

1. THE QUESTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE: THE PROBLEM OF TYPOLOGY¹

Jodi Magness
Tufts University

As an undergraduate majoring in archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the mid-1970s, I was taught that the ancient synagogues of Palestine (or, rather, the land of Israel) could be neatly divided into a tripartite typology. This typology was passed down from E.L. Sukenik, who established it, to successive generations of archaeology students at the Hebrew University; Sukenik's son, Y. Yadin, was one of my professors at the Institute of Archaeology.² This typology divides the synagogues of Palestine dating from the second or third to sixth centuries³ into three successive architectural groups or types. The earliest group, described as "Galilean" and dated to the second-third centuries, is characterized by the following features: a basilical plan; a large, decorated facade (usually with three doors, but sometimes with only one) in the wall facing Jerusalem; richly carved stone reliefs; a flagstone floor; and no set place for the Torah ark or shrine. The synagogues at Capernaum, Chorazin, and Kfar Baram are examples of the "Galilean" type. The second group, described as "transitional," is dated to the fourth century and is characterized by a broadhouse plan, with the doorways in one of the narrow walls and a fixed place for the Torah ark in the Jerusalem-oriented wall; a decline in carved stone relief decoration; the appear-

¹ I am grateful to Andrea M. Berlin, Kenneth G. Holum, Lee I. Levine, and David Adan-Bayewitz for their comments on this essay. I assume full responsibility for its contents. I would also like to thank Eisenbrauns for their permission to reproduce E.M. Meyers, C.L. Meyers, and J.F. Strange, *Excavations at the Ancient Synagogue of Gush Halav* (Winona Lake, 1990), Figs. 4-6, 9, and the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum for their permission to reproduce V.C. Corbo, *Cafarnaon I. Gli edifici della città* (Jerusalem, 1975), Figs. 11-12 and Pl. XI. During the writing of the essay, I was supported by a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies and a fellowship in Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.

² See E.L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London, 1934); also see M. Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue: Architecture," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), vol. 15, cols. 595-600; D. Urman and P.V.M. Flesher, eds., *Ancient Synagogues, Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery* (Leiden, 1995), pp. xxvi-xxvii.

³ All dates are C.E. unless otherwise noted.

ance (in some) of floor mosaics; and (sometimes) no columns in the hall. The synagogues at Hammath Tiberias, Eshtamoa, and Khirbet Susiya are examples of the "transitional" type. The third group, described as "Byzantine," is dated to the fifth and sixth centuries. These synagogues are characterized by a basilical plan with an apse for the Torah ark in the Jerusalem-oriented wall, rubble construction, and interiors covered with floor mosaics. The synagogue at Beth Alpha is an example of the "Byzantine" type.

Within the last thirty years, this typology has been called into question. A number of scholars have pointed out that many of the differences in synagogue types are regional rather than chronological and that the synagogues do not fit into a neat typology. Accordingly, the broadhouse synagogues at Eshtamoa and Khirbet Susiya are now recognized as belonging to a group characteristic of southern Judea.⁴ The broadhouse synagogue at Khirbet Shema' in Galilee appears to have been constructed in the late fourth to early fifth century instead of in the third century as the excavators claimed.⁵ A late fourth to fifth century date has been proposed for "Galilean" type synagogues in the eastern lower Galilee, while those of the Golan have been dated to the fifth and sixth centuries.⁶ Much of the controversy about the validity of the traditional typology has centered on the synagogue at Capernaum, which was always cited as the best example of the "Galilean" type but has been redated to the fifth century on the basis of renewed excavations. In this essay I examine the archaeological evidence for the dating of the "Galilean" type synagogues at Gush Halav and Capernaum. I conclude that the former was constructed no earlier than the second half of the fifth century, while the latter was constructed no earlier than the first half of the sixth century. This conclusion invalidates the traditional typology and, as will be seen, has a number of other far-reaching implications. I begin with Gush Halav, as it provides one of the most fully published examples of an excavated synagogue of the "Galilean" type.

⁴ D. Amit, "Architectural Plans of Synagogues in the Southern Judean Hills and the 'Halakah,'" in Urman and Flesher, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 129-156.

⁵ J. Magness, "Synagogue Typology and Earthquake Chronology at Khirbet Shema' in Israel," in *Journal of Field Archaeology* 24, 1997, pp. 211-220.

⁶ Z. Gal, "Ancient Synagogues in the Eastern Lower Galilee," in Urman and Flesher, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 166-173; Z.U. Ma'oz, "The Art and Architecture of the Synagogues of the Golan," in L.I. Levine, ed., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 98-115.

Gush Halav

Gush Halav (Greek: Gischala; Arabic: el-Jish) is located about eight kilometers (five miles) northwest of Safed, in Israel's Upper Galilee. A synagogue was surveyed in 1905 by H. Kohl and C. Watzinger and excavated in 1977-1978 by E.M. Meyers, C.L. Meyers, and J.F. Strange, under the auspices of the American Schools of Oriental Research.⁷ The excavators distinguished four main phases in the synagogue's history:

Period I: 250-306	Middle-Late Roman
Period II: 306-363	Late Roman
Period III: 363-460	Byzantine I
Period IV: 460-551	Byzantine IIA

The synagogue was built over earlier levels dating from the Iron Age through Early Roman periods. Late Byzantine (IIB) and Early and Late Arab period remains were also represented in the post-synagogue levels.⁸ The following review of the published architectural, stratigraphic, ceramic, and numismatic evidence indicates that there is only one synagogue building at Gush Halav, which was constructed no earlier than the second half of the fifth century, and one major phase of occupation, which lasted until the late seventh or early eighth century.⁹

Architecture: The synagogue at Gush Halav is a rectangular basilical structure consisting of a single hall (13.75 x 10.6-11 meters), whose main facade is oriented south towards Jerusalem (p. 74). The southern facade is constructed of nicely cut ashlar, while the other walls

⁷ H. Kohl and C. Watzinger, *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea* (Leipzig, 1916), pp. 107-111; Meyers, Meyers, and Strange, op. cit. The ancient synagogue, which was associated with a village, apparently lies in a tel with remains from various periods; see Meyers, Meyers, and Strange, *ibid.*, pp. 2, 10, 14.

⁸ Meyers, Meyers, and Strange, *ibid.*, pp. 7-13. Page and figure references in the following are to this work.

⁹ After I wrote this essay, D. Adan-Bayewitz called my attention to E. Netzer, "Review of the Synagogues at Gush Halav and Khirbet Shema," in *Eretz-Israel* 25 (1996), pp. 450-455 (in Hebrew, with English summary on p. 106*). Based on his analysis of the published excavation report, Netzer concluded, as I did, that there was only one synagogue building at Gush Halav, and that it was constructed during the excavators' Period II. He also does not believe that the synagogue was destroyed by the earthquake of 363. However, Netzer differs from me in accepting the excavators' chronology, placing the construction of the synagogue in the first half of the fourth century, and its destruction in 551.

are of more roughly cut stones (pp. 82, 112-113). The underside of the lintel of the only doorway in the south facade was decorated with a finely carved eagle with garlands (pp. 89-90). A secondary entrance through a passage with a stairway was located at the northwest corner of the synagogue (pp. 90-93). Walls outside of and parallel with the western, northern, and eastern walls of the synagogue's halls created narrow rooms or corridors surrounding it on those three sides, whose function and chronology are unclear (pp. 65, 69, 93-97). The western corridor, which according to the excavators existed from the earliest phase, was apparently used for storage, while the northern corridor may have served as a mezzanine in the later phases (pp. 70, 93-97, 105-112). The numerous fragments of roof tiles recovered in the excavations indicate that the building had a low-pitched, tiled roof, perhaps with a clerestorey (p. 115).

The interior was divided into a nave and two aisles by two rows of four columns each. The columns stood on stylobates of dressed ash-lars which are parallel to the two north-south walls. Though the pedestals for the columns are virtually identical in form, their dimensions vary (p. 75). Similarly, the column fragments recovered in the excavations vary in dimension, and the seven capitals recovered differ in style (p. 100). There are also fragments of two heart-shaped columns with two matching capitals, whose placement within and association with the synagogue is uncertain (pp. 103-106). Other architectural features discovered inside the synagogue include field-stone benches along the western and northern walls, and a *bema* (or, according to the excavators, two consecutive *bemas*), against the south wall to the west of the doorway (pp. 77-79). The small number of tesserae found in the fills of the synagogue suggests that the floor was not tessellated (p. 79; but see p. 68 for the suggestion that they derive from a poor mosaic floor in the Period II synagogue). Rough stone pavers found *in situ* just inside the southern doorway were probably covered with plaster, and some plaster layers were found elsewhere in the hall (pp. 67-68, 79).

The Excavators' Chronology. According to the excavators, the synagogue was first constructed in the second half of the third century (pp. 65-66, Figs. 14-15). Extensive renovations and changes were carried out after the earthquake of 306. These included the outer walls (of the corridors) in the northeast, which may have been added at this time (but which may have already been in existence); extensive cuttings of stone *in situ* within the building, which suggest that the

stylobate and other members were recut and reset; the erection of a column dedicated by Yose bar Nahum; and the repair of the roof. The mezzanine and the heart-shaped columns are assigned to this phase, or to after 363. The scattered tesserae found in the synagogue fills may come from a simple white mosaic floor in this phase (pp. 63-68). After the earthquake of 363, more major repairs and renovations were carried out on the synagogue. In fact, all of the resetting and repair operations associated with the earthquake of 306 may have taken place at this time. This is also the period in which many of the materials in the western corridor of the synagogue accumulated. The renovation of the *bema*, which involved raising it about one step and reducing its size, also probably took place at this time. No changes occurred in the synagogue's ground plan during the final phase of occupation (450-551). A pot containing a coin hoard, together with many other objects, were stored in the western corridor (see below). This phase ended when the earthquake of 551 destroyed the synagogue and the surrounding village. During the succeeding Byzantine IIb period, there was little activity at Gush Halav (p. 68). Pottery and oil lamps from the early Arabic (A1) period are apparently associated with temporary encampments. An oil lamp inscribed in Arabic was found near the *bema* (p. 72).

A Revised Phasing Sequence: The excavators' phasing sequence and chronology was created by associating a series of assumed destructions with historically attested earthquakes. As the case of the synagogue at Khirbet Shema^c has illustrated, claimed evidence for earthquake destruction at archaeological sites is often problematic and needs to be carefully evaluated.¹⁰ This holds true for Gush Halav, where the architectural, stratigraphic, ceramic, and numismatic evidence, when considered independently of any assumed earthquake destructions, yields a much different phasing sequence and chronology from those published by the excavators. To demonstrate this, it is first necessary to review the stratigraphic and architectural evidence for the construction and initial phase of occupation of the synagogue at Gush Halav.

As can be seen from the excavators' section drawings (Figs. 5, 6, 8), the original floor level of the synagogue lay at an approximate elevation of 704.5 meters (also see the threshold in Fig. 4, whose elevation is marked 704.565). Compacted fills and traces of rough plaster or

¹⁰ Magness, *op. cit.*

lime surfaces that apparently represent the floor's bedding can be seen in the sections (Figs. 5, 6; L3012, L3022). These must have originally covered the rough flagstone pavement just inside the south doorway (Fig. 5). There are also at least two successive plaster surfaces at about 704.6/704.5 meters in the western corridor (Fig. 9; L4080, L4010, L1058; L4082, L4020, L1060). Other evidence confirms that the original floor level lay at approximately 704.5 meters. This includes the fact that 704.5 meters is the level of the top of the ashlar stylobates (L4036=L1011; L3005=L2005) and of the top of the threshold of the doorway in the inner west wall of the synagogue, which provided access into the western corridor. The top of the threshold of the doorway in the northwest corner of the synagogue lies at 704.316 meters. The tops of the benches lining the western and northern walls lie at a height of 704.64 meters (Fig. 4).¹¹ Most of the walls visible in the section drawings lie either partly or entirely below the original floor level of the synagogue (Fig. 5, L1045, L1017/L2035; Fig. 6, L1002, L1004, L5002/L3002, L5030). They therefore represent the foundations of the synagogue or buildings that antedate it. Some of the earlier walls may have been rebuilt or incorporated into the synagogue (for apparent examples of this, see Fig. 5, L1045 [and Photo 7], and Fig. 6, L1002). As can be seen in the section drawings, the synagogue walls and even the stylobates have deep foundations (Figs. 5-8). Foundation trenches are clearly visible in the section drawings on the south side of L1017/L2035 (Fig. 5; L2042, L2041) and on the west side of L1002 (L1033). The latter is associated with the rebuilding of L1002. The relatively high level of this foundation trench, the top of which lies at about 704.8 meters, is apparently due to the fact that the outside of L1002 served as a retaining wall. The bottom of the foundation trench of L1017/L2035 (L2041/L2042) lies at about 702.4 meters, while its top is at ca. 703.2 meters. The foundations of the stylobates lie between about 703 and 704 meters (see L3014 in Fig. 6; and L2034 and L2044 in Fig. 8).

The depth of most of the fills around and between these walls indicates that they antedate the synagogue. They represent deposits associated with earlier, pre-synagogue structures in this area or ear-

¹¹ 704.643 is the only height indicated for a bench (L1030) on Fig. 4 in Meyers, Meyers, and Strange, *op. cit.* This is inconsistent with the excavators' statement on p. 77 that the benches are all about 40 centimeters above the synagogue's (latest) floor level.

lier accumulations through which the foundations of the synagogue were cut. Plaster pieces, including some painted fragments, indicate that the fills contained material from earlier buildings (p. 29; see for example L2042, which is the foundation trench on the south side of L1017/L2035, visible in Fig. 5; L2009 and L2016 next to L2002, in Fig. 8; and Photo 29). Except on the north side of the synagogue building, where late (postdestruction) debris reached as deep as 702 meters (see for example L1082, L1083), the loci identified by the excavators as representing Period I (the original construction of the synagogue) clearly lie below the level of the top of the synagogue's foundations and foundation trenches (see for example Fig. 5, L4054; Fig. 6, L1068, L1057, L3033, L3032, L3037, L5019, L5024, L5025, L5035).

