovery that it is reasonably certain that this inscription refers to the Ostian Jewish community.²⁷³

4.3.2 The Synagogue Building

As noted above, the synagogue building of Ostia was discovered in the 1960s and marked the first concrete evidence to indicate the existence of a Jewish community in this city. The building was discovered accidentally during the construction of an expressway;

²⁷⁰ Translation from Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, 224-225.

²⁷¹ Karin Hedner-Zetterholm, “The Jewish Communities of Ancient Rome,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome – Interdisciplinary Studies* (ed. Birger Olsson, Deiter Mitternach and Olof Brandt; Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag 2001), 132.

²⁷² Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 389.

²⁷³ Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 588.

the first season of excavation took place shortly afterwards and focused on the main hall and its connected rooms.²⁷⁴ The second season of excavation, which took place in 1962, saw the whole building excavated, including the mosaics and the floor.²⁷⁵ Maria Floriani Squarciapino was the lead excavator of these projects and wrote a few articles subsequent to the excavations, but a final report was never completed.

The synagogue is located in an area built outside of the Porta Marina, near the ancient seashore of the Tyrrhenian Sea, and faces the Via Severiana.²⁷⁶ According to Olof Brandt, who dates the construction of the synagogue to the first century CE, Ostia was still in expansion with many of its insulae and other buildings not yet built.²⁷⁷ The Porta Marina was built around 100 BCE, along with the city walls of Ostia; the area in which the synagogue is located is commonly termed the ‘quarter outside the Porta Marina’.²⁷⁸ The location of the synagogue outside of the city limits has received considerable attention in scholarly discussion and will be discussed in detail below. At this point it suffices to note that the conjecture that the synagogue’s location outside the city was a result of the Jewish community being forced to do so because of antagonistic relations with other groups in Ostia is unlikely. As Runesson notes, there is neither any existing evidence suggesting bad relations, nor is there any to indicate that a so-called ‘Jewish

²⁷⁴ Maria Floriani Squarciapino, “The Synagogue at Ostia,” trans. Lionel Casson, *Archaeology* 16 (1963): 195.

²⁷⁵ Squarciapino, “The Synagogue at Ostia,” 196.

²⁷⁶ Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia: The Building and its History from the First to the Fifth Century,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome – Interdisciplinary Studies* (ed. Birger Olsson, Deiter Mitternach and Olof Brandt; Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag, 2001), 37.

²⁷⁷ Brandt, “The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue at Ostia,” 19.

²⁷⁸ Brandt, “The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue at Ostia,” 21.

quarter' existed.²⁷⁹ As will be discussed below, the possible reasons for its location on the shore, outside of the walls of the city, may be attributed to traditional customs of ritual purity, specifically ablutions with water. The quarter surrounding the synagogue did not begin to expand and grow until the time of Trajan's harbour in the early second century CE, and it is only at this time that other buildings were constructed near the synagogue.²⁸⁰ This was also the time when the Via Severiana was built,²⁸¹ which may have contributed to the expansion of this area.

In terms of inscriptional evidence associated with the synagogue edifice, two important inscriptions can be discussed. The first was found reused in the floor of the vestibule and is mostly in Greek, with one introductory line in Latin. Two lines at the bottom were erased and the name Mindius Faustus was inscribed over the space; the lettering of this line differs greatly from the previous lines, indicating that they were from a later date.²⁸² David Noy notes that the original donation was from someone other than Mindius Faustus and that he likely restored it, hence the presence of his name over the erasure of the last two lines.²⁸³

Pro salute Aug(usti/ustorum).
οἰκοδόμνησεν κὲ ἀίπο[ί-]
ησεν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ δο-
μάτων καὶ τὴν κειβωτὸν
ἀνέθηκεν νόμῳ ἁγίῳ
[[Μίνδις Φαῦστος με-]]
[[[τὰ τῶν ἰ]]] [[διῶ]] [[[ν]]].

²⁷⁹ Runesson, "The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia," 37.

²⁸⁰ Brandt, "The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue at Ostia," 22.

²⁸¹ Brandt, "The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue at Ostia," 22.

²⁸² David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 24.

²⁸³ Noy, *JWE*, 25.

For the health of the Emperor(s). [[Mindi(u)s Faustus]] [[[with his household]]] built and produced (it) from his own gifts and erected the ark for the holy law.²⁸⁴

The second inscription was found not within the synagogue edifice, but in an area just south of ancient Ostia. It has routinely been associated with a possible Ostian Jewish community and its synagogue because of its use of the term *archisynagogos*. David Noy argues that outside of the Aegean area this term has “invariably Jewish connotations”, and it seems unlikely that, if an Aegean trader was buried at Ostia, he would have been commemorated in Latin; both of these facts suggest that Plotius Fortunatus was an *archisynagogos* belonging to the Jewish community.²⁸⁵

Plotio Fortunato
Archisyn(agogo) fec(erunt) Plotius
Ampliatius Secundinus
Secunda p(a?)t(ri?) n(ostro?) et Ofilia Basilia coiugi b(ene) m(erenti).

