

that the women up in the gallery might also have the opportunity to touch it. No, instead the women peer down to what is happening below, sometimes leaning over the railing to get a better look. In some synagogues the women cannot hear the sermon well from where they are seated, and in most they cannot see well. If they are behind a curtain, they can only see shadows and outlines. If, by analogy, we use the contemporary Orthodox seating arrangement as the background against which to interpret the titles borne by ancient Jewish women, then it is in fact difficult to come to any other conclusion than that these women had no official function.

But just how strong is the archaeological and literary evidence that the ancient synagogue possessed a women's gallery? Upon what do Krauss and his colleagues base their theory? A survey of the archaeological and literary evidence for the women's gallery can answer that question.

A. Is there Archaeological Evidence for a Women's Gallery or a Separate Women's Section?

In our century numerous synagogues have been excavated in Palestine and in the Diaspora. Sometimes the remains are minimal, such as a single inscription. Other remains are quite sufficient for drawing up a complete floor plan. In no case has an actual gallery been found. All of the galleries in all the architects' reconstructions are reconstructed and not extant. In order to decide whether these reconstructions are convincing, a survey of the evidence from the major sites is necessary. We should remember, however, that monumental remains can only tell us whether a side room or gallery existed, not whether it was for women. Theoretically, donative inscriptions could speak of a women's gallery, room for women or divider between the women's and men's sections, but none do.

1. Synagogues in Roman and Byzantine Palestine

With the exception of the Theodotos inscription (CII 1404),<sup>5</sup> there exist no undisputed synagogue remains from the Second Temple period. This is probably due to the fact that the floor plans of the earliest synagogues differed little from those of normal houses and cannot be identified by archaeologists as synagogues, if by "synagogue" one means a building whose main function was to house the worship service.<sup>6</sup> The first possible synagogue ruin from the first century was discovered at Masada,<sup>7</sup> Herod the

Great's fortress near the Dead Sea. In its present state, the structure can be dated to the period of the Zealot occupation during the First Jewish Revolt (66-73 C.E.); it is unclear whether the original Herodian building was also a synagogue before being remodeled by the Zealots. The building, approximately 10.5 by 12.5 meters in size, is located directly on the casemate wall on the northwest side of the plateau. The original Herodian building had an anteroom, and the main room had had five pillars along the northern, western and southern sides. When the Zealots remodeled, they removed two of the columns of the western row, and tore down the wall dividing the anteroom from the main room, placing the two pillars where the wall had been. They also built a small room (3.5 x 5.5 m) in the northwestern corner with an entrance from the main hall and set up a four-tiered row of plastered benches along the north, west and south walls and a single bench on the eastern entrance side.

In addition to the structure's clear nature as an assembly room, the discovery of scripture fragments (Deuteronomy and Ezekiel) found buried under the floor (as if in a geniza?) added to the conviction that the building in question was indeed a synagogue. However, since we know little about the layout of first-century synagogues, one should not consider the identification as a synagogue a closed matter.

Concerning the women's gallery, it is clear that there was none, and the small room in the corner is clearly unsuitable as a women's room as it has no separate entrance. All worshipers sat in the one main room on the benches along the walls.

At Herod the Great's fortress, Herodion,<sup>8</sup> just southwest of Bethlehem, a structure very similar to the one at Masada was found. The room (14 x 10 m), with an entrance in the east, was remodeled by the Zealots during their occupation (66-70 C.E.). It had a nave and two side aisles with four (or perhaps six) columns on each side and a three-tiered row of stone benches along the sides and back. Due to its clear nature as an assembly room and because of the similarities to the synagogue at Masada, it is likely that this too was a synagogue. As at Masada one searches in vain for a women's gallery.

A further first-century public building which is most likely a synagogue was found in Gamla,<sup>9</sup> the Jewish fortress in the Golan Heights destroyed by the Romans in 67 C.E. One enters the building through a narthex and proceeds through a vestibule into the main prayer hall, which, like Masada and Herodion, is lined with rows of benches. Four rows of columns run parallel to

the walls. The synagogue is approached in its southeast corner by stairs coming up the side of the hill.<sup>10</sup> An article in the Biblical Archaeological Review<sup>11</sup> states that these stairs possibly led to an upper gallery, and a photograph of the synagogue at Capharnaum, which also has stairs, is printed as a parallel. Further excavation in the summer of 1979, however, has revealed that these steps are the continuation of a road leading up the side of a hill to the synagogue. They should, therefore, be seen as leading to the synagogue itself rather than to a gallery.