This means that most of the excavators' Period I fills and occupation deposits antedate the synagogue (with a few exceptions, such as L5014, the stone cuttings visible in Fig. 7, and L3014, L3015, L3033, L2044, which are the bedding for stylobate L3005/L2005; see below). Instead, the loci identified by the excavators as belonging to Period II, which lie at the level of the foundation trenches of the walls and stylobates of the synagogue should be associated with its construction (see for example Fig. 5, L2003, L2037, L2042, L3029, L3030; Fig. 6, L1014, L1015, L1018, L1019, L1021, L1033 [this is the foundation trench for W1002, which according to the excavators was rebuilt in Period II], L1070, L3029, L3030 [these are associated by the excavators with repairs to the stylobate after the earthquake of 306], L5010, L5012, L5015, L5018, L5019; Fig. 8, L2009, L2013, L2015, L2018). The consistency of the foundation and floor levels, and the lack of evidence for the repeated major reconstructions posited by the excavators, indicate that there was only one major phase of construction. All of the remains cited by the excavators as evidence for later (post-Period I) renovations can be associated with this single, original phase of construction. These include the bedding for the stylobates, the *bemas*, and the benches. The presence of two successive plaster floors in the western corridor may reflect different, minor occupation phases during the lifetime of the building.

The Stylobates, Bema, Benches, and Architectural Fragments: According to the excavators, the "remains of extensive cuttings of stone in situ within the building suggest that the stylobate and other members were recut and reset" after the earthquake of 306, though some of these repairs could also have taken place after the earthquake of 363

(p. 68). However, the stone cuttings and buttressing of the stylobates associated with these rebuildings clearly belong to the original construction of the synagogue. In fact, the following description suggests that the excavators themselves could not distinguish between the original construction and supposed later repairs (p. 36):

Locus 3032 appears in the section drawing as a layer of stone chips recovered near the base of the stylobate shoring. Its pottery may clearly be dated to Period I. Underneath L3032 is L3037, a corresponding layer from Period I; it represents Period I accumulations associated with the original laying of the stylobate. However, the most obvious point documented by the section drawing here is the Period II repair, not the founding. The only alternative to establish the date of founding was to fully dismantle the stylobate and the imposing bedding on either side. In the interest of preservation, we decided to do so at the more convenient points along the stylobate, points not on balk lines. The fact that L3014, the stylobate bedding, is laid down in Period I at this point along the stylobate is nonetheless helpful in understanding the overall stratigraphic picture. However, the stylobate is preserved predominantly in its Period II context. Lifting pavers here and there, though helpful, did not provide sufficient ceramic evidence for concluding which sections survived the 306 catastrophe and which ones were fully repaired.

L3014 is visible as a layer of stones, about half a meter wide and half a meter deep, on the eastern side of the foundations of stylobate L3005 (Fig. 6). The same kind of bedding was found at various points along both sides of the foundations of stylobate L3005/L2005 (L3015, L3033; see p. 35, and Photo 9; and L2034, L2044; 29, 74, and Photo 8, and Fig. 8). L3014, L3015, L3033, and L2044 were attributed by the excavators to Period I, while L2034 was attributed to their Period II. However, the published descriptions and section drawings indicate that all of the stylobate bedding belongs to one original phase of construction. While the deep foundations of the synagogue walls and the buttressed bedding for the stylobate foundations may reflect an awareness on the part of the builders of seismic activity in the area, as the excavators suggested (p. 41), surely their primary purpose was to support the weight of the thick walls and heavy tiled roof of the superstructure. The deep foundations were necessary because instead of resting on bedrock, they were sunk into a thick layer of soft and potentially unstable fills and accumulations.

According to the excavators, there were two successive stone platforms, which they identified as "*bemas*," just inside and to the west of the doorway in the south wall of the synagogue. The foundations

were all that remained of the excavators' Period I *bema*, consisting of a rectangular frame of nicely-cut ashlar filled with earth and rubble, with preserved dimensions of ca. 2.00 x 1.75 meters. It abutted the eastern side of stylobate L4036, but because of the remains of the later *bema*, it is not clear how far to the west it extended (p. 79; see Photos 33, 37). The excavators' Period II *bema* (L4015) is a small structure (1.46 x 1.17 x 0.30 meters) made of less carefully dressed stones, which rested partly on the western half of stylobate L4036 and continued westward from there into the western aisle. It had traces of plaster on its north face (p. 79; see Photos 31, 32, 37). It is not clear why the excavators interpreted these remains as representing two different *bemas*. They can just as easily be understood as belonging to a single structure, with the excavators' Period I *bema* representing the foundations, and their Period II *bema* representing the remains of the superstructure. This is supported by the presence of another five blocks preserved on top of their Period I *bema*, which appear to be identical in size and quality with the stones of their Period II *bema*, on the other side of the stylobate (compare Photos 32 and 33). In fact, in the caption to Photo 33, these five blocks are identified as either the second course of the [Period I] *bema* or a remnant of a flagstone floor (p. 73, though on p. 79 they are identified as L4045, "the surviving pavers of Periods III and IV"). All of these remains should be identified as belonging to a single structure or *bema*. Its placement in relation to the main doorway of the south facade corresponds exactly with that of "Platform M" in the synagogue at Capernaum (though the latter appears to be made of un-hewn blocks of stone).¹²

The attribution of all of these remains to a single structure is further supported by the associated levels of the floor and stylobate. According to the excavators, the stone pavers just inside the doorway of the south wall (L4051) were contemporary with their Period I *bema*. As they noted, however, their irregular nature suggests that they were originally covered with plaster. The upper surface of the five stone blocks on their Period I *bema* (L4046, described above) lies 0.40-0.45 meters above the level of the stone pavers inside the door (L4051) and is nearly even with the top of the adjacent stylobate (Photo 33). This means that there is nearly a half meter discrepancy

¹² Compare Photo 33 with Corbo, *Cafarnaou*, Photo 52, upper right.

between the top of the stylobate and the excavators' Period I floor level and *bema*. Their suggestion that this was a deliberate device to solve drainage problems inside the building is awkward and unconvincing, since it means that the top of the stylobate would have been considerably higher than the floor (p. 79). Placing the excavators' Period I *bema* and the flagstone pavers inside the doorway (L4051) below the floor level solves this problem. The manner in which the five stones (L4045) above their Period I *bema* abut the stylobate suggests that they too were covered by the floor. In fact, what appears to be the original plaster and dirt floor (L4015; or the bedding for a floor) is visible to the west of the excavators' Period II *bema* (Photos 31, 32). Though this plaster and dirt floor was sectioned, the photographs indicate that it was at the same level as the top of the stylobate. As the caption to Photo 32 notes, this surface was associated with the [Period II] *bema* (p. 72). Thus, the excavators' Period II *bema* is actually the superstructure of a single *bema*, lying on top of the stylobate and associated with surface L4015. This plaster and dirt floor covered the pavers just inside the doorway (L4051) and the foundations of the *bema* (that is, the excavators' Period I *bema*), and covered or ran up to the top of the stylobate. Another plaster surface (L4018), which was revealed in a section just below L4015, can be understood as representing an earlier (minor) occupation phase, or part of the make-up of L4015, or together with L4015 part of the bedding for a floor that is not preserved.

Benches (L4019, L1030, L1072, L1073) lined the western and northern sides of the synagogue's interior. The bench on the north extends from the northwest corner eastwards, only as far as the eastern stylobate. The benches protrude 0.40-0.45 meters from the inner walls and are about 0.40 meters high. They are built of two rows of stones that were originally plastered over, as indicated by traces of plaster. Because the benches are not deeply founded but instead rest at or slightly below the latest floor level, and because one of them (L1072) partially obscures a design incised into plaster adhering to the inner face of wall L1017, the excavators assigned them to Period II or later. They noted that the various segments of the benches could have been added at different times. "Byzantine 1" pottery is mentioned as having been found inside bench 4019, though none is illustrated (pp. 77-78; Photos 36, 37). The photographs and descriptions suggest instead that all of the benches were constructed at the same time. No rebuilt or added segments are visible in the photo-

graphs, and the width and height of the benches is consistent, if slightly irregular. The top of bench L1030 appears to lie at a level of 704.6-704.7 meters (Fig. 6). The synagogue floor would have abutted the bench about halfway up its outer face. In fact, this is exactly what Photos 31, 36, and 37 show, with the dirt and plaster floor (L4015) abutting the base of the superstructure of the *bema* (the excavators' Period II *bema*) on the left and the middle of the outer face of the bench on the right (pp. 71, 78, 80). The "design" scratched into the plaster of the wall behind the benches, which is described as "stylized trees-of-life," is incisions made to roughen the face of the base coat, to hold a finer overlying layer (p. 67, caption to Photo 30).¹³ Thus, the benches, stylobate bedding, and the excavators' Period I and II *bemas* belong to a single, original construction phase. The presence of at least two successive layers of dirt and plaster floors inside the hall and western corridor may reflect different, minor occupation phases during the building's lifetime, but not the series of violent destructions and major reconstructions posited by the excavators.

A Revised Chronology: When was the synagogue built? The excavators based their chronology on the numismatic and ceramic evidence and arrived at precise dates by bracketing the various phases or periods with historically attested earthquakes. The ceramic and numismatic evidence must be used with caution, since the presence of deep layers of earlier remains and fills beneath and around the synagogue means that there is a great deal of residual material. Thus, in many cases the pottery and coins provide a broad *terminus post quem* instead of the actual date of the associated phase or remains. This is especially true when only a few diagnostic sherds were recovered, as in the fills of the benches and *bema* and the bedding under stylobate L2005 (Pottery Plates BB; X:11-14).

As has been seen, most of the loci identified by the excavators as Period II (together with a few of the Period I loci) are associated with the foundation level of the synagogue. These include L1089, L1070, L4020, L4066, L4071, L4082, L1060, and L1080, which represent the bottom layer in the western corridor. This plaster and dirt level contained many lamps, lamp fragments, coins, iron nails, and frag-

¹³ For a similar treatment of plaster see A. Negev, *The Architecture of Mampsis, Final Report. Volume I: The Middle and Late Nabatean Periods (Qedem 26)* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 132: "All walls were plastered in two layers. The lower layer was a thick muddy plaster mixed with straw. Before this dried incisions were made in a herringbone pattern to ensure better adherence of the second layer of thinner plaster."

ments of glass vessels. Because, according to the excavators, the pottery and coins date to the Late Roman period, they assigned these loci to Period II, or the first use of the synagogue in the fourth century (306-363) (L1089, at the northern end of the corridor, is assigned to Periods I-II, but was contaminated by a Byzantine I pit; see pp. 51-52, 268). Three more loci identified by the excavators as Late Roman, L4033, L4035, and L4060, were excavated beneath these at the south end of the corridor (p. 52; see Fig. 9). The latest coins from these loci date to 364-367 (p. 281, R78265, C-137 from L4066; there is another unidentified Late Roman coin from this locus) and 383-392 (p. 282, R78271, C-144 from L4071). Their presence means that the associated level (the excavators' Period II) could not have been destroyed in the earthquake of 363. Instead, these coins provide a late fourth century *terminus post quem* for the construction of the synagogue.

The ceramic material, however, points to an even later date. Among the pottery illustrated from these loci is the rim of a Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 bowl, dated mainly from the second half of the fifth to first half of the sixth century (Pottery Plate EE:10).¹⁴ It provides the first indication that the synagogue was constructed no earlier than the second half of the fifth century. More dating evidence comes from two large lamp fragments and one complete oil lamp from L1089 (Lamp Plate B:13-15). They represent a northern type related to those illustrated in Lamp Plates B:16, D:1-3, but differ in having incised rather than impressed decoration and flat instead of low ring bases. The cross on the nozzle of the example in Lamp Plate B:15 provides a Constantinian *terminus post quem*, while the oval form of the body, small filling hole, and pointed handle suggest a fourth to fifth century (or later) date. The lamp in Lamp Plate D:2, which represents a northern type with impressed decoration, also comes from L1089. The largest number of lamps of this type comes from the catacombs at Beth She'arim.¹⁵ Since the excavators of Beth She'arim assumed that the cemetery there went out of use after the mid-fourth century, these lamps have

¹⁴ Also see J.W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1972), pp. 329-338.

¹⁵ R. Rosenthal and R. Sivan, *Ancient Lamps in the Schloessinger Collection (Qedem 8)* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 110-111; see B. Mazar (Maisler), *Beth She'arim, Report on the Excavations During 1936-1940. Volume I: Catacombs 1-4* (Jerusalem, 1973), Figs. 22:2; 24; N. Avigad, *Beth She'arim, Report on the Excavations During 1953-1958. Volume III: Catacombs 12-23* (Jerusalem, 1976), Pl. 70:12-26.

traditionally been dated from the third to mid-fourth century.¹⁶ However, as F. Vitto recently demonstrated, the occupation of the site and use of the cemetery at Beth She'arim continued through the Byzantine period and probably into the early Islamic period.¹⁷ The morphology of these impressed lamps and their place in the sequence at Gush Halav point to a fifth to sixth century date for the type.