For Plotius Fortunatus, ruler of the synagogue [*archisynagogo*]. Plotius Ampliatius, Secundinus and Secunda built it (for our father?), and Ofilia Basilia for her well-deserving husband.²⁸⁶

4.3.3 The State of Research

Of late, much of the scholarly discussion concerning the Ostian synagogue consists of the works of L. Michael White and Anders Runesson; the two engaged in dialogue through articles in the *Harvard Theological Review*, and later in the *Journal for the Study of Judaism*. They disagree on some fundamental points concerning the nature of the synagogue and some aspects of the building’s overall architectural plan. Prior to

²⁸⁴ Translation from Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, 223.

²⁸⁵ Noy, *JJWE*, 27.

²⁸⁶ Translation from Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book*, 224.

discussing this debate, a brief summary of Squarciapino's archaeological opinion of the synagogue will be given. Following that, the position of White will be presented interspersed with Runesson's critique of the problematic points of his analysis. Lastly, the arguments of Runesson will be presented since his perspective is commonly accepted as the general consensus regarding the synagogue at Ostia.

Maria Floriani Squarciapino

Following the completion of the two seasons of excavation of the synagogue, Squarciapino described the edifice as a fourth century CE building that stood upon an earlier structure constructed of *opus reticulatum*, which could be dated to the first century CE.²⁸⁷ She states that the fourth-century edifice occupied a large rectangular space, faced east-southeast, toward Jerusalem, and that the main entrance to the complex opened on the Via Severiana.²⁸⁸ She describes the building as follows:

The synagogue itself is oblong (24.90 x 12.50m., 81 x 40^{1/2} feet) and is divided laterally into three parts: at the front an area with a mosaics floor set a little lower than the rest of the synagogue; then an imposing inner gateway formed of four columns in gray marble with Corinthian capitals and bases of white marble, and approached by two steps set between the first pair of columns of the gateway; finally the large innermost area, floored in *opus sectile*.²⁸⁹

The inner area, according to Squarciapino, originally had three entrances but one was later blocked up the aedicule, for the Torah shrine.²⁹⁰ The aedicule was constructed in

²⁸⁷ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 196.

²⁸⁸ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 196.

²⁸⁹ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 196.

²⁹⁰ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 197.

opus vittatum and the corbels contain Jewish symbols, including the menorah, the shofar, palm branch, and citron.²⁹¹

Concerning the earlier structure, Squarciapino noted that the four columns belonged to this period as their foundations were contemporary with the building in *opus reticulatum*.²⁹² The main hall of the synagogue had large benches lining the walls,²⁹³ which may indicate its function as some kind of meeting hall. Squarciapino suggested that the building functioned originally as a synagogue, thus affirming that from the first century CE onward in Ostia there was a synagogue.²⁹⁴ This affirmation of the first-century edifice as a synagogue was largely connected to the Mindis Faustus inscription discovered in the building. According to her, the ark mentioned in the inscription refers to the Ark of the Covenant and confirms that in the second and third centuries the building was a synagogue, and provides proof of a continuity of use between the original edifice and the fourth century building.²⁹⁵ Therefore, Squarciapino, the chief excavator of the Ostia synagogue, argued that the original edifice in the first century was a synagogue, and dated its construction to sometime during the first century CE.

L. Michael White

White's analysis of the synagogue challenged Squarciapino's original findings concerning the structure, regarding both the dating of the building and its function during its earliest phase. With regard to function, in the later phases of use White is comfortable

²⁹¹ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 197.

²⁹² Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 201.

²⁹³ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 200.

²⁹⁴ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 203.

²⁹⁵ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 203.

stating that the edifice was a Jewish synagogue. In the earliest phase, however, he argues that the building was a private house. Before discussing these assertions by White, and the critique of his position by others, it will be helpful to first consider the general descriptions he provides for the original edifice and the later synagogue.

Concerning the original edifice, White acknowledges that it was constructed in *opus reticulatum* (also called *opus mixtum a*), but dates the construction to the second century CE, or to the last decade of the first century CE at the earliest.²⁹⁶ He states that the original structure included the main hall (D), the entry court area (B-C), and room G.²⁹⁷ The final form of the building, which was a “formal synagogue structure,” is described as a large complex with a main hall; an inner court (B) opening onto a tripartite inner gateway (C), which contained four marble columns; the room (G), which was accessible from a vestibule (A); and a large hall (E) that opened to an alleyway (J).²⁹⁸ White also draws attention to an adjacent building (K) discovered northwest of the synagogue building. According to White, the entrance to K is down a narrow hall that leads to a set of stairs to a second story.²⁹⁹ He suggests that benches found in area C could possibly be the remnant of a stairway from the building’s first phase, but which was later removed due to renovations.³⁰⁰ White is influenced in this conjecture by a comparison he draws from insula complexes at Ostia, which he argues had a passage to the first floor

²⁹⁶ White, “Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence,” *Harvard Theological Review* 90.1 (Jan., 1997): 28-29.

²⁹⁷ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 31.

²⁹⁸ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 30-31.

²⁹⁹ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 33.