Migdal<sup>12</sup> (Magdala) and Korazin<sup>13</sup> (Arabic: Khirbet Karaza; N.T.: Chorazin) have also been in the discussion of first-century synagogues, but both must now be excluded.<sup>14</sup>

After the first century, synagogue ruins become much more identifiable and much more varied in their architecture. In a number of these ruins archaeologists have conjectured the existence of an upper gallery for women or of a separate room for them. This is on the basis of evidence ranging from one pillar base to a number of pillars, entablature and stairs. In a number of other cases no one has claimed that any provision for separation existed.

Eshtemoa' (Arabic: es-Samu')<sup>15</sup> in Judea, south of Hebron, is an example of the latter category. One enters the building (13.3 x 21.3 m) on the east side through a narthex with two pillars and two columns. In the prayer hall itself it is the Torah niche in the long northern wall, rather than on one of the narrow walls, which orients the synagogue towards Jerusalem. Two-tiered stone benches line the north and south walls. There seem to have been no columns in the prayer hall itself. Without columns there could have been no upper gallery, and one can see from the floor plan that there is no place for a separate room for women. The synagogue can be dated to the fourth century.

A further case where there seems to be no women's gallery is the synagogue at Beth She'an.<sup>16</sup> The room in question is roughly square (7 x 7 m) and part of a larger complex including the house of a man named Leontius and a court. One entrance was through the court on the north, and a second entrance was from the east. The excavators have assumed the existence of a niche in the south wall (towards Jerusalem). There were benches along the walls. One can see that all synagogue worshipers sat together in one room. The date is from the middle of the fifth to the sixth century.<sup>17</sup>

In a further number of cases where remains for a gallery could conceivably have been found, the archaeological reports mention none. These are cases where one finds sufficient remains to expect some evidence for an upper story if one existed. They include: Beth She'arim (352-53),<sup>18</sup> Beth Yerah (dating ranging from 4th to 6th C.),<sup>19</sup> Qatsrin (4th C.),<sup>20</sup> Jerash (4th/5th C.),<sup>21</sup> Isfiya (5th/6th C.),<sup>22</sup> Jericho (6th/7th, possibly 8th, C.),<sup>23</sup> Na'aran (6th C.).<sup>24</sup> Khirbet Sumaq (3rd C.),<sup>25</sup> Tell Menora (6th C.),<sup>26</sup> Gaza (6th C.),<sup>27</sup> Rehov (4th/7th C.),<sup>28</sup> Ma'oz Hayyim (4th/5th C.),<sup>29</sup> Hammat Teverya (north of the hot springs--3rd/4th C.).<sup>30</sup>

There are a number of synagogue ruins, particularly in Galilee, where excavators have reconstructed a women's gallery on the basis of various pieces of evidence. Let us now turn to these.

The synagogue at Capharnaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee is one of the best-preserved synagogues found in Israel. The white limestone structure is a basilica with a nave and two side aisles. A third row of pillars runs parallel to the back wall. The structure is oriented towards Jerusalem. Three doors on the south wall provide access to the nave and two side aisles respectively. The prayer hall is adjoined by a court with a colonnade carrying a portico along the northern, southern and western walls, leaving the central court open. At the outer northwestern corner of the synagogue proper there is a small structure made of black basalt (like the rest of the village, but in contrast to the white limestone of the synagogue itself). This structure is flanked by stairs leading up and away from the back, i.e., northern wall of the synagogue.

The first major excavation of the synagogue was undertaken in 1905 by Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger. According to their reconstructed model, a women's gallery, which was reached by the basalt steps at the northwest corner, extended over the two side aisles and across the back of the synagogue proper, being supported by the columns below.<sup>31</sup> Their two-story model is reprinted by Erwin Goodenough,<sup>32</sup> Stanislaw Loffreda,<sup>33</sup> Zev Vilnay,<sup>34</sup> etc. A printed reconstruction like this tends to achieve a life of its own; one soon forgets which stones are actually there and which ones were called into being by the artist's pen.