The level above this, identified by the excavators as representing Period III or Byzantine 1 (363-460), consists of L4021, L4010 (and L4010.1), L4048 (and L4048.1), and L1058 (and L1058.1; ".1" appended to a locus number indicates the make-up of a surface; p. 6). This surface consisted of mixed lime and soil rather than finished plaster (p. 48). Like the layer below, this surface and its make-up contained numerous artifacts, including many round, wheel-turned, hanging lamps, oil lamp fragments, iron implements, bronze, glass, and dozens of coins (p. 51). The latest coins from these loci provide a fifth century *terminus post quem* for the make-up and floor of the synagogue (from L4010.1: R771285, C-27 dated to the fifth century; R771320, C-38, dated 450-457; R771321, C-39, dated 425-450; R771368, C-44, dated 425-450; R771329, C-50, dated 425-461; R771372, C-58, dated 425-450; from L4048.1: R78042, C-67, dated 402-450; R78204, C-112, dated 450-457; R78202, C-115, dated 421-476; and from L1058.1: R771398, C-22, dated to the fifth century; there are also a number of unidentified Late Roman coins from these loci; see pp. 266, 273-274, 278-279). A few of these coins could be even later; G. Bijovsky has recently suggested that some of the *minimi* from Gush Halav identified by J. Raynor as fifth century instead date to the fifth to sixth centuries.¹⁸ As in the case of the layer below, the latest datable ceramic types from this level point to a date no earlier than the second half of the fifth century for the construction and initial phase of occupation of the synagogue. These include another example of Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 (Pottery Plate EE:1) and numerous oil lamps and lamp fragments. Several oil lamp types are represented. Those illustrated in Lamp Plate C:1-15, which come from the make-up of the floor

¹⁶ Rosenthal and Sivan, *ibid.*

¹⁷ F. Vitto, "Byzantine Mosaics at Bet She'arim: New Evidence for the History of the Site," in *Atiqot* 28, 1996, pp. 138-141; many of the oil lamps illustrated from Beth She'arim date to the Byzantine and early Islamic periods.

¹⁸ J. Raynor, "Numismatics," in Meyers, Meyers, Strange, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-245; G. Bijovsky, "The Gush Halav Hoard Reconsidered," in *Atiqot* 35, 1998, pp. 81-83.

(L4048.1), have ovoid bodies and square handles and are made of thin, red-slipped ware, with geometric decoration in low relief (p. 128). At least some have multiple wick-holes. Molds for this type of lamp, which is common in the northern part of Israel, were found in the excavations at Caesarea. The suggested dates for this type range from the second half of the third century to the seventh century.¹⁹ More examples of the type of northern oil lamp with impressed decoration found in the previous level are represented here as well (Lamp Plates B:16; D:1, 3).

The ceramic and numismatic evidence thus provides a *terminus post quem* in the second half of the fifth century for the construction and initial occupation of the synagogue. In other words, the synagogue was constructed no earlier than the second half of the fifth century. However, the presence of possible sixth century *minimi* and Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 bowls means that it could have been constructed as late as the first half of the sixth century (see the discussion of the Late Roman "C" Ware Form 3 bowls in relation to the synagogue at Capernaum, below). The pottery and coins found among the debris on top of the floors indicate when the occupation ended. This phase is referred to as Period IV by the excavators. Some of the best dating evidence for this phase again comes from the western corridor. A number of artifacts associated with the final occupation of the building lay buried beneath a layer of architectural fragments from its final collapse. These included an intact oil lamp and lamp fragments, bronze pieces, iron nails, parts of a bronze chandelier, roof tiles, and a few coins. In addition, a hoard of 1,953 coins was discovered in a cooking pot at the northern end of the corridor, which rested upon the plastered surface of the previous phase (L4010=L4048=L1058). The Period IV loci from the western corridor are L4009.1=L4044=L1046 (pp. 47-48). The hoard consists of coins of the lowest possible value, and all are badly worn from use. Most of the coins date from the mid-fourth to mid-sixth centuries, with 60% falling between the years 425 and 498 (Theodosius II to

¹⁹ Rosenthal and Sivan, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125, nos. 513-514; V. Sussman, "Moulds for Lamps and Figurines from a Caesarea Workshop," in *Atiqot* 14, 1980, pp. 76-79; Y. Israeli and U. Avida, *Oil Lamps from Eretz Israel, The Louis and Carmen Warschaw Collection at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 112; K.G. Holum, et al., *King Herod's Dream, Caesarea on the Sea* (New York, 1988), Fig. 140; A. Siegelmann, "Roman and Byzantine Remains in the Northern Coastal Plain," in *Atiqot* 21, 1992, Fig. 4.

Anastasius I). According to Raynor, the contents and context of the hoard indicate that it was not a one-time deposit and that the fact that the cooking pot was set on top of the corridor's floor instead of being concealed in a pit suggests that it served as a depository for charity or operating moneys.²⁰

According to the excavators, the hoard was deposited shortly before the destruction of the synagogue by the earthquake of 551. Other evidence, however, points to a later date for the end of the synagogue's occupation. The rim of a bowl of Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 9 from L4044 dates from ca. 550 to the end of the seventh century (Pottery Plate FF:29).²¹ The intact oil lamp from L4044 (Lamp Plate D:6) represents a later variant of the northern oil lamps with impressed and incised decoration found in the previous phases. R. Rosenthal and R. Sivan's late sixth to mid-seventh century date for this type is supported by the existence of one specimen decorated with the impressions of coins minted in the first half of the seventh century.²² Another intact oil lamp from the last phase of the synagogue's occupation comes from L3012 (Lamp Plate D:7). L3012 is described as a compact fill buried beneath the collapse of the synagogue (L3008; see Fig. 6; see p. 271 for the assignment of L3012 to Periods II-III). It was located on the eastern side of the main hall of the synagogue, on the western side of stylobate L3005. The oil lamp from this locus represents a type dating from the seventh to early eighth century, though its pointed nozzle and relatively high tongue handle indicate that it lies at the later end of that range.²³ Another lamp comes from L4015 (Lamp Plate D:4), which is the dirt and plaster surface under L4007, west of L4008. This surface was associated by the excavators with their later *bema* (L4017) and with bench L4019 (which is assigned to Period IV; see p. 274). The shape of the lamp's body is similar to the previous example, but its low knob handle points to a seventh century date. This lamp appears to be associated with the latest occupation of the synagogue rather than

²⁰ J. Raynor, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-245; Bijovsky, *op. cit.*, has revised Raynor's identifications of some of the coins; and see the discussion of coin hoards in synagogues below.

²¹ Hayes, *op. cit.*, pp. 379-382.

²² Rosenthal and Sivan, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124; A. Kindler, "A Seventh Century Lamp with Coin Decoration," in *Israel Exploration Journal* 8, 1958, pp. 106-109.

²³ J. Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology circa 200-800 C.E.* (Sheffield, 1993), pp. 255-258, Oil Lamps Form 4C.

coming from beneath or within the floor. The ceramic and numismatic evidence from these loci, which by the excavators' definition antedate the collapse of the building, indicates that the synagogue's occupation ended in the late seventh to early eighth century.

This chronology is supported by the evidence from other loci that were associated by the excavators with later phases. L4039 represents a compact fill, which, like L3012, should be assigned to the final occupation phase of the synagogue (though it was assigned by the excavators to their B2b-A1, or postsynagogue, destruction period; see pp. 276-277). It was located to the east of stylobate L4036, buried beneath the surface debris L4038. The finds from this locus included a fragment of a Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 bowl and a coin dated to 565-568 (p. 277; Pottery Plate EE:2). The debris above (L4038) contained more fragments of Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 bowls (Pottery Plate EE:4, 7, 8, 12, 15) and its later variant, Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 10 (Pottery Plate EE:19-22), dated from the late sixth to mid-seventh century.²⁴ There were also fragments of Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 9, dated from ca. 550 to the end of the seventh century (Pottery Plate FF:27)²⁵ and Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 7, dated mainly from the second half of the sixth to early seventh century (Pottery Plate FF:30).²⁶

Conclusion: All of the available evidence suggests that the synagogue at Gush Halav was constructed no earlier than the second half of the fifth century and perhaps as late as the first half of the sixth century. There were no major earthquake destructions followed by reconstructions as envisioned by the excavators. Instead, occupation continued until the late seventh or early eighth century. The possible presence of two successive floor levels in the western corridor and near the *bema* in the main hall may reflect minor occupation phases during the synagogue's lifetime. According to the excavators, the northwest entrance was blocked by broken architectural fragments after the earthquake of 363, with only the south doorway providing access into the main hall during Periods III-IV. They describe the debris that accumulated over the stairs (L1034, L1048, L1050, L1055) as containing material no later than Byzantine I (pp. 92-93).

²⁴ Hayes, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-338, 343-346.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 378-382.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 378-379.

This includes the rim of a Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 bowl from L1048 (Pottery Plate EE:3). However, in the locus list, L1034 is defined as Period B2b, and it contained a coin dating to 575-576 (p. 265). The late date of the material from the debris over the stairs, together with the use of broken architectural fragments such as part of a column drum and a gable fragment indicate that the northwest entrance was blocked after the final abandonment and collapse of the synagogue.

The coin record at Gush Halav is consistent with that at other Galilean synagogue sites (see below). Late Roman coins of the fourth to fifth centuries are relatively plentiful. The century-long hiatus between the coins of Marcian (450-457) and Justin II (565-578) noted by Raynor is filled by the coins from the hoard, the latest of which date to the first half of the sixth century. The latest coin from the excavations dates to the reign of Maurice (582-602).²⁷ The almost complete absence of restorable vessels (except for a few oil lamps) from the final occupation level of the synagogue (Pottery Plate DD) suggests that the synagogue was abandoned before it was brought down by an earthquake. This is supported by the excavators' statement that, "The artifacts left for the expedition to recover do not reveal a building abandoned in haste with all its furnishings left behind after the great earthquake of 551" (p. 129). At the time of the abandonment, the coin hoard, which had lost its monetary value long before the seventh century, was left in its pot at the end of the northern corridor (see below). This proposed sequence is supported by the absence of evidence for burning in association with the destruction (p. 48), since oil lamps would presumably have been kept lit in an occupied building. It is also supported by the fact that the roof tiles lay beneath the collapse of the architectural fragments belonging to the upper part of the building, suggesting that the roof had caved in before the walls and columns were brought down (pp. 47-48). Though the excavators' description of the architectural fragments as lying more or less in a line and in the same layer is consistent with destruction by earthquake (p. 48), it is only possible at present to date this event after the abandonment of the building in the late seventh to early eighth century. The references to early Arab pottery (including glazed wares, no examples of which are published; see p. 13), in association with a squatters' occupation among the ruins, suggest that

²⁷ Raynor, *op. cit.*, pp. 234, 243; Bijovsky, *op. cit.*

the earthquake may have occurred some time during the eighth century.

We now turn to the synagogue at Capernaum, which shares many points of similarity with the one at Gush Halav and appears to have been constructed at about the same time.

The synagogue at Capernaum

The white limestone synagogue at Capernaum was the cornerstone of the tripartite typology of ancient Palestinian synagogues, representing the "Galilean" type. Cleared early in this century by H. Kohl and C. Watzinger, it was dated on the basis of its architectural style to the second to third century.²⁸ However, the discoveries made by V.C. Corbo and S. Loffreda, who began conducting excavations beneath the synagogue in 1968 on behalf of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, have indicated a much later date for its construction. This later date has caused a great deal of ongoing controversy.²⁹ As I hope to demonstrate here, the architectural, stratigraphic, ceramic, and numismatic evidence points to a date no earlier than the first half of the sixth century for the construction of this synagogue.

The Synagogue Building: The synagogue consists of a basilical prayer hall (20.4 x 18.65 meters), with a courtyard to the east (11.25 meters wide at the front, referred to as a "Beth Midrash" by the excavators) and a narrow porch along the front (south) facade. A small room or annex, the original function of which is unclear, is appended to the northwest corner of the building. The entire structure, which is constructed of white limestone imported from elsewhere in Galilee, sits atop a raised platform of local black basalt. The structure is entirely paved with flagstones. The interior of the prayer hall is divided by three rows of Corinthian columns along the east, west, and north sides into a central nave and three aisles. The columns sit on raised pedestals on a stylobate. The courtyard is also surrounded on three sides (north, east, and south) by pedestaled Corinthian columns on a stylobate, which created roofed porticoes. The synagogue was decorated with richly carved reliefs, some of which were figured (and most

²⁸ Kohl and Watzinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-40.

²⁹ See the studies of Corbo, Loffreda, Avi-Yonah, Foerster, and Tsafir listed in the bibliography.

of which were later obliterated). The lintel of the central entrance to the prayer hall was carved with the Roman imperial eagle. There are also Jewish motifs such as a seven-branched menorah and what appears to be a Torah shrine. One column in the nave bears a Greek inscription reading, "Herod, son of Mo[ni]mos, and Justus, his son, together with [his] children, erected this column." On the shaft of another column, which apparently stood in the court of the synagogue, is an Aramaic inscription: "Halfu, the son of Zebidah, the son of Yohanan, made this column. May he be blessed." Two platforms (designated "M" and "N") flanked the inner side of the main entrance in the south facade. The presence of these platforms flanking the main doorway in the Jerusalem-oriented wall here and at Gush Halav disproves the traditional notion that there was no set place for the Torah shrine in "Galilean" type synagogues.³⁰ Though the synagogue at Capernaum is larger and more elaborate than the one at Gush Halav (presumably reflecting a more affluent community), both share this and other features, including a rectangular basilical prayer hall with interior columns resting on stylobates; the orientation of the main facade south towards Jerusalem (at Capernaum, with three doorways; at Gush Halav, with one); carved stone decoration including an eagle on the lintel of the central entrance to the prayer hall; columns bearing dedicatory inscriptions; stone benches lining some of the walls inside the prayer hall; and tiled roofs. Capernaum was paved with a flagstone floor; at Gush Halav the floor was apparently paved with stone or plastered. In addition, the architectural, stratigraphic, ceramic, and numismatic evidence suggests that both synagogues were constructed at about the same time.