³⁰⁰ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 33.

rooms and access to stairs; this may be the case with the synagogue edifice too.³⁰¹ He further contends that the outer areas of H, J, and K “contribute materially to an improved understanding of its character as a typical Ostian insula complex.”³⁰²

In terms of the building’s original function, the proposal of the stairway leads White to move away from classifying it as a synagogue. Instead, he posits that it was a private insula complex that contained domestic quarters and shops.³⁰³ To support this assertion, White establishes four different phases for the edifice’s construction history. The first phase saw the original construction of an insula complex near the beginning of the second century CE.³⁰⁴ It is only in the second phase, for White, that the building became a synagogue; this phase likely began in the mid to later second century and continued into the early third century.³⁰⁵ The third phase, for White, consisted of a major renovation that included the monumentalization of the hall and the incorporation of areas A, E, and F.³⁰⁶ The fourth, and final, phase may have contained the construction of the Torah aedicule, although it may have been part of a second stage of phase three.³⁰⁷ In relation to the renovation of the insula complex into a synagogue in phase two, White refers to epigraphic evidence, specifically the Mindius Faustus inscription, to support his argument. He suggests that the inscription refers to two acts of construction, the edifice itself (renovation into a synagogue) and the dedication of the ark.³⁰⁸ Based on the date of

³⁰¹ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 33.

³⁰² White, “Synagogue and Society,” 33.

³⁰³ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 35.

³⁰⁴ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 36.

³⁰⁵ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 36.

³⁰⁶ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 36.

³⁰⁷ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 36.

³⁰⁸ White, “Synagogue and Society,” 41.

the inscription, White contends that the transformation was likely completed by the late second to third century.³⁰⁹

Runesson and others have rightly challenged White's assertion that the synagogue was originally part of a private insulae complex and had two stories. Similar to his approach to *GD* 80 on Delos, White asserts that the Ostia synagogue had an original function as a private dwelling of sorts, perhaps to further his proposed pattern that Diaspora synagogues were often developed in this way.³¹⁰ White, however, overlooks many architectural features of the structure that do not lend to its classification as a private building. For instance, Runesson has effectively countered White's argument for a staircase that would have been located in area C on the basis of the structure's architecture. He points out that the four columns in area C, which have been dated to the first phase,³¹¹ rule out the possibility of a second story.³¹² Further, the existence of windows challenges White's argument for a second story. Runesson argues that "evidence of windows exist at a height of approximately 3.5m in the northern wall of Room D. But if the building had two stories, windows at this height would not provide light to the first story."³¹³ Dieter Mitternacht has further supported this position, noting that if a second floor existed, and included this window, it would have been at the bottom

³⁰⁹ White, "Synagogue and Society," 41.

³¹⁰ Brandt, "Jews and Christians in Late Antique Rome and Ostia: Some Aspects of Archaeological and Documentary Evidence," *Opuscula Romana* 29 (2004): 10.

³¹¹ Squarciapino, "The Synagogue at Ostia," 201.

³¹² Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora: A Response to L. Michael White," *Harvard Theological Review* 92.4 (Oct., 1999): 414.

³¹³ Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 416.

of the room, which would be quite irregular.³¹⁴ White's analogy between building K and the synagogue structure as comparable examples of buildings with a staircase is also problematic. As Runesson argues, building K is of smaller proportions and has walls that are 1.5 Roman feet thick that could support a second story; the synagogue's walls are the same thickness, but as a larger structure, the walls are too thin for a second story.³¹⁵ Such an argument against a second story is further strengthened by the simple fact that there are no visible beam holes in any of the walls of the synagogue indicating the presence of another story.³¹⁶ Above all, according to Runesson, the monumental layout of the structure from its earliest construction phase does not fit a private insula hypothesis, but indicates that it was a public building.³¹⁷

Another major part of White's analysis that Runesson critiques is the dating of the original structure to the second century CE; Runesson prefers a date in the second half of the first century CE. The presence of *opus reticulatum mixtum* indicates that the synagogue was not built before the mid-first century CE, as this masonry technique did not come into use prior to Claudius (41-54).³¹⁸ Based on the fact that brick stamps dated to the first century, and a bit after, were involved in renovations in the second century, precisely when White wants to date the original construction, Runesson contends that the

³¹⁴ Dieter Mitternacht, "Current Views on the Synagogue of Ostia Antica and the Jews of Rome and Ostia," in *The Ancient Synagogue From its Origins until 200 CE – Papers Presented at an Interntal Conference at Lund University, Oct. 14-17 2001* (ed. Birger Olsson and Magnus Zetterholm; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003), 539.

³¹⁵ Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 416.

³¹⁶ Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 416.

³¹⁷ Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 420.

³¹⁸ Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora." 425.

building was built some time in the latter half of the first century CE.³¹⁹ To further support a first century dating, Runesson turns to local history contemporary with the building's construction history. He suggests that the synagogue's construction may have been affected by commercial activity after the building of Claudius' harbour, and the first renovation of the synagogue edifice in the second century may coincide with the expansion of the quarter outside the Porta Marina.³²⁰

In the same issue of the *Harvard Theological Review* where Runesson provided his response, White also offered a counter response to Runesson. White contends that his use of the term *insula* has a broader meaning than Runesson's. White argues that he was using it to designate a block of buildings/houses, shops, baths and possible public buildings, rather than a more specific definition that refers commonly to an apartment complex.³²¹ He summarizes, "thus, whatever one finally concludes about the 'original form' of the synagogue edifice (a point yet to be discussed), it was part of a larger complex of edifices, which, in my view, is appropriately termed an *insula* complex in this more general sense."³²² Runesson responded to this claim that he misunderstood White's use of *insula* by citing the conflicting, and confusing, uses of the phrase in White's work.³²³ Ultimately, Runesson rightly challenges White's modified use of the phrase by stating that, "even if the synagogue remains should be interpreted as an *insula* in the

³¹⁹ Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 426.