This reconstruction assumes that women would have entered the gallery by the stairs attached to the black basalt annex at

the back. The gallery would have had Doric columns of a slightly narrower width than the Corinthian columns below.<sup>35</sup>

The reconstruction should be clear and indeed looks plausible. Let us now examine the actual remains of this gallery. The visitor to the reconstructed synagogue at Capharnaum does not see a gallery. What is it that would archaeologically force us to assume the existence of such a thing? It is not the basilica style that would necessitate one, for indeed most basilicas did not have galleries.<sup>36</sup> Nor do we have the remains of a gallery: the floor, the railing, the walls behind it, the lintel of the door leading into it. There do exist several Doric columns of a diameter slightly less (10 cm less) than that of the columns of the prayer hall. Further, one finds several fragments of what could have been the architrave of the upper row of columns and the first steps of a staircase located at the back of the synagogue, i.e., at the northwest corner next to the basalt structure. The best evidence for a gallery consists of these steps in the back, which could possibly lead up to a gallery door. This theory presupposes a rather narrow, winding, outside staircase leading up to a rather elegantly decorated gallery. An alternative interpretation would be that the basalt staircase served the basalt structure to which it is attached. This is, in fact, the way the most-recent excavators of the synagogue, Virgilio Corbo, Stanislaw Loffreda, and Augusto Spijkerman, interpret it. They take the basalt structure (Installation 143) to be some type of storeroom and surmise that the staircase leads to an upper level of the storage area.<sup>37</sup> This reconstruction is also based on their observation that too few fragments of the alleged gallery have been found and that the winding staircase is too narrow to assume that women used it for the regular sabbath services.<sup>38</sup>

Just four kilometers north of Capharnaum lie the ruins of Korazim.<sup>39</sup> The synagogue measures 16.7 by 22.8 meters and is divided by two rows of columns into a nave and two side aisles, with a third row of columns forming a further aisle along the northern side. A small room which could be entered only from the inside extended out into a courtyard, which was about five meters in width. Between the wall of this courtyard and the small room were found several steps. Nahman Avigad writes, "Apparently, these were part of a staircase leading to the upper story."<sup>40</sup> Other evidence from Korazim for a gallery consists of fragments of smaller columns as well as fragments from a frieze, which is

reconstructed as having run along the upper portion of the walls of the gallery.<sup>41</sup>

The synagogue in an-Nabraten (Hebrew: Nevoraya),<sup>42</sup> just north of Safed was surveyed by Kohl and Watzinger in 1905 and recently excavated under the direction of Eric M. Meyers, James F. Strange, and Carol L. Meyers. Because the excavations began in 1980, only preliminary reports are available.<sup>43</sup> The excavators surmise that Kohl and Watzinger are relatively accurate in assessing the dimensions at 16.9 x 11.65 m.<sup>44</sup>

Two rows of four columns run north-south; one entered through a single entrance in the southern facade, and there must also have been one entrance in the north. Eric Meyers notes that the "presence of smaller column fragments and pedestals suggest a possible portico on the southern side."<sup>45</sup> In 1905 Kohl and Watzinger found a single base to a column outside of the building on the south (front) side, the diameter of which is 46 cm, in contrast to the bases inside which have a diameter of 66.5 cm and conjectured that the base could be the single remain of a gallery.<sup>46</sup> However, due to the smallness of the building they concluded that a better guess is that the building had only one story and that there existed a separate room for women on the same level on the north side, the northern door being the entrance to this women's section.<sup>47</sup> Erwin Goodenough comments, "Since guessing is all that can be done, my guess is that women were left out altogether."<sup>48</sup> Presumably the base of a column found in 1905, which served as the base not only of a column but in fact of a whole gallery, was among those fragments found in the campaign and taken possibly to be part of a portico, which means that the fragments lay near where they had originally stood.

The two varying interpretations of these fragments are a good illustration of the difficulties inherent in the women's gallery hypothesis at many sites. Kohl and Watzinger reconstruct an entire gallery on the basis of one fragment and in the absence of a staircase, while the recent excavators suggest a more plausible interpretation of the same data. As to Goodenough's theory that women did not come to the synagogue, one can only ask on what evidence he bases his view.

One of the best preserved synagogues in Galilee was found in Bar'am (Arabic: Kafr Bir'im),<sup>49</sup> eleven kilometers northwest of Safed. The large building (15.2 x 20 m), probably to be dated to the third century, had a porch on the south side (facing Jerusalem), which was supported by eight columns. There were

three front entrances leading into the prayer hall, which was divided by two longitudinal rows and one transversal row of columns into a nave surrounded by three side aisles.