Stratigraphy: The fact that the white limestone walls of the synagogue are not perfectly aligned with the top of the black basalt platform has led the excavators to suggest that the latter represents the remains of an earlier synagogue from the time of Jesus.³¹ However, the homogeneous nature of the fill inside the platform and the fact that it was built over sloping ground support their original suggestion

³⁰ Corbo, *Capernaum*, p. 120; J.F. Strange, "Review Article: The Capernaum and Herodium Publications," in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 226, 1977, p. 70.

³¹ S. Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum* (Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 46-49; the excavators also noted that the walls of the basalt platform do not run continuously beneath the stylobate. Also see Y. Tsafir, "The Synagogues at Capernaum and Meroth and the Dating of the Galilean Synagogue," in J.H. Humphrey, ed., *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research* (Ann Arbor, 1995), p. 155.

that it was first constructed as the foundation for the limestone synagogue.³² The platform was constructed over the remains of late Hellenistic and early Roman houses, which were apparently occupied at least until the third to fourth century.³³ The houses were buried in a layer of fill (designated Stratum B) that was up to four meters deep. The remains of earlier structures that were destroyed when the platform and synagogue were constructed are represented by fragmentary walls and pavements of basalt stones and earth ("massicciata").³⁴ The fill of Stratum B was, according to the excavators, "hermetically sealed" by a thirty centimeter thick layer of white mortar (designated Stratum C) on which the stone pavement of the building was laid. This mortar was made of crushed limestone chips from the white limestone of the synagogue, and more chips were found in spots beneath the layer of mortar. Though in most places the limestone pavement was not preserved, the impressions of the pavers were still visible in the mortar.³⁵

The fact that this same stratigraphic sequence has been revealed in the twenty-five trenches excavated in the synagogue and its courtyard contradicts the continuing claim of some archaeologists that Strata B and C belong to a later reconstruction of a second to third century synagogue building.³⁶ As J.F. Strange has pointed out, the fact that the same fill has been found beneath the stylobates also argues against a later rebuilding, since "the removal of the stylobate implies removal of the entire upper structure of the building."³⁷ The excava-

³² S. Loffreda, "Coins from the Synagogue of Capharnaum," in *Liber Annuus* 47, 1997, p. 225; S. Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum. Archaeological Evidence for Its Late Chronology," in *Liber Annuus* 22, 1972, p. 11; Tsafir, *ibid*.

³³ This level is designated Stratum A by the excavators; S. Loffreda, "The Late Chronology of the Synagogue of Capernaum," in Levine, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

³⁴ See n. 31 above. The question of whether these fragmentary remains and the platform belong to an earlier synagogue that stood on this spot lies beyond the scope of this discussion.

³⁵ See for example Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum," pp. 11-12, and "Late Chronology," p. 54. To preserve what remained of the original stone pavement, the trenches in the prayer hall were opened in spots where it was not preserved (though the mortar bedding was intact). Some of the trenches in the courtyard were cut through the original stone pavement; see Loffreda, "Coins from the Synagogue of Capharnaum," p. 227.

³⁶ See for example Tsafir, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157; G. Foerster, "Notes on Recent Excavations at Capernaum," in Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³⁷ Strange, *op. cit.*, p. 70. Also see Loffreda, "Coins from the Synagogue at Capharnaum," p. 229: "in Trench 14 (the southern portion of the western aisle) more than one hundred late Roman coins were found in the foundation of the stylobate."

tors have distinguished the following construction stages in the synagogue. The prayer hall was built independently, while the courtyard, porch, and northwest annex were added later. There is no architectural connection between the prayer hall and the other structures, including the foundations. In the prayer hall, the inner walls were plastered before the construction of the side benches. The benches and their foundations were built up against the plaster. The stone pavement of the prayer hall and the mortar underlying it were put in place before the construction of the stone benches, which partly overlap the stone pavement. On the other hand, the pavement and layer of mortar are later than the foundations of the two rectangular structures (M and N) located on both sides of the main entrance, since the mortar stops against their foundations.³⁸

Chronology: It is clear from the above that the white limestone synagogue represents a single building with no evidence of major reconstructions. On the basis of the coins and pottery found beneath the pavement, mainly in Strata B and C, the excavators have suggested that construction was carried out over the course of a century, from the second half of the fourth century to the third quarter of the fifth, beginning with the prayer hall and ending with the courtyard.³⁹ As they have pointed out, this date accords well with the Aramaic dedicatory inscription on the column from the synagogue, which Sukenik assigned to the Byzantine period.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, the excavators have published only a fraction of the potsherds and the approximately 25,000 coins they have found beneath the pavement of the synagogue.⁴¹ Since the exact prove-

³⁸ Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum," p. 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27; Corbo, *Cafarnao*, p. 168; Loffreda, "Late Chronology," p. 52. In his most recent article, "Coins from the Synagogue at Capharnaum," Loffreda proposed a slightly later date for the beginning of construction: "it seems that the initial date of the entire synagogue building (prayer hall, eastern courtyard and balcony) was not before the beginning of the 5th century, while the final date of the project is still kept at the last quarter of the fifth century" (p. 233).

⁴⁰ Sukenik, *op. cit.*, p. 72; Loffreda, "Late Chronology," p. 52.

⁴¹ S. Loffreda, "Potsherds from a Sealed Level of the Synagogue of the Synagogue at Capharnaum," in *Liber Annuus* 29, 1979, p. 218; Loffreda, "Late Chronology;" A. Spijkerman, "Monete della sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *La Sinagoga di Cafarnao* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 125-139; E.A. Arslan, "Monete axumite di imitazione nel deposito del cortile della Sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *Liber Annuus* 46, 1996, pp. 307-316; Loffreda, "Coins from the Synagogue at Capharnaum;" E.A. Arslan, "Il deposito monetale della Trincea XII nel cortile della sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *Liber Annuus* 47, 1997, pp. 245-328. Loffreda ("Coins from the Synagogue at Capharnaum," p. 230), lists a total of 24,575 coins found in all of the trenches and strata (A-C) beneath

nience of the pottery (and of many of the coins) is not provided, it is difficult to evaluate the building's chronology. However, a review of the numismatic and ceramic evidence suggests it was constructed in the sixth century, instead of by the third quarter of the fifth century as the excavators have proposed. Most of the coins found beneath the pavement of the synagogue date to the fourth and fifth centuries, with a few earlier specimens present. The pre-fourth century coins noted by Tsafir in the lower layers of Stratum B are apparently associated with the Hellenistic and early Roman houses beneath the synagogue, which, according to the excavators, were occupied at least until the fourth century.⁴² Fourth to early fifth century coins were the most numerous in the fills beneath the synagogue's floor, with the latest specimens reported until recently dating to the reign of Leo I, ca. 474.⁴³ Though the excavators have interpreted this evidence as meaning that the synagogue's construction was completed by the third quarter of the fifth century, it actually means that it was constructed no earlier than the third quarter of the fifth century. In other words, the coins found under the floor of the synagogue provide a *terminus post quem*, not a *terminus ante quem*, for its construction.

Other published numismatic evidence points to a construction date in the sixth century. This includes Loffreda's reference to a "very few Byzantine coins" from the hoard of 2,920 coins found on the south side of the western aisle of the prayer hall.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, because they have not been published, the number, identification, and date of these "Byzantine" coins are unknown. Most of the rest of the coins from this hoard date to the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The excavators seem to have disregarded the Byzantine coins because they did not accord with their proposed *terminus ante quem* in the third quarter of the fifth century.⁴⁵ Another hoard discov-

the floor of the synagogue, with a chart of their numbers according to trench and stratum.

⁴² Tsafir, *op. cit.*, p. 156; also see Loffreda, "Coins from the Synagogue at Capharnaum," pp. 230, 240-241; Loffreda, "Late Chronology," pp. 54-55; Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum," p. 14, for third and fourth century coins from Stratum A.

⁴³ Loffreda, "Potsherds," p. 218; see below for coins dating to the reign of Zeno.

⁴⁴ Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum," p. 15.

⁴⁵ Though in many other places the original stone pavement was no longer in place, only here did the excavators use this as a reason for disregarding the numismatic evidence: "Since the stone pavement had been removed in ancient times, the presence of very few Byzantine coins can be disregarded for our purpose," Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum," p. 15.

ered in Trench XII in the synagogue's courtyard contained 20,323 fractional bronze coins, coin fragments, and counterfeits embedded in the mortar layer underlying the stone pavement. Specimens dating to Zeno's second reign (476-491) are among the latest of the fifteen percent of the coins from this hoard that have been analyzed and published so far.⁴⁶ Instead of indicating that the synagogue was completed shortly after 476, as E.A. Arslan concluded, these coins provide a *terminus post quem* of 491 for its construction.⁴⁷ The hoard also includes a number of imitation Axumite coins, which according to Arslan were in circulation from the third quarter of the fifth century to the third quarter of the sixth century. The lower end of this range seems to be based largely on the assumption that the synagogue's construction was completed no later than the beginning of Zeno's second reign (476): "Se a Cafarnao l'accumulo... sembra chiudersi poco dopo l'inizio del secondo regno di Zeno."⁴⁸ However, Arslan noted that Axumite coins have been found elsewhere in contexts dating to the sixth century: "...in altri luoghi la presenza della moneta axumita appare prolungarsi notevolmente. A Baalbek viene riconosciuta in un contesto chiuso con Giustino II (565-578)."⁴⁹ According to Bijovsky, "these [imitation Axumite] coins circulated in the area during the sixth century, as part of the repertory of Byzantine nummi."⁵⁰ The coins thus indicate a sixth century date for the construction of the synagogue at Capernaum.

The pottery found beneath the synagogue is consistent with the coin evidence. The most closely dated pieces belong to imported Late Roman Red Ware bowls. Though the illustrated sherds are not accompanied by descriptions of the fabric or identifications according to J.W. Hayes' typology, most can be identified on the basis of the line-drawings.⁵¹ The following types are represented beneath the pavement:

⁴⁶ Arslan, "Il deposito monetale della Trincea XII;" for the coins of Zeno see p. 322, nos. 1911-1913.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 247, "Il complesso venne quindi sigillato non molto tempo dopo 476 d.C."

⁴⁸ Arslan, "Monete axumite," p. 313.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 313-314.

⁵⁰ Bijovsky, op. cit., p. 83.

⁵¹ Hayes, op. cit. The pottery from the synagogue is not published in Loffreda, *Cafarnao II. La Ceramica* (Jerusalem, 1974), though it is possible to correlate some of the pottery types published elsewhere from the synagogue with those illustrated in that volume.

- 1) African Red Slip Ware Form 59, dated ca. 320-420.⁵²
- 2) Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 1, dated from the late fourth century to third quarter of the fifth century.⁵³
- 3) Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 1, dated from the late fourth century to about the third quarter of the fifth century.⁵⁴
- 4) Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 5, dated around 460 through the first half of the sixth century.⁵⁵
- 5) Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 2, dated mainly to the late fifth and early sixth century.⁵⁶
- 6) Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3, dated mainly to the second half of the fifth and first half of the sixth centuries.⁵⁷

The pottery and coins found beneath the synagogue thus provide an early sixth century *terminus post quem* for its construction, instead of a

⁵² Hayes, *ibid.*, pp. 96-100; for illustrated examples, see S. Loffreda, "La Ceramica della sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *La Sinagoga di Cafarnao* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 78, Fig. 3:13; S. Loffreda, "Ceramica ellenistico-romana nel sottosuolo della sinagoga di Cafarnao," in Bottini, G.C., ed., *Studia Hierosolymitana III, Nell'Ottavo Centenario Francescano* (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 21, no. 10.

⁵³ Hayes, *ibid.*, pp. 325-327; for illustrated examples, see Loffreda, "La Ceramica," p. 78, Fig. 3:1.

⁵⁴ Hayes, *ibid.*, pp. 372-374; for illustrated examples see Loffreda, *ibid.*, p. 78, Fig. 3:2-3.

⁵⁵ Hayes, *ibid.*, pp. 339-340; for illustrated examples, see Loffreda, "Potsherds," p. 19, no. 21; Loffreda, "Ceramica ellenistico-romana," p. 21, no. 41.

⁵⁶ Hayes, *ibid.*, pp. 374-376; for illustrated examples, see Loffreda, "Potsherds," p. 19, nos. 15-20; Loffreda, "Ceramica ellenistico-romana," p. 21, no. 15.

⁵⁷ Hayes, *ibid.*, pp. 329-338; for illustrated examples see Loffreda, "La Ceramica," p. 78, Fig. 3:5, 8; Loffreda, "Potsherds," p. 19, nos. 1-14; Loffreda, "Ceramica ellenistico-romana," p. 21, nos. 21-34. The following later types appear to be represented as well:

1) Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 10, dated from the late sixth to mid-seventh centuries (Hayes, pp. 343-346; for an illustrated example see Loffreda, "La Ceramica," p. 78, Fig. 3:11).

2) Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 7, dated mainly to the second half of the sixth to early seventh centuries (Hayes, pp. 377-379; for illustrated examples see Loffreda, "La Ceramica," p. 78, Fig. 3:9, 12).

3) Possibly Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 9, dated from ca. 550 to the end of the seventh century (Hayes, pp. 378-382; for what may be illustrated examples of this type see Loffreda, "La Ceramica," p. 78, Fig. 3:7; Loffreda, "Ceramica ellenistico-romana," p. 21, nos. 12-13).

Since these pieces are so much later than the others, and their identification and provenience are uncertain, they are not included in this discussion. However, their presence means there is a possibility that the synagogue could postdate the mid-sixth century.

terminus ante quem in the third quarter of the fifth century as suggested by the excavators.