³²⁰ Runesson, "The Oldest Synagogue Building in the Diaspora," 427-428.

³²¹ White, "Reading the Ostia Synagogue: A Reply to A. Runesson," *Harvard Theological Review* 92.4 (Oct., 1994): 438-439.

³²² White, "Reading the Ostia Synagogue," 439.

³²³ Runesson also notes that he is not the only one to have interpreted his 'insula' phrase as a private building, see "A Monumental Synagogue from the First Century: The Case of Ostia," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35.2 (2002): 178-179 n.29.

wider sense, this does not say anything about the interpretation of the main building as a synagogue in its first phase, since, as White himself states, a public building could be part of such an insula.”³²⁴ White does not clearly explain how the synagogue edifice would have functioned if it indeed was part of such an insula complex. Such an omission weakens his change of argument and it remains that the best possible understanding of the structure in its original phase is that of a public building. As Brandt has asserted, the shape and size of the main hall (D) is unlike any other building in Ostia.³²⁵ Such an original room demands an explanation that accounts for its distinguishing feature; the function as a main hall in a synagogue edifice provides just that.

In an effort to respond to Runesson’s argument concerning the thickness of the walls being too thin to support a second floor, White proposes an alternative option for such a construction. He states that they are only too thin “without some sort of load-bearing assistance, such as partition walls, piers, columns, or the like, just as one observes in the construction of K. An intervening floor in any part of the space would have provided needed structure support for a two-story elevation.”³²⁶ The possibility of a partition wall and an intervening floor is interesting, but is not supported by any concrete evidence. As Runesson asserts, such a possibility is “architecturally unlikely,” as the extra weight demands partition walls, which have not been found in the excavations.³²⁷ The argument for a second floor is thus unconvincing and it is most probable that we are dealing with an edifice that was only one story.

³²⁴ Runesson, “A Monumental Synagogue,” 181.

³²⁵ Brandt, “Jews and Christians in Late Antique Rome and Ostia,” 10.

³²⁶ White, “Reading the Ostia Synagogue,” 441.

³²⁷ Runesson, “A Monumental Synagogue,” 197-198.

One last point of response on White's part is worthy of consideration. He makes the claim that Runesson followed his original analysis of masonry, but shifted all the dates; this, however, is incorrect and is not fully explained by White.³²⁸ One thing that may help clarify issues concerning masonry analysis in Ostia is White's current project "Ostia Synagogue-area Masonry Project." In his 1999 article, White stated that he had begun preliminary work toward a systematic analysis of masonry techniques of the synagogue edifice.³²⁹ Still in 2012, however, no final reports have been published. As such, until White's publications are accessible, the dating of masonry techniques as used by Squarciapino and Runesson offers the general consensus for dating the synagogue building.³³⁰

Anders Runesson

Much of Runesson's analysis of the synagogue at Ostia has been touched upon above. His analysis is currently the largely accepted perspective and is the most plausible concerning the dating of the building and its original function as a synagogue. Runesson presents an architectural history of the synagogue that comprises three major phases (1-3) and includes a minor phase (3b). The first phase, dated to the second half of the first century CE, consisted of the construction of the main building (B, C, D, G [F]); the surrounding structures, including building K; the main hall (D) had benches and a podium; a triclinium existed in G/B and a well and a cistern (A) were outside the main

³²⁸ White, "Reading the Ostia Synagogue," 450.

³²⁹ White, "Reading the Ostia Synagogue," 452.

³³⁰ See Runesson "The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia," 81, n.274 for a list of scholars who have accepted the first century dating as likely.

entrance.³³¹ Runesson proposes that the main hall (D) functioned as a space in which an activity took place that needed benches and focused on a raised platform, indicative of some kind of public meeting place.³³² The raised platform has commonly been interpreted as the bimah in the later phases of the building, which leads Runesson to argue that “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was its function also in the original building. If this is correct, the main hall of the building in its earliest phase was dedicated to some form of worship.”³³³

The second phase, likely in the Hadrianic period, close to the first half of the second century, consisted of the same areas with some additions. A nymphaeum was added to building K; benches were removed in G; a possible partition of both B and G may have taken place; mosaic floors in G and parts of B were added.³³⁴ A third phase occurred sometime near the beginning of the fourth century and included the incorporation of areas A, E, and F into the building; the removal of partition walls in B with the addition of new doors; the introduction of an oven in G; the enlargement of the podium and its installation; new flooring in D and some areas in C.³³⁵ The final minor phase, dated by Runesson to the middle of the fourth century or later, included the introduction of the aedicula and its subsequent renovation.³³⁶ Most important for our look at the development of Diaspora synagogues is Runesson’s effective argument that the first

³³¹ Runesson, “A Monumental Synagogue,” 216.

³³² Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia: The Building and its History from the First to the Fifth Century,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome* (ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht, and Olof Brandt; Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag, 2001), 80.

³³³ Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia,” 80.

³³⁴ Runesson, “A Monumental Synagogue,” 216.

³³⁵ Runesson, “A Monumental Synagogue,” 216-217.

³³⁶ Runesson, “A Monumental Synagogue,” 217.

phase of the building, with the main hall, functioned as public space that was most probably used by Jews for communal purposes.³³⁷

In terms of identifying the building as a synagogue within its building phases, Runesson provides seven criteria to be explored within the different phases of construction. These are (1) the form of the building, (2) the presence of Jewish symbols, (3) interior features typical for Jewish buildings (benches, a bimah, or a Torah shrine), (4) location and orientation of the building, (5) existence of water facilities, (6) existence of adjacent rooms (triclina, hostel facilities, etc.), and (7) knowledge of Jewish presence in the city in question from other sources.³³⁸ Since the present study is concerned with pre-70 CE synagogues, the primary concern here is identifying whether the edifice functioned as a synagogue in its first phase (dated to the middle of the first century CE).³³⁹

Runesson notes that the architectural features of room D (benches and a podium) along with the monumentality of the edifice indicate that the edifice was constructed as a public building.³⁴⁰ As noted earlier, the podium has been viewed as a bimah in later phases, so it is likely that it had the same function because it was connected with the overall layout of the room, as were the benches.³⁴¹ The continuity of the structure into its later phases is difficult to overlook. As Brandt suggests regarding the archaeological evidence, “the simple and most linear hypothesis is that this was a synagogue.”³⁴²

Regarding the other criteria, Runesson notes that the building was oriented towards

³³⁷ Runesson, “A Monumental Synagogue,” 216. Cf. Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia,” 92-93.

³³⁸ Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia,” 83-84.

³³⁹ Cf. Runesson “A Monumental Synagogue,” 202 for a helpful chart that outlines the presence of these features (and two additional others) in all the building phases.

³⁴⁰ Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia,” 90.

³⁴¹ Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia,” 90.

³⁴² Brandt, “Jews and Christians in Late Antique Rome and Ostia,” 10.

Jerusalem and located near the sea, a well and a cistern was present in area A, and a triclinium was also present.³⁴³ This leaves two criteria: the presence of Jewish symbols and the knowledge of a Jewish presence in the city. The presence of Jewish symbols cannot be attested in the earliest phases (it is not until late that we find such symbols on mosaic floors and the aedicula). Concerning evidence pointing to the existence of a Jewish community, and that building K was perhaps used to house an official like an *archisynagogos*, Runesson turns to the Plotius Fortunatus inscription. He follows Noy's assertion that Plotius Fortunatus was Jewish and held the title of *archisynagogos*.³⁴⁴ Taking a middle date from Noy's dating, around 100 CE, Runesson suggests that Plotius Fortunatus was likely an active member of the synagogue and could possibly be the *archisynagogos* of this synagogue in its earlier phase, but asserts that such a conjecture will never be known with certainty.³⁴⁵ Despite the absence of at least one criterion (Jewish symbols), and very tentative proof of a Jewish community in the earliest phase on Ostia, the evidence available is indicative of a synagogue edifice that existed during the first century CE. Following Runesson's arguments for dating and function, it is likely that we have another Diaspora synagogue that predated the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE.

Runesson has also closely looked at the Ostian synagogue in comparison with the relationship of water and worship in Diaspora Jewish communities and synagogues. As discussed, in chapter three, Diaspora synagogues were likely associated with ritual purity

³⁴³ Runesson, "The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia," 90-91.

³⁴⁴ Runesson, "The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia," 91.

³⁴⁵ Runesson, "The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia," 91-92.

practices requiring water. Runesson seeks to explore whether or not ritual ablutions, and concerns with impurity in a non-Jewish environment may have influenced the synagogue's location by the sea. While being cautious about relying heavily on rabbinic literature, Runesson cites a passage in the Mekhilta (Mek. Pisha 1) stating that the only exception of God revealing himself outside of the land of Israel was at a pure spot near water.³⁴⁶ Connected to this, one consideration is that the impurity of non-Jewish lands served as a possible "impetus for building synagogues by water."³⁴⁷ The idea of the impurity of non-Jews and 'idol worship' may be another factor affecting the location of synagogues. Such perspectives derived from rabbinic writings must be used cautiously, but should still be considered. As Runesson argues, "to be sure, nothing in the rabbinic texts we have cited here speaks in a direct way of worship in synagogues. However, it is not unreasonable to assume a connection with communal worship."³⁴⁸ Turning to sources more contemporary with the early phase of the Ostia synagogue, Runesson argues that several texts in Josephus and Philo speak of ritually pure spots in ritual contexts. He cites Philo's *Flacc.* 122 in which the Jews of Alexandria leave the city after their synagogues have been destroyed to pray at the beach. He suggests that a pure spot by water is assumed to replace the synagogues as a place of worship; if this is the case, the synagogues must have been understood as pure places themselves.³⁴⁹ Such evidence is

³⁴⁶ Runesson, "Water and Worship: Ostia and the Ritual Bath in the Diaspora Synagogue," in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome* (ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht, and Olof Brandt; Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag, 2001), 120.