Other considerations support the assignment of the synagogue's construction to the first half of the sixth century or later. As Loffreda himself acknowledged, the variants of Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 bowls represented under the synagogue date to the first half of the sixth century: "I do agree with Dr. Hayes in recognizing this new feature as quite common in the first half of the sixth century A.D. However, on the evidence of coins, its appearance in Capharnaum must be set in the third quarter of the fifth century, during the reign of Leo I."⁵⁸ Second, since there appears to be a fairly large number of sherds representing this form and Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 2 (as well as smaller amounts of Late Roman "C" Form 5) under the synagogue, time must be allowed for these types to have appeared, been in use, been broken and discarded, and then imported with the fills deposited beneath the synagogue. A date in the first half of the sixth century or later is also supported by the evidence of local ceramic types. Pieces of metallic storage jars with white-painted decoration on a dark background were found in the fill of the courtyard and porch and were embedded in the stucco fragments that decorated the synagogue's interior.⁵⁹ Evidence from Jerusalem suggests that the white-painted decoration first appeared on these northern Palestinian bag-shaped jars during the sixth century.⁶⁰ Other types described (but not illustrated) as embedded in the stucco fragments include a casserole with bevelled rim and large horizontal handles and an oil lamp decorated with a cross in relief.⁶¹

It is apparent from the excavators' publication of the synagogue excavations that they have progressively raised the construction date of the synagogue from the late fourth and early fifth century to the mid-fifth century and finally to the third quarter of the fifth century, as later and later coins were discovered beneath the floor. This has also led them to stretch the duration of construction over the course of about seventy-five years or more, beginning in the late fourth or early fifth century.⁶² When Loffreda first prepared the publication of

⁵⁸ Loffreda, "Potsherds," p. 218.

⁵⁹ Corbo, *Cafarnaum*, pp. 149, 165.

⁶⁰ Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology*, p. 32.

⁶¹ Corbo, *Cafarnaum*, p. 149.

⁶² Compare the dates in the following: Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum," p. 26: "In conclusion the Synagogue of Capharnaum was built not earlier

the pottery from the excavations at Capernaum in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he and Corbo proposed a late fourth to early fifth century date for the synagogue (which was, of course, much later than the previously accepted date).⁶³ Loffreda based much of his chronology and typology of the local pottery on its association with coins of the third to fifth centuries.⁶⁴ However, the numismatic evidence can be misleading and provides only a very rough *terminus post quem*. In addition, Loffreda's earliest publications of the pottery from the synagogue appeared in print before Hayes' typology of imported Late Roman Red Wares.⁶⁵ By the time Hayes' volume was published, indicating a range from the second half of the fifth through first half of the sixth century for some of the types represented beneath the synagogue, a *terminus ante quem* in the third quarter of the fifth century had already been established by the excavators. It is now necessary to examine the nature of the numismatic evidence, which is crucial to the dating of the "Galilean" type synagogues.

than the second half of the fourth century A.D. and completed at the beginning of the fifth century." Corbo, *Cafarnao*, p. 168: "In base alle numerosissime monete ed all'abbondante ceramica, provenienti da contesti stratigrafici diversi e nondimeno in costante armonia fra di loro, siamo pienamente convinti che gli edifici della sinagoga furono iniziati, come minimo, verso seconda meta del quarto secolo dopo Cristo e che il lavoro fu portato a termine, con la posa dei pavimenti, verso gli inizi della seconda meta del quinto secolo dopo Cristo" (my emphasis). Loffreda, "Potsherds," p. 220: "The latest pieces...suggest that the pavement of the courtyard of the synagogue cannot be earlier than the mid-fifth century A.D., while the latest coins of Leo I bring us to a date around 474 A.D." Arlsan, "Monete axumite," p. 308: "L'ipotesi piu probabile...appare quella del deposito votivo di offerte...formatosi progressivamente a partire da una data forse da collocare in eta teodosiana (dopo la demonetizzazione dell'*maiorina*) e conclusasi con la costruzione della pavimentazione della Sinagoga in un anno di non molto successivo all'inizio del secondo regno di Zenone (476 d.C.)" (my emphasis). In his most recent article, Loffreda has suggested that construction began in the early fifth century; see "Coins from the Synagogue of Capharnaum," pp. 332-333: "After the recent identification of many other coins, it seems that the initial date of the entire synagogue building (prayer room, eastern courtyard and balcony) was not before the beginning of the 5th century, while the final date of the project is still kept at the last quarter of the 5th century."

⁶³ V.C. Corbo, "Nuovi scavi nella sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *La Sinagoga di Cafarnao, dopo gli scavi del 1969* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 60; Loffreda, "La Ceramica."

⁶⁴ Loffreda, *Cafarnao II*.

⁶⁵ Hayes, op. cit.; see Loffreda, "La Ceramica," and "The Synagogue of Capharnaum."

Synagogues and coins

Deposits of hundreds and sometimes thousands of coins beneath the floors and foundations of ancient Palestinian synagogues are now a well-known though poorly understood phenomenon. The sites where this is attested include Capernaum, Chorazin, Gush Halav, Meroth (Khirbet Marus), Rehov (all in Galilee), Qazrin, Ein Neshut, Dabiyye, Horvat Kanaf (all in the Golan), and Horvat Rimmon (in Judea).⁶⁶ The coins are almost always small bronze denominations, the overwhelming majority of which date to the fourth and fifth centuries. As D.T. Ariel has noted, "this ubiquity is related to the inflationary economic character of that period, which rendered most of the coins...almost valueless."⁶⁷ These coins have been understood as providing evidence that the synagogues were built, occupied, or restored during the fourth to early fifth centuries, though at Horvat Kanaf, Ariel noted that "no coins representing the occupational period of the synagogue have yet been found."⁶⁸ As has been seen, at Gush Halav the ceramic evidence indicates that the synagogue was constructed no earlier than the second half of the fifth century, while at Capernaum it indicates a construction date no earlier than the first half of the sixth century. The similar pattern of coin finds from the foundations and beneath the floors at other synagogue sites suggests that they too may date to the late fifth or sixth century. The latest published coins from some of these sites are:

- 1) Ein Neshut: 193 coins (115 of which were identified) from two deposits under the foundations or thresholds of the synagogue. The latest are of Theodosius II or Valentinian III (425-450), with perhaps one coin of Zeno (474-491).⁶⁹
- 2) Dabiyye: The latest coin from a deposit of 336 coins sealed by the flagstone floor dates to 408.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ D.T. Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at 'En Nashut," in *Israel Exploration Journal* 37, 1987, pp. 148-149; also see Arslan, "Il deposito monetale della Trincea XII."

⁶⁷ Ariel, *ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; D.T. Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at Horvat Kanef, Preliminary Report," in *Israel Numismatic Journal* 4, 1980, p. 60; D.T. Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at Dabiyye," in *'Atiqot* 20, 1991, p. 78.

⁶⁹ Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at 'En Nashut."

⁷⁰ Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at Dabiyye."

- 3) Meroth: The latest out of 520 coins found under the stone floor date to the late fifth century.⁷¹
- 4) Horvat Kanaf: The latest two out of 563 coins from the foundations and fill beneath the floors are of Anastasius I (498-518).⁷²
- 5) Qazrin: 180 coins (64 of which could be identified) came from the rubble fill behind the added benches along the interior face of the northern wall. The latest date to the reign of Anastasius I (491-518).⁷³

Ma'oz has discussed this phenomenon in relation to the Golan synagogues as follows (my translation from the Hebrew):⁷⁴

It is worth emphasizing that the two latest coins—which provide the *Post quam* [sic!] of the building are from the foundations and they indicate that the synagogue [at Horvat Kanaf] was constructed no earlier than the beginning of the sixth century. The rarity of fifth century coins in relation to the corpus (the majority as mentioned are from the late fourth century) is characteristic of the monetary policy of the pe-

⁷¹ Z. Ilan, "The Synagogue and *Beth Midrash* of Meroth," in R. Hachlili, ed., *Ancient Synagogues in Israel, Third-Seventh Century C.E.* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 21-42.

⁷² Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at Horvat Kanef;" Z.U. Ma'oz, *Ancient Synagogues in the Golan, Art and Architecture, Volumes I-II.* (Qazrin, 1995), p. 133.

⁷³ Z.U. Ma'oz and A. Killebrew, "Qasrin, 1983-1984," in *Israel Exploration Journal* 35, 1985, pp. 289-293, and D.T. Ariel, "A Hoard of Byzantine Folles from Qasrin," in *'Atiqot* 29, pp. 69-76. For Chorazin, see Z. Yeivin, "Excavations at Khorazin," in *Eretz-Israel* 11, 1973, pp. 144-157; Y. Meshorer, "Coins from the Excavations at Khorazin," in *Eretz-Israel* 11, 1973, pp. 158-162; Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at Horvat Kanef," p. 148, note 11. Ariel notes that at Chorazin, Z. Yeivin (the excavator) used deposits of fourth to fifth century coins to determine the date of abandonment of the synagogue. However, the similarities with coins from the other synagogue sites suggests that they instead provide a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the synagogue (Yeivin, p. 153). This is supported by the ceramic evidence. Though the provenience of the pottery published by Yeivin is not described (there are locus numbers, but no descriptions of the loci), it includes the same types of imported Late Roman Red Ware bowls found in the fills beneath the floors of the synagogue at Capernaum (for example, Late Roman "C" or Phocian Red Slip Ware Form 3 [Yeivin, p. 152, nos. 8-9]; Cypriot Red Slip Ware Forms 1 and 2 [p. 152, nos. 7 and 11, respectively]. Some later types are also illustrated, such as Cypriot Red Slip Ware Form 7 [p. 152, no. 1], and Egyptian Red Slip "A" Ware [p. 152, no. 2, and perhaps no. 4]). A sixth century date for the synagogue would account for Eusebius' description of the village as lying in ruins in his day (*Onomasticon* 174:23). It would also accord with the account of Petrus Diaconicus, who quoted an apparently sixth century source that referred to repeated attempts by the Jews of Chorazin to build their synagogue (Yeivin, p. 27).

⁷⁴ Ma'oz, *Ancient Synagogues*, p. 133.

riod, as is expressed also in the assemblages of coins from other sites.⁷⁵ I would like to say that in a corpus of over five hundred coins [from Kanaf], only twenty of the fifth century were found—only about 3.5%. If the number of coins recovered was much smaller, the chances of finding fifth century coins would diminish to almost zero. In such a case, the determination of the construction date of the building could be off by a century. It is also worth emphasizing that the distribution of coins in different pits in the hall indicates that these are not ordinary hoards, such as those someone would hide and with the purpose of recovering it in times of trouble. For it is not logical that someone would dismantle the floor of the synagogue in several spots in order to recover some poor pieces of copper. These are hoards of the type characteristic of synagogues—which were deposited at the time of construction.

Ma'oz makes two important points here: first, that these coins were never meant to be retrieved, since they had little or no monetary value, and, second, that these deposits date no earlier than the beginning of the sixth century. These points have also been made by Ariel, who noted that at Horvat Kanaf, the highest concentration of dated coins is found in the period between 383-395. After 408, and until the latest dated coin, the concentration of dated coins drops drastically. Ariel attributed both phenomena to the different quantities of coins minted at the time, instead of to any growth or decline in wealth at Horvat Kanaf.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at Horvat Kanef," p. 60.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* For a recent suggestion that the paucity of fifth century coins reflects a dramatic decline in the size, number, and prosperity of contemporary settlements in Palestine, see Z. Safrai, *The Missing Century* (Leuven, 1998). Although a comprehensive review of this work lies outside the scope of this discussion, I would like to address a few specific points raised by Safrai. 1) Because few fifth century coins have been found in Jerusalem, Safrai concluded that "the economic activity in the city was in reality more limited than the representation of such activity in the contemporaneous literature and in the religious and possibly also the political sphere" (p. 22; also see p. 147). However, I have noted elsewhere that the paucity of fifth century coins and the fact that fifth century ceramic types are basically the same as fourth century types has made it difficult to identify fifth century levels at sites in Jerusalem. In other words, in the case of Jerusalem, the numismatic evidence led to the misdating of the associated ceramic types, and creates the false impression of a decline in prosperity during this period; see Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology*, pp. 164-165. The possibility that a similar problem affects the Galilee is suggested by Safrai's statement that, "in most sites in which the numismatic data could be verified, a decrease in the quantity of coins was matched by a corresponding drop in the ceramic finds" (p. 22). In the conclusion to this paper, I note that the fact that the pottery types of the Galilee have been dated largely on the basis of the associated coins indicates that the local ceramic chronology may need to be revised. 2) The ceramic evidence contradicts the conclusion of the excavators (repeated by Safrai, p. 134), that the settlement

This conclusion is supported by similarities with the other synagogue sites mentioned here. The deposition of these small bronze coins thus seems to postdate the reforms of Anastasius I (491-518), who replaced the tiny bronze nummi, which had been almost the only bronze coins of his predecessors, with larger pieces.⁷⁷ At Horvat Kanaf, one small-module follis of Anastasius I is the latest coin represented, to the exclusion of the much more common large-module follis.⁷⁸ This means that almost none of the coins represented in the synagogue deposits had any legal monetary value when they were deposited, though they appear to have remained in circulation in the sixth century.⁷⁹ It also means that almost all, if not all, of the small bronze coins from these synagogues antedate their construction. To account for this phenomenon at Horvat Kanaf, Ariel suggested that either the town did not survive long after the completion of the monumental synagogue or that no recently-minted coins were lost at the site after its occupation.⁸⁰ The latter appears to be the case. To understand why so many small bronze coins were deposited in these synagogues, it is first necessary to distinguish between different kinds of hoards or deposits. As Ariel has noted, many of the coins appear to have been deliberately deposited, individually or in large numbers, during the construction of the synagogues. Such deposits cannot

at Khirbet Shema^c was abandoned after the earthquake of 419, and was renewed on a limited scale only in the sixth century. In fact, the synagogue at Khirbet Shema^c was apparently constructed in the late fourth or early fifth century, when Safrai posits a large-scale decline; see Magness, "Synagogue Typology and Earthquake Chronology at Khirbet Shema^c." 3) The case of the forts at Ein Boqe^q and Upper Zohar demonstrates the potentially misleading nature of the numismatic evidence. All of the hundreds of small bronze coins (which could be identified) recovered from these two forts antedate their occupation; see J. Magness, "Redating the forts at Ein Boqe^q, Upper Zohar, and other sites in SE Judaea, and the implications for the nature of the *Limes Palaestinae*," in J.H. Humphrey, ed., *The Roman and Byzantine Near East Volume 2, Some Recent Archaeological Research* (Portsmouth, RI, 1999), pp. 191-199. Similarly, Abbasid coins are rare or unattested at many sites in Palestine with Abbasid occupation. Because they are often found in association with the more common Umayyad coins, many Abbasid ceramic types have been misdated to the Umayyad period; see J. Magness, "The Chronology of Capernaum in the Early Islamic Period," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117.3, 1997, pp. 482-483.

⁷⁷ A.R. Bellinger, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection. Volume One, Anastasius I to Maurice, 491-602* (Washington, D.C., 1966), p. 2; Bijovsky, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

⁷⁸ Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at Horvat Kanef," p. 60.

⁷⁹ Bijovsky, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

⁸⁰ Ariel, *ibid.*

properly be considered hoards.⁸¹ They may represent a type of "foundation deposit," though this phenomenon is still unexplained.⁸²

For the purposes of this discussion, I suggest distinguishing between these groups of coins as follows:

- 1) Coins that were mixed with the earth or fills imported during the synagogue's construction. These are usually individual coins, though they can add up, as at Capernaum. These can be understood as incidental deposits, as it is not clear that the builders of the synagogues were aware of the presence of these coins mixed in with the earth.
- 2) Coins that were deliberately deposited, individually or in groups, during the construction of the synagogue. These were placed in or next to the foundations, or under the floors.
- 3) "Hoards" of small bronze coins such as those from Gush Halav and Horvat Rimmon. These were found stored together (usually in ceramic vessels) in a room in the synagogue, above the floor level (that is, they postdate the synagogue's construction). It is worth noting that these coins were placed in hidden places inside the synagogue, such as at the end of the western corridor at Gush Halav or in a small hole between two stones at Horvat Rimmon.
- 4) True hoards of coins of precious metals, such as the gold hoard from Horvat Rimmon and the gold coins found beneath the benches at Capernaum (see below).

True hoards of precious coins are relatively rare and are not included in this discussion. Since it is not known whether the builders were aware of the presence of the coins brought in with the fills, the first group of coins are not considered deliberate deposits either. This leaves the second and third groups, which I believe represent a similar phenomenon, as they were deliberately stored or deposited in or under synagogues and consist entirely or almost entirely of small bronze coins dating to the fourth and fifth centuries. In other words, Jews in sixth century Palestine deposited hundreds, thousands, and even tens of thousands of legally if not effectively worthless bronze

⁸¹ Ariel, "Coins from the Synagogue at 'En Nashut," p. 148; Ma'oz, *Ancient Synagogues*, p. 133.

⁸² Bijovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 83; Ariel, *ibid.*; Arslan, "Monete axumite," p. 308; Arslan, "Il deposito monetale della Trincea XII," pp. 290-293.

coins in their synagogues, either in the foundations and below the floors, or in hidden places inside the building. The cooking pot containing 1,953 coins found at the end of the western corridor in the synagogue at Gush Halav represents such a deposit. The fact that the coins had no legal and little real monetary value by the time they were placed in the pot invalidates Raynor's suggestion that it served as a petty cash box or depository for charity or operating moneys.⁸³ According to Bijovsky's estimate, the purchasing power of the Gush Halav hoard in the mid-sixth century was only about 25 loaves of bread.⁸⁴ It has also been suggested that the coins were intended to bring the building and its congregants blessings and good fortune.⁸⁵ Z. Ilan has quoted a proposal by Y. Kentman:⁸⁶

[T]hese were coins used to redeem *ma'aser sheni* (the second tithe). Jewish law requires that *ma'aser sheni*, approximately 9% of certain crops, be eaten in Jerusalem. It is permissible to transfer (redeem) the value of the crops to a coin, carry that coin to Jerusalem, and purchase food and drink for consumption in the Holy City. In either case, *ma'aser sheni* could only be eaten in Jerusalem while the Temple stood. After the destruction of the Temple in 74 C.E. [sic!], crops still had to be redeemed before they could be eaten. Jewish law at this time allowed for the symbolic redemption of large amounts of crops with coins of little value. While it was impossible to redeem those coins since the Temple no longer existed, the coins retained a holy status and could not be used for any purpose. Jewish law therefore required that they be destroyed. In practice, since ruling authorities forbade the destruction of coins, other methods of disposing of the coins had to be found. Perhaps the coins underneath Meroth's floor were *ma'aser sheni* coins which were forbidden for use. They may have been collected elsewhere, over many years, and when the synagogue was built they were brought there.

While I do not necessarily accept Kentman's proposal, I believe it

⁸³ Raynor, *op. cit.*, p. 245; Bijovsky, *ibid.* Bijovsky, p. 83, classifies this as a genuine hoard, despite the fact that it consists of tiny, ill-struck nummi instead of the usual gold and large bronze coins.

⁸⁴ Bijovsky, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Ilan, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Without suggesting a direct connection between the practices, it is interesting to note the parallels between the coin deposits under synagogues and foundation deposits in the ancient Near East. The deposits described by R.S. Ellis in ancient Mesopotamia were usually placed under the floors or in the foundations of walls of temples and sacred precincts. Small pieces of copper were sometimes included, which are also mentioned in some of the building inscriptions. The latest examples of such practices mentioned by Ellis occurred under the Parthians. See R.S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 132, 134, 161.

reflects the kind of ritual considerations that lay behind the deposition of these large numbers of small bronze coins in and under synagogues.

Architectural style

“Galilean” type synagogues, especially the one at Capernaum, were originally dated to the second to third centuries on the basis of their architectural style.⁸⁷ As G. Foerster stated, “The late second or third century C.E. dating is founded on architectural and stylistic parallels in contemporary Roman art and architecture in Syria and Asia Minor.”⁸⁸ Although these synagogues resemble Syrian temples of the second to third centuries, this architectural style continued in use for hundreds of years. It can be seen, for example, in the villages of northern Syria, which experienced a period of great expansion during the period from about 330-550 C.E.⁸⁹ The only excavations conducted to date in these villages (at Dehes), have indicated that at least some of the houses were constructed in the sixth century.⁹⁰ The continued use of this architectural style can also be seen in the fifth and sixth century churches of this region.⁹¹ The Golan synagogues, which share many stylistic similarities with the “Galilean” type synagogues, have been dated by Ma’oz to the fifth to sixth centuries.⁹² A

⁸⁷ Kohl and Watzinger, op. cit., pp. 147-173.

⁸⁸ Foerster, op. cit., p. 57.

⁸⁹ For example, compare the acanthus rinceaux motif on the buildings at Deir Sunbul and Mugleyya (G. Tate, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du nord du IIe au VIIe siècle, Tome I* [Paris, 1992], p. 156, Figs. 221-223) with the same motif at Capernaum (Kohl and Watzinger, op. cit., p. 31, Abb. 61), and the grapevine (rinceaux) motif at Jebel Zawiye (Tate, p. 153, Fig. 216) with the same motif at Capernaum (Kohl and Watzinger, p. 12, Abb. 15; p. 13, Abb. 19).

⁹⁰ See J.-P. Sodini et al., “Déhès (Syrie du nord), Campagnes I-III (1976-1978), Recherches sur l’habitat rural,” in *Syria* 57, 1980, pp. 1-303.

⁹¹ See for example G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord, le massif du Bélus à l’époque romaine, II* (Paris, 1953), Pls. 156:1 (east church at Baqirha), 159-160, 202 (church at Qalbloze), 200 (east church at Behyo). Though most of these churches differ from the “Galilean” type synagogues in having a built (internal) apse, it is interesting to note the frequent presence of a colonnaded courtyard on one of the long sides of the prayer hall, and the narrow porch along the front of the building, like at Capernaum; see for example Tchalenko, *ibid.*, Pl. 111 (the west basilica at Behyo).

⁹² Z.U. Ma’oz, “Golan, Byzantine Period,” in E. Stern, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (New York, 1990), p. 539.

late fourth to fifth century date has been proposed for the “Galilean” type synagogues of eastern lower Galilee.⁹³ Thus, a late fifth to sixth century date cannot be ruled out for the synagogues at Capernaum, Gush Halav, and others of “Galilean” type strictly on the basis of architectural style.⁹⁴ A sixth century date would also account for the much-debated inscription on the lintel of the “Galilean” type synagogue at Nabratein, which states that the building was constructed in 564.⁹⁵ Advocates of the traditional typology have attempted to account for this late date by claiming that the inscription was added to the lintel of an already standing building.⁹⁶

Some scholars have objected to a late fourth to fifth century date for the synagogue at Capernaum because its architecture and decoration are so different from others in the vicinity, such as the fourth century synagogue at Hammath Tiberias, and the late fifth to sixth century synagogue at Beth Alpha. As Avi-Yonah stated, “If we consider all we know of the development of architectural styles, we would probably find this to be the only case of such astounding architectural diversity within so small an area.”⁹⁷ These differences, however, seem to be regional rather than chronological. The “Galilean” type synagogues belong to a Roman architectural tradition in Syria that flourished into the sixth century. Synagogues like the one at Beth Alpha—constructed of unworked field stones, having a niche or apse built into the Jerusalem-oriented wall, and with decoration focused on mosaic floors—are related instead to churches of the late fifth to eighth centuries. Though basilical churches with a

⁹³ Gal, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-173.

⁹⁴ As Loffreda (“Coins from the Synagogue of Capharnaum,” p. 238) has noted, long before the current controversy began, Avi-Yonah suggested that the capitals of the synagogue at Capernaum appear to belong stylistically to the Byzantine period: “The capitals are mostly of Corinthian type, but they deviate strongly from the classical type...in their sharply-cut edges and geometrical interstices, they antedate by at least two centuries the typical Byzantine capital; in fact, if we did not know the approximate date of these synagogues, we would assign them, on the basis of their architectural decoration, to the Byzantine period.” See M. Avi-Yonah, “Synagogue Architecture in the Classical Period,” in C. Roth, ed., *Jewish Art, An Illustrated History* (New York, 1961), p. 166.

⁹⁵ E.M. Meyers, “Nabratein (Kefar Neburaya),” in Stern, *op. cit.*, p. 1077.

⁹⁶ M. Avi-Yonah, “Some Comments on the Capernaum Excavations,” in Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61. In this passage, Avi-Yonah objected to a fourth century date for the synagogue at Capernaum because that would mean it was contemporary with the nearby (and quite different) synagogue at Hammath Tiberias.

semi-circular apse in the east wall and richly decorated mosaic floors are widespread, it is interesting to note the large number (apparently reflecting a concentration of mosaic workshops) in the territories of Madaba and Gerasa (Jerash).⁹⁸ Stylistically, synagogues like the one at Beth Alpha seem to belong to this architectural group and tradition.

Another argument that has been advanced against a fourth century or later date for the synagogue at Capernaum is historical, that the Jews could not possibly have constructed such a lavish structure during a period of oppressive Christian rule. To quote Avi-Yonah again, "Such a state of affairs might be conceivable in our ecumenical age, but it seems almost impossible to imagine that it would have been allowed by the Byzantine authorities of the fourth century."⁹⁹ However, as J.E. Taylor has pointed out:¹⁰⁰

The contemporaneity of the two buildings [synagogue and octagonal church at Capernaum] is only a problem if we insist that the Christian authorities exercised an effective absolute rule over Capernaum. There is no real evidence to show that they did. The situation may well have been quite the reverse; only this would account for the archaeological evidence.

Taylor makes the important point that the archaeological evidence should first be interpreted without preconceived notions and biases. Only after the chronology of each ancient synagogue has been established on the basis of the archaeological evidence will it be possible accurately to reconstruct the contemporary historical setting in which Jews lived and interacted with others.

Synagogues after the Muslim conquest

As has been seen, the archaeological evidence suggests that the synagogue at Gush Halav remained in use until the late seventh to early eighth century. An intact oil lamp with a molded Kufic Arabic inscription on the shoulder was found in the upper layer of debris in the western corridor of the synagogue. Only the beginning of the

⁹⁸ See M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, 1993).

⁹⁹ Avi-Yonah, "Some Comments on the Capernaum Excavations," p. 62.

¹⁰⁰ J.E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places, The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1993), p. 293.

inscription, which reads, "In the name of Allah," can be made out.¹⁰¹ Since this lamp can be dated on the basis of its morphology to the seventh to eighth centuries, it suggests Muslim presence at Gush Halav by that time.¹⁰² Hoards of coins found at other synagogues indicate that occupation continued elsewhere after the Muslim conquest. At Meroth, for example, the latest of 485 coins (245 of which were gold and the rest bronze) from a hoard or "treasury" under the floor of the storeroom dates to 1193.¹⁰³ At Nabratein, the depiction of what may be a Torah shrine on a type of early Islamic bowl could point to Jewish presence at least into the eighth to ninth centuries.¹⁰⁴ At Capernaum, a small hoard of gold coins, the latest of which date to the third quarter of the seventh century, was found beneath the eastern benches of the prayer hall.¹⁰⁵ This discovery contradicts the excavators' conclusion that the synagogue was destroyed at the beginning of the early Islamic period.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the possible presence of "Mefjer" (buff) ware from the fill of Trench 11 and the foundations of the staircase near the northeast corner of the courtyard suggests that the building may have undergone some repairs in the second half of the eighth century or later.¹⁰⁷ The possibility that the synagogue remained in use well into the early Islamic period is supported by a bronze Tulunid coin dating to the second half of the ninth century found between the paving stones of the balcony.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Meyers, Meyers, and Strange, op. cit., p. 129; Lamp Plate D:8.