³⁴⁷ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 120.

³⁴⁸ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 121.

³⁴⁹ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 122.

used to support Runesson's argument that non-Jewish lands were likely considered impure.

Following this discussion, Runesson argues that the impurity of non-Jewish land results in two preferences for Jewish worship in non-Jewish contexts; first, there is a preference to worship outside such cities, and second, there exists an inclination to worship near water as 'living water' is considered ritually clean.³⁵⁰ With such a framework in mind, the particular location of the synagogue at Ostia can be understood. As Runesson suggests, and as the discussion below concerning associations and guilds will demonstrate, the city of Ostia was full of "idols" from Graeco-Roman and oriental cults; this may have contributed to the synagogue's location outside the city walls and near water.³⁵¹

Turning to the first-century synagogue edifice, certain architectural features suggest a concern with ritual purity as well. A well was located near the eastern main door and adjacent to the well was a cistern.³⁵² Similar to other guild houses at Ostia, both the well and cistern likely served secular and ritual uses.³⁵³ A large basin existed in area B after the first major renovation, and its shallow depth implies that it was likely used for the washing of hands and feet, rather than full immersion.³⁵⁴ These features, alongside the possible motivations for a practical location outside of the city walls and near the sea, indicate that the Jewish community was most likely concerned with issues of ritual purity,

³⁵⁰ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 123.

³⁵¹ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 123.

³⁵² Runesson, "Water and Worship," 125.

³⁵³ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 125.

³⁵⁴ Runesson, "Water and Worship," 125.

and water played a significant role in ritual ablutions related to activities held within the synagogue.

4.3.4 Guilds and Associations at Ostia

Like Delos, Ostia was a richly diverse port city that contained many and various associations. A large number of guilds, or occupational associations, are known to have existed in the city. Epigraphic evidence alone attests to forty different Ostian guilds from the Imperial period onward.³⁵⁵ As Russell Meiggs has shown, guilds were a prominent feature of Ostia since they covered almost all aspects of the city's life and likely included a considerable part of the population.³⁵⁶ Such guilds served a variety of functions and provided members with services that were not just related to their occupational status. As Harland has argued, religious activities were quite common among the purposes of such guilds and their activities were often intertwined with religious and social aspects.³⁵⁷ This position echoes Gustav Hermansen who noted that guilds often held their meetings and banquets in the public temple of the patron deity of their association.³⁵⁸ Examples of such overlap between the social and religious aspects of these associations are present within the archaeological remains of guild houses and meeting places in the city. The builders' meeting place, for example, which was constructed during the time of Hadrian, had a

³⁵⁵ Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981), 55. Hermansen divides these Ostian guilds into six different groups: grain shipping and related services, commerce, transport, trades, civil services and cults. See *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life*, 56.

³⁵⁶ Russell Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 312.

³⁵⁷ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 63. Cf. Gregory S. Aldrete, *Daily Life in the Roman City – Rome, Pompeii, and Ostia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 214. Aldrete takes a similar stance and notes that these were not strictly professional associations, but served a variety of functions pertaining to 'religious' life as well.

³⁵⁸ Hermansen, *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life*, 60. Cf. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 327, who argues, "most if not all [guild's] had their own patron gods or goddesses."

general meeting room that included a sanctuary where rituals were performed for its patron deity.³⁵⁹ The building of the grain measurers' guild is another good example of cultic aspects within a guild association. The building had a large meeting room, a courtyard with a well, a latrine, and a temple that was dedicated to their patron deity Ceres Augusta.³⁶⁰ Similar to the way in which the synagogue functioned as a communal meeting place for a Jewish community, these guild houses served both social and cultic dimensions of life for their associations.

Meiggs has suggested that religious associations were common in Ostia in the imperial period; such guilds resembled occupational ones and offered similar services to its members.³⁶¹ The diverse religious and cultic aspects of ancient Ostia cannot be overlooked when considering the Jewish community and its synagogue. Religion pervaded life in Ostia; Meiggs states that temples were conspicuously located in every district and small shrines could be found in private houses and public buildings.³⁶² The Jewish community within Ostia was just one part of this diverse religious and ethnic setting of the city. Temples and sanctuaries were located throughout the city, some near the Jewish synagogue. In the quarter outside of Porta Marina, the temple of Bona Dea was located not very far from the synagogue. Dated to approximately 30-40 CE, the sanctuary honoured Bona Dea, an indigenous goddess who protected the fields, family, and the home; her cult was reserved for women.³⁶³ The sanctuary was a wholly enclosed

³⁵⁹ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 63-65. Cf. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 324. Cf. Hermansen, *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life*, 62-63.

³⁶⁰ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 63.

³⁶¹ Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 332.

³⁶² Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 337.

³⁶³ Brandt, "The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue at Ostia," 21.

compound that included a small prostyle and tetrastyle temple; in front of the temple stood an altar.³⁶⁴ Brandt has suggested that the cult had an exclusive character, reflected in its closed building plan and peripheral localization, far from the city center.³⁶⁵ Parallels can possibly be drawn between the synagogue and the temple of Bona Dea. Both buildings existed far from the city center and had some level of exclusivity to them. At the very least, the cult of Bona Dea, with its geographical closeness to the Jewish synagogue, provides one possible example of a ‘religious’ group with which the Jews were likely to come into contact.

4.3.5 The Ostia Synagogue and Ethnic Boundary Maintenance

Similar to Delos, the Ostia synagogue provides another strong example of the relevance of ethnic boundary maintenance in relation to Diaspora synagogues. Constructed in the second half of the first century, the synagogue most likely predates the fall of the Temple in 70 CE. Therefore, the destruction of the Temple cannot be considered as a cause behind its construction. Likewise, a deprivation argument cannot be fully supported, as there is a lack of concrete similarities between the synagogue edifice and the Temple. While a case can be made for a symbolic representation of the synagogue in place of the Temple, such a theory is not exhaustive enough. The diverse nature of Ostian society demands that we consider how a Jewish community was able to maintain

³⁶⁴ H.H. J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Sources and a Description of the Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 408-409.

³⁶⁵ Brandt, “The Quarter Surrounding the Synagogue,” 21. See also, Brouwer, *Bona Dea*, 407-429. He similarly argues that the privacy of the complex reflects the cult’s secretive nature.

their collective identity; the existence of the synagogue should therefore be considered within such a perspective.

As an ethnically diverse city, Ostia was home to a variety of guilds and associations, which would have interacted with the Jewish community. Such interaction likely would have provided the necessity of Jewish communities to establish some means by which they could maintain their identity. Boundary maintenance was established through their interaction with these non-Jewish groups, and the institution of the synagogue was possibly one result of such interaction. The widespread presence of guilds in Ostia, and the similarity between their meeting places and the synagogue edifice, indicate that the Jews were one group among many that established communal institutions in which they could maintain their collective identity. The multi-ethnic and ‘multi-religious’ society appears to be at the core of the developments that led the Jewish community in Ostia to establish their synagogue institution.

As we have seen, the location of the Ostian synagogue was likely not a result of the Jews being secluded or forced to live outside the city walls. Rather, it seems that this was an intentional decision on part of the community in order to better serve the interests of their tradition. Runesson has effectively argued that the location of the synagogue was most likely influenced by concerns with ritual purity; non-Jewish lands and idols were considered to be impure, and areas close to water were considered pure. Attention to such matters was one of the ways in which the community reinforced its collective identity as the synagogue was built.

4.4. Concluding Remarks

The Delos and Ostia synagogue are the oldest archaeological remains of Diaspora synagogues. It has been demonstrated in this and the previous chapter that common assumptions about Diaspora synagogue development are not wholly applicable to these two edifices. Instead, one has to seek other possible factors that contributed to the development and maintenance of these institutions. The relevance of ethnic boundary maintenance, and the understanding of synagogue institutions as related to ethnic boundary markers, are fitting for both of these separate institutions.

5. Conclusion

The main aim of my study has been to examine the relevance of Jewish ethnic identity for the development of Diaspora synagogues. Such an approach to Diaspora synagogue development and maintenance is necessary in contemporary scholarship because previous models and theories have continually overlooked the socio-historical experience of Jewish communities within a foreign environment. The common trend in Diaspora synagogue scholarship to understand the development of these institutions as being in a direct relationship with the structures and religious institutions in Jerusalem, specifically the Temple and the sacrificial cult, is simply not sufficient as a full explanation. Deprivation arguments do not sufficiently explain why Jewish communities developed synagogues and maintained them within non-Jewish environments. A further problem is that such theorizing fosters an understanding of ancient Judaism as a monolithic entity, overlooking significant evidence of diversity. Previous scholarship concerning the Diaspora synagogue that has not utilized the deprivation argument has tended to focus primarily on ways in which the synagogue was perceived by non-Jews, and not Jews themselves. While some studies have assumed that the collective identity of a Jewish community was intertwined with the synagogue, none have tried to identify how this may have occurred.

Through the construction of new perspective that builds upon perceptions on ancient ethnicity informed by contemporary studies on ethnicity and ethnic identity formation, I have argued that Jewish communities existed in antiquity primarily as ethnic groups with a particular set of ancestral customs, and that they developed shared

communal spaces to appropriately practice such customs and traditions. More specifically, Jewish communities in the Diaspora developed synagogues as communal and ‘religious’ institutions that served to maintain and reinforce their distinct ethnic identity. Such strategies for identity maintenance were a necessary outcome of the Diaspora context in which these Jewish communities existed; numerous other ethnically based groups and associations assembled in a similar way and existed alongside these Jewish communities. The very fact that these Jewish communities were able to retain their ethnic identity and continue to practice their particular tradition alongside these other groups indicates that some kind of maintenance took place that was triggered by this diverse context.