¹⁰² See Rosenthal and Sivan, op. cit., p. 133, ns. 542-543; Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology*, pp. 255-257, Oil Lamps Form 4.

¹⁰³ Ilan, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ J. Magness, "The Dating of the Black Ceramic Bowl with a Depiction of the Torah Shrine from Nabratein, in *Levant* 26, 1994, pp. 199-206.

¹⁰⁵ Loffreda, "The Synagogue of Capharnaum," p. 16; B. Callegher, "Un ripostiglio di monete d'oro bizantine dalla sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *Liber Annuus* 47, 1997, pp. 329-338.

¹⁰⁶ Corbo, *Cafarnao*, pp. 151, 169; Loffreda, *Recovering Capharnaum*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ See Corbo, *ibid.*, p. 165, for a reference to jar fragments of a light yellow ware; Loffreda, *Cafarnao II*, pp. 61-63, Class E. According to Loffreda, *Recovering Capharnaum*, p. 40, "games" were inscribed on the paving stones of the synagogue after it went out of use in the Islamic period.

¹⁰⁸ Spijkerman, op. cit., p. 43, no. 346.

Conclusion

This essay has a number of implications:

1) The "Galilean" type synagogues at Gush Halav and Capernaum represent single, original (not reconstructed) buildings established no earlier than the second half of the fifth and first half of the sixth century, respectively, in an architectural style that had a long tradition in Roman Syria. Contemporary synagogues like the one at Beth Alpha were constructed in an architectural style that was commonly used for churches of the late fifth to eighth centuries and enjoyed great popularity in the territories of Madaba and Gerasa on the east side of the Jordan River.

2) The assignment of the "Galilean" type synagogue at Gush Halav to the second half of the fifth century or later, and the one at Capernaum to no earlier than the first half of the sixth century, invalidates the traditional typology and leaves a void in terms of archaeologically identifiable remains of second to third century synagogues in Palestine. It also means that we need to reevaluate our assumptions regarding the relations between the Jews and Christians of Palestine during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries.

3) The fact that so many of the coins found in the synagogues at Capernaum and Gush Halav antedate their construction and occupation suggests the need to reexamine the chronology of other synagogues. In the broadest sense, the coin problem affects the chronology of the entire Galilee during the late Roman and Byzantine periods. This is because the sites and the local pottery types have been dated largely on the basis of the associated coins. The fact that coins of fourth to fifth century date are found in sixth century contexts suggests that the local pottery chronology may need to be revised.¹⁰⁹

4) The chronology of ancient synagogues must be established on the basis of carefully excavated and thoroughly published archaeological evidence. The synagogue at Gush Halav was chosen as the starting point for this discussion because it provides one of the few

¹⁰⁹ I suspect it is not a coincidence that the end of the manufacture of such common local types as "Galilean bowls" is dated to the first half of the fifth century. As a reading of D. Adan-Bayewitz, *Common Pottery in Roman Galilee, A Study of Local Trade* (Ramat-Gan, 1973), indicates, the chronological framework for the local pottery is based mainly on the evidence from Galilean synagogue sites, including and perhaps especially Capernaum.

examples of such a site. It remains to be seen whether the future publication of other excavated "Galilean" type synagogues will accord with the chronology proposed here.

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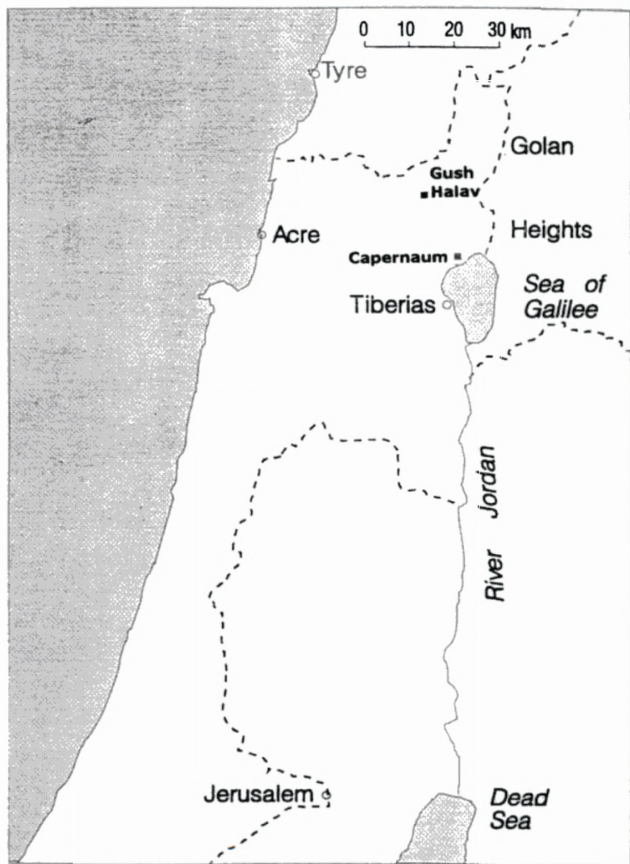


Figure 1.
Map of Galilee showing the location of Capernaum and Gush Halav.

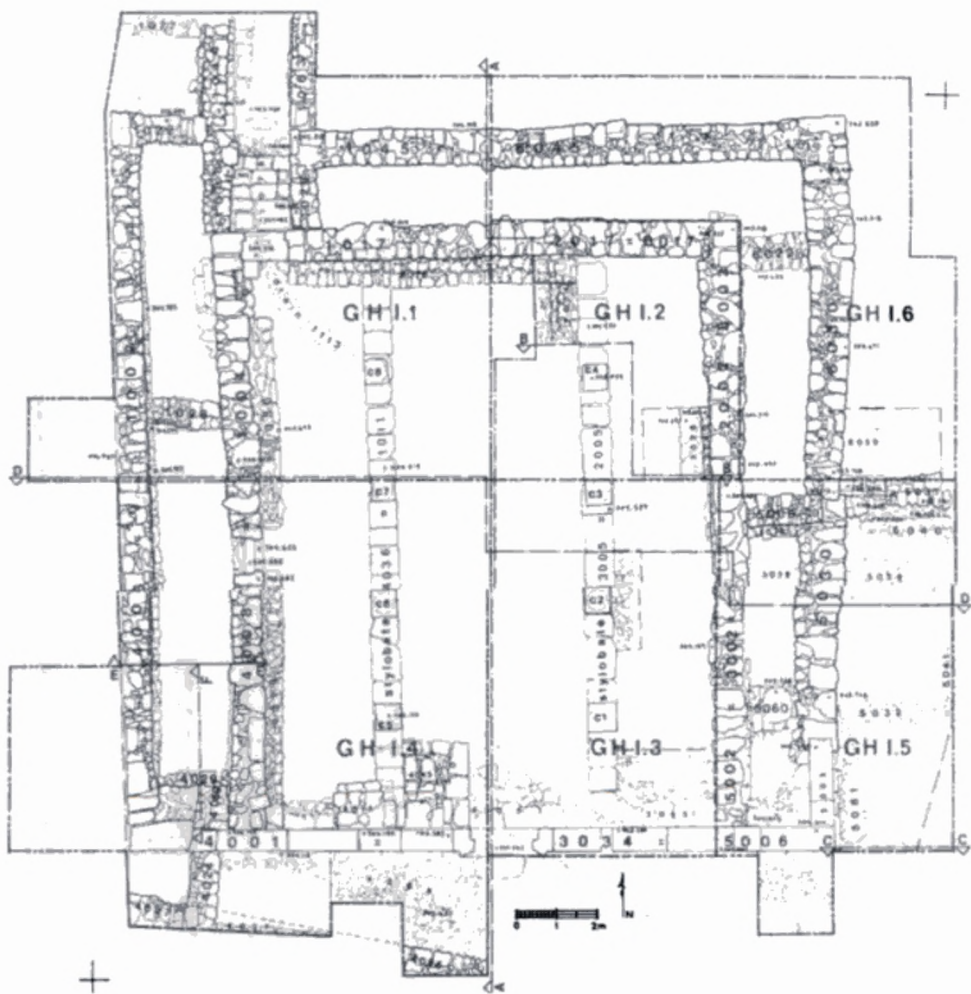


Figure 2.

Annotated stone-for-stone plan of the synagogue at Gush Halav, showing areas of excavation, architectural loci, elevations, and the location of published sections.

Reproduced with permission from Meyers, Meyers, and Strange 1990: Fig. 4.

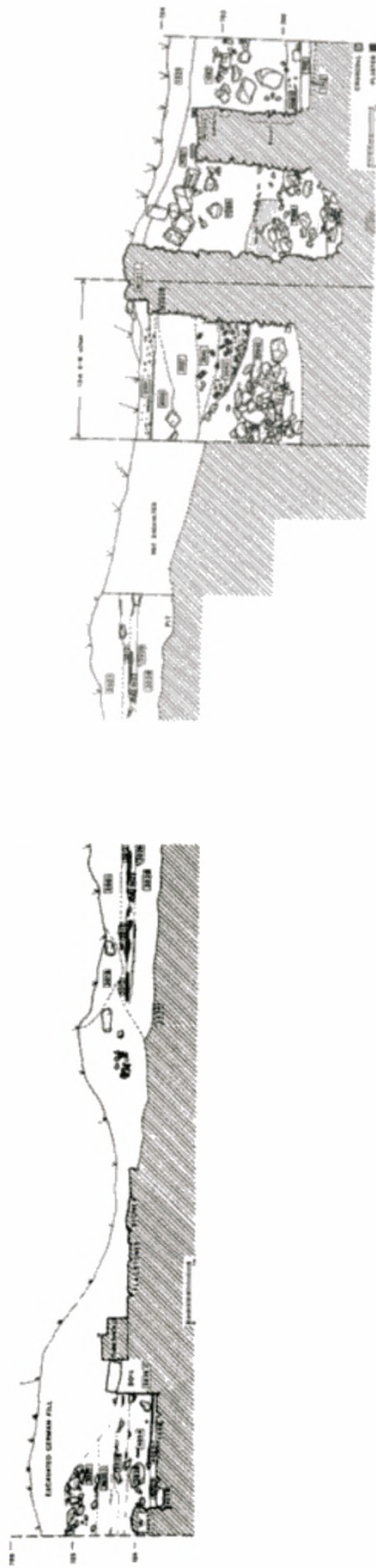


Figure 3.
 Section A-A, the main north-south walk through the synagogue at Gush Halaw, looking west.
 Reproduced with permission from Meyers, Meyers, and Strange 1990: Fig. 5.

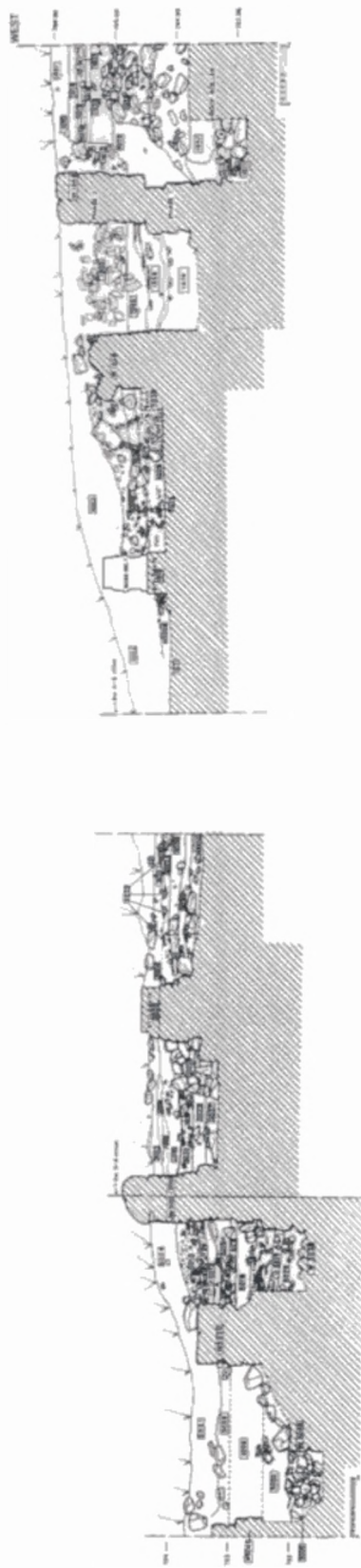


Figure 4.
 Section D-D, the main east-west balk through the synagogue at Gush Halav, looking south.
 Reproduced with permission from Meyers, Meyers, and Strange 1990: Fig. 6.