A key aspect of my study has been the use of case studies of the oldest archaeological remains available to us today – Delos and Ostia. As demonstrated in the discussion of the Delos synagogue, *GD 80* could not, contra White, have been constructed as a private house. An analysis of the architectural features, including a discussion of the positions of Binder and Trümper, supports the identification of the edifice as a public building from its earliest phase of construction (likely sometime during the first century BCE). Likewise, the Ostia synagogue has been identified as a Jewish synagogue dating from the second half of the first century CE. The arguments of Runesson effectively counter White’s theory that the edifice was originally constructed as part of a private insula complex. By focusing on the building plans of these two structures, and their architectural features, we have been able to draw plausible conclusions concerning their functions. Both edifices had large halls with benches that most likely served as meeting

places for Jewish communities. The location near water and the presence of cisterns in both buildings suggest that concerns of ritual purity and ritual ablutions and were likely a factor in the construction process. With the existence of two pre-70 CE Diaspora synagogues, we have been able to consider how the collective ethnic identity of Jewish communities functioned in local contexts alongside other associations. Perhaps one of the most useful conclusions that can be drawn from these case studies is the importance of archaeology in the study of not only Diaspora synagogues, but of all ancient synagogues. It is imperative that archaeological evidence is included and analyzed in any discussion of the development and maintenance of these ancient Jewish institutions. If not, one of the most important interpretive tools we have access to in order to theorize about the functions and purposes that synagogues served in antiquity would be ignored.

The expanded perspective of Diaspora synagogue development proposed here places an emphasis on a communal institution that incorporated both social and ‘religious’ elements, while demonstrating ways in which Jewish ethnicity was tied to an institutional setting. Close attention has been paid to the Jewish understanding of their own institutions. A shift in focus has been made from what the synagogue meant to Graeco-Roman non-Jews to the Jewish communities themselves. Further, by exploring a connection between the ancestral customs of the Jewish tradition and its related ethnic identity, we have isolated possible ways that the functions of the synagogue benefitted the community it served.

Above all, a model that perceives of the synagogue as being in a reciprocal relationship with identity formation and institutional organization emphasizes the socio-

historical context of the ancient Diaspora. It attempts to situate the Jewish community within a non-Jewish environment and assess the possible ways in which the Jews would have reacted to challenges that threatened their collective identity. The main research question that I have sought to answer has been: what sustained the communal life of the Jews, and what brought it into being in the first place? Responding to such questions led me to analyze what social mechanisms are active as a Jewish community in the Diaspora is formed and maintained. It is my thesis that the collective ethnic identity of a community is the key driving force in these processes, and that Diaspora synagogue institutions played a large role in Jewish identity formation and maintenance in settings in which Jews lived as a minority.

The results of the present study can also act as a point of departure for future studies on Diaspora synagogues, and the development of synagogues as a whole. A useful further study would be to consider the other major Diaspora synagogues in a similar way as done here, including, e.g., Dura Europos, Sardis, and Stobi. These synagogues are not as closely related geographically and architecturally as Delos and Ostia are, and would provide interesting case studies against which to test the model. In particular, synagogues such as Sardis and Stobi were located directly in the central parts of city and not in an isolated location. Such a central location in a non-Jewish city may raise further questions concerning Jewish ethnic identity and the ways in which the synagogue possibly contributed to the maintenance of such a collective identity. Questions concerning the origins of the synagogue also enter into the discussion of ethnic identity and synagogue development. It may be helpful to consider questions of origins within the context of the

Diaspora, and ethnic identity as one of the primary factors for the emergence of the synagogue.

While this study has focused on synagogues in the Diaspora, the model proposed here does not have to be confined to such a context in future studies. It may be possible to explore the relevance of ethnic identity in relation to synagogues in ancient Palestine. These synagogues were in closer proximity to the Jerusalem temple and may benefit from a renewed look at their development aside from theories that focus heavily on deprivation arguments. The possibility of exploring synagogues after the fall of the Jerusalem temple in relation to ethnic identity in a situation of colonization is also something that may be considered. It is not until late antiquity that we begin to see a strong presence of Jewish symbols present in synagogue edifices, and general uniformity in synagogue features. This rise in uniformity and displays of Jewish tradition may possibly be correlated with the rise of Christianity and the need to establish a strong sense of identity among such communities.³⁶⁶

In conclusion, the consideration of Jewish ethnic boundaries and identity in antiquity allows us to theorize about the phenomenon that was the ancient Diaspora synagogue in different ways than previously assumed possible. It encourages us to view the synagogue as part of the process in which Jews engaged in order to maintain their Jewishness. It further serves as one possible answer as to how Jews survived, as Jews,

³⁶⁶ Runesson suggests that the development of the Ostia synagogue in its later phases, in terms of more pronounced Jewish symbols and ideology, may have been a result of Christianity “provoking the self-preservation of the Jewish community.” See “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia,” 94. Cf. Runesson, “Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation: Jews and Christians in Capernaum From the First to the Sixth Century,” in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition* (ed. Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale Martin; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 231-257, in which he makes a similar, and more extensive, argument with regard to the Capernaum synagogue.

within a foreign context. It effectively accounts for the negotiation of intersecting identities that were present with a Diaspora context. It takes into consideration certain challenges that faced these communities while attempting to adapt to non-Jewish environments, which inevitably forced them to negotiate their collective identity. The hope is that by taking steps towards promoting a more socio-historical understanding of Diaspora synagogues the result will be a more comprehensive picture of Diaspora Judaism in antiquity as a whole.

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