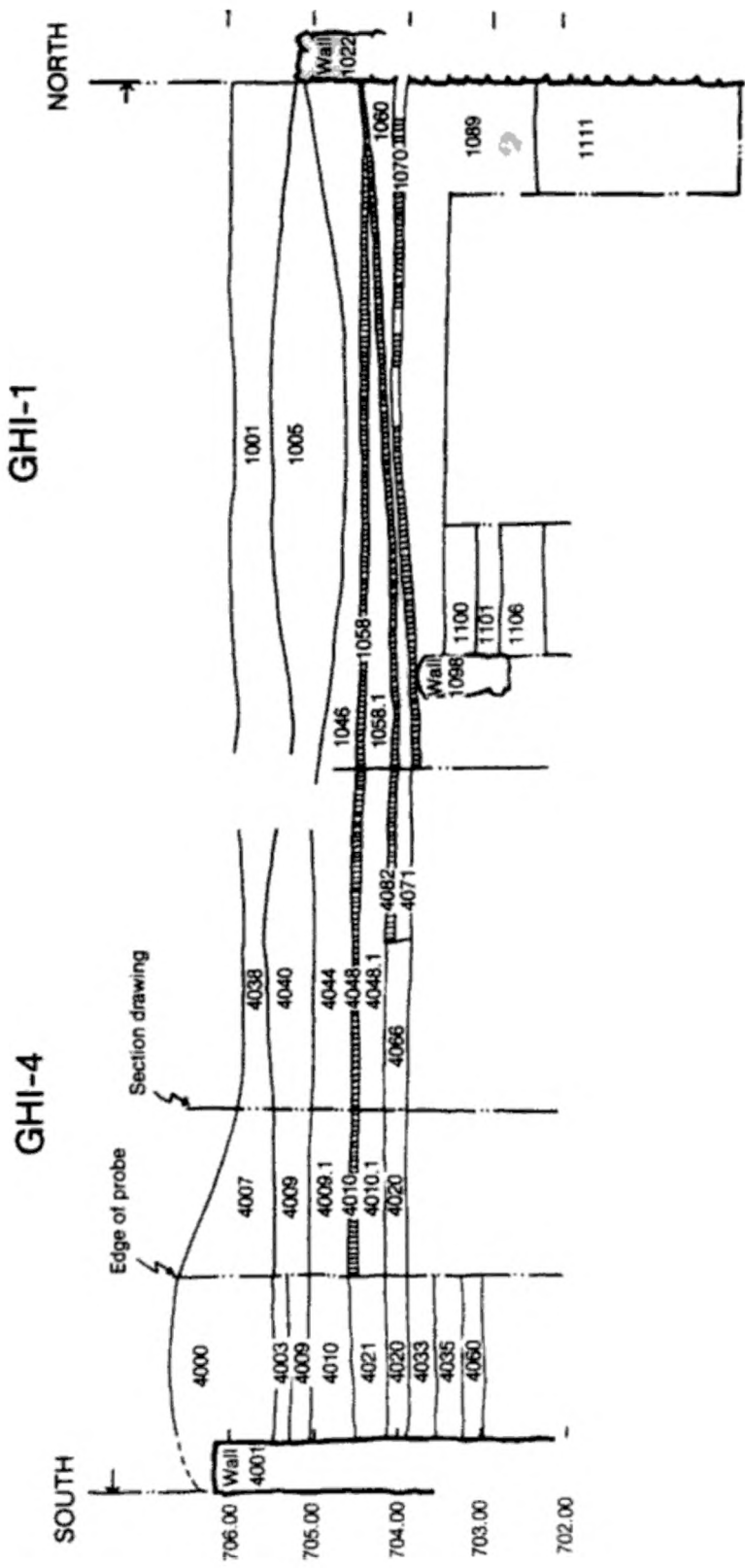


Figure 5.
 Schematic section, north-south, through the "western corridor" of the synagogue at Gush Halav, looking west.
 Reproduced with permission from Meyers, Meyers, and Strange 1990: Fig. 9.

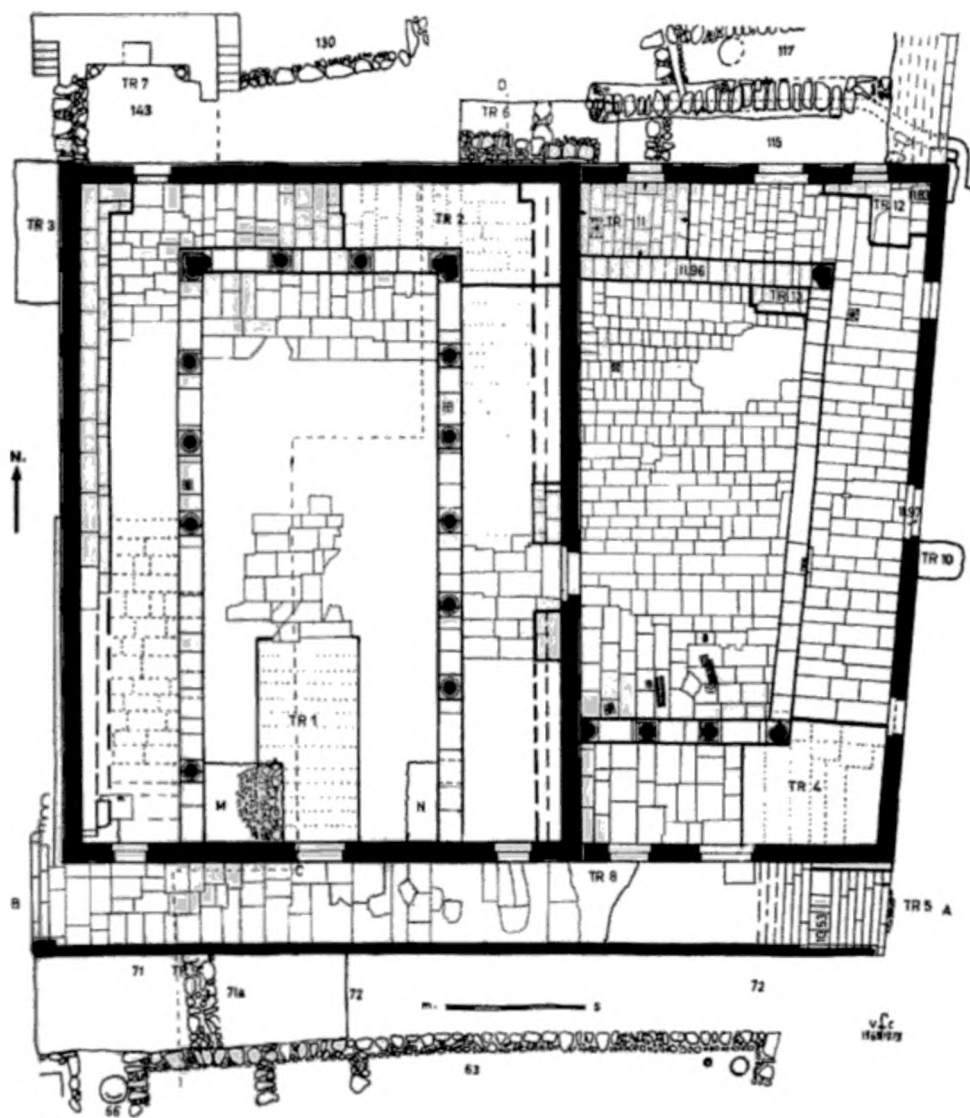


Figure 6.
 Plan of the synagogue at Capernaum.
 Reproduced with permission from Corbo 1975: Pl. 11.

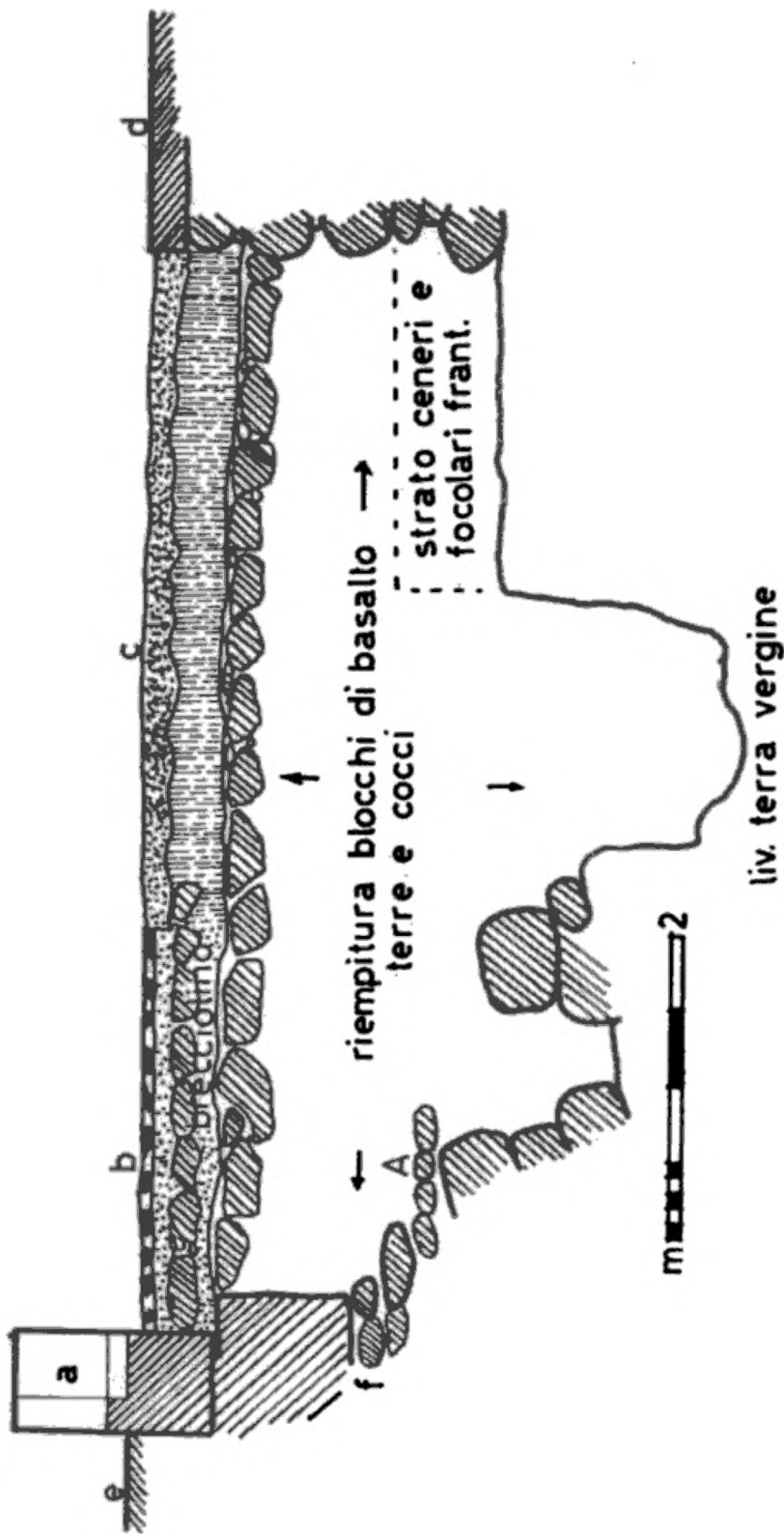


Figure 7.
 North-south section in trench 1 in the synagogue at Capernaum, looking west.
 Reproduced with permission from Corbo 1975: Fig. 11.

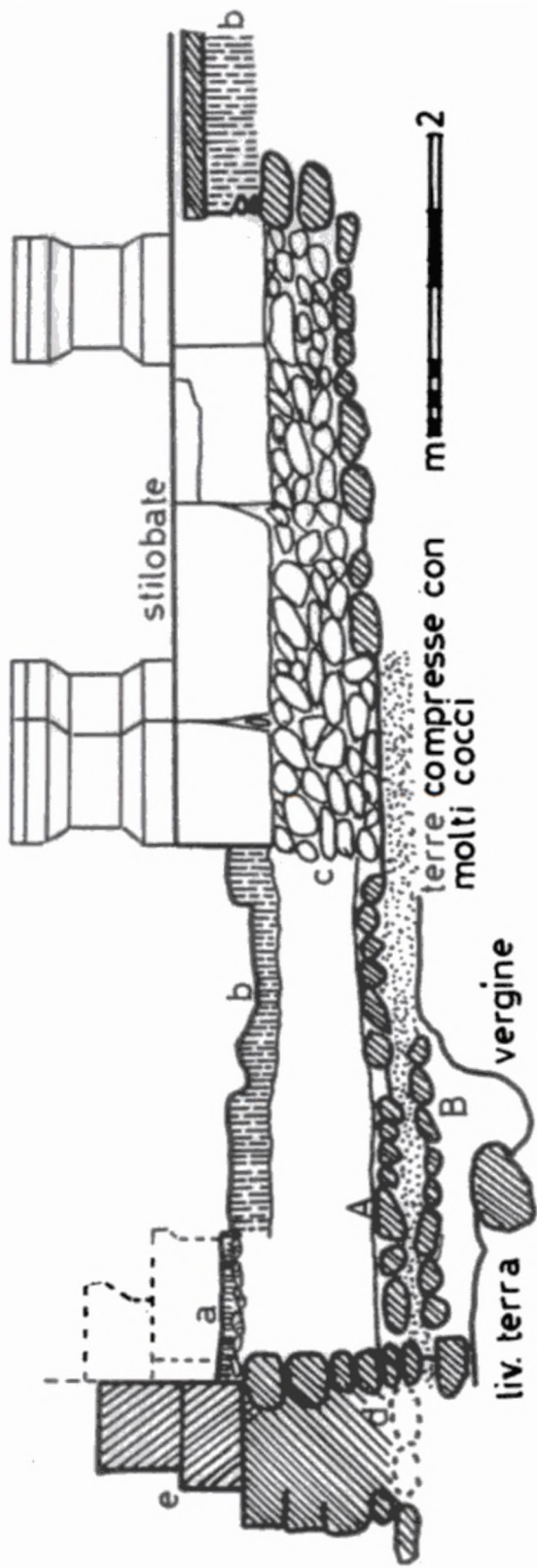


Figure 8.
 East-west section in trench 2 in the synagogue at Capernaum, looking south.
 Reproduced with permission from Corbo 1975: Fig. 12.