Kohl and Watzinger<sup>50</sup> assume the existence of a gallery. Their evidence consists of one base for a column 49 cm in diameter and the fragments of a pillar with a diameter of 43 and 44 cm. These items being of a lesser diameter than the others found, Kohl and Watzinger assume that they must have belonged to an upper gallery. They further suggest that an Ionic capital found in the house of village priest, a capital having a diameter of 45 cm, would fit well for an upper gallery. This is a rather motley collection of evidence. The only common denominator seems to be the diameter, which is in all three cases less than that of other columns found inside the prayer hall. It is by no means clear, however, that these three architectural fragments have anything to do with a women's gallery or even with each other. One cannot exclude the possibility that these three fragments belonged to a gallery, but we have no particular reason for assuming that the one base, the fragments of a pillar and the Ionic capital are the sole surviving elements of a gallery, rather than elements from some other part of the building. What definitely speaks against the gallery thesis is the lack of even the trace of a staircase providing access to such a gallery. In their floor plan, Kohl and Watzinger have added a reconstructed staircase on the outer northwestern corner of the building (as at Capernaum), punctuating it with question marks.<sup>51</sup> While such reconstruction is not an illegitimate endeavor, one should be aware that there is not a single bit of evidence to support this. Since Kohl and Watzinger's time, when this corner was as yet uncleared, the whole synagogue area has been cleared and partially restored. In a visit to the site in June 1978, I was able to find no traces of a staircase.

It is worthwhile to compare Kohl and Watzinger with two more recent scholars. For Erwin Goodenough the gallery was no longer a thesis to be supported by evidence, but a fact to be cited. He reprints Kohl and Watzinger's floor plan, with its reconstructed staircase, commenting that the synagogue had "columns carrying a balcony on the east, north and west sides"<sup>52</sup> and that, "Steps seem to have gone up to the gallery on the north side of the building as at Capernaum."<sup>53</sup> Nahman Avigad writes, "The facade undoubtedly was two stories high and terminated in a Syrian pediment, but no traces of such a pediment have been found." He further comments, "No remains of the upper story were

found."<sup>54</sup> It is unclear whether Avigad discounts the evidence cited by Kohl and Watzinger or whether he has overlooked it. In any case, he is willing to stick to the theory of an upper story, even in the face of no evidence at all. Since Avigad's plan has no reconstructed staircase,<sup>55</sup> there is no way of knowing how he would provide access to such a second story.

There is one more piece of evidence to be considered. When the Dutch traveler C. W. M. van de Velde was in the village of Bar'am in the middle of the last century, an old man told him about an upper "story with pillars," which had stood in his youth, but which had been destroyed by an earthquake.<sup>56</sup> This does make more credible the possibility of a gallery, although the problems raised above still remain, particularly the lack of a staircase. However, a "story with pillars" could mean anything from pilasters set high up on the walls to an actual second story. A further question is how much credence one should give to such a second-hand report.

In conclusion, while a gallery at Bar'am cannot be excluded, the burden of proof rests upon the proponents of a gallery. The meager evidence cited to date is simply not sufficient to suppose the existence of such a gallery.

One of the most fascinating of the ancient synagogues is the one excavated at Khirbet Shema'<sup>57</sup> in Upper Galilee. Built directly into the hill, it offers the visitor a spectacular view of the hills of Galilee. The entrance from the top of the hill is by steps leading down into the prayer hall, and, the building being of the broadhouse type, one would turn upon entering to face the long wall with the beam in order to be oriented towards Jerusalem. The building is about 11 by 15 meters in size. There were two building periods, the first in the third century (Synagogue I), the second in the fourth or fifth century (Synagogue II). The first synagogue was probably destroyed in an earthquake.

The gallery posited by the excavators in the same place for both Synagogue I and Synagogue II was probably constructed of wood which rested on bedrock at the western side of the synagogue.<sup>58</sup> It is posited that those entering the gallery either turned to the left into the gallery at the top of the stairs leading down to the main prayer hall or, more likely, entered by a separate door in the north wall (in Synagogue II).<sup>59</sup> The hypothesis is that the gallery was meant for women and that a back entrance to the gallery would insure a total separation of



the sexes. The evidence for such a door is a trace of a cutting in the bedrock into which the threshold would have fit.<sup>60</sup>

In comparison with other synagogue ruins, Khirbet Shema' lends itself to the reconstruction of a gallery reasonably well. At least one can say that a space exists which could plausibly be a gallery; in the other ruins that space must first be created. Nevertheless, here, as with the other posited galleries, one must carefully distinguish between what actually exists and what must be reconstructed. The evidence for the gallery consists of the bedrock upon which it may have rested and a slight indentation in the bedrock which may have been meant to receive the threshold for a door leading into the gallery. What is not extant is any of the gallery itself. In light of this lack, the excavators suggest that it may have been made of wood,<sup>61</sup> and that some of the smaller pieces found in the main prayer hall may have belonged to the gallery.<sup>62</sup> Nor have remains of the actual western wall been found. At the northwestern corner, one finds only bedrock, making the exact line of the wall and of a northern door a matter of reconstruction.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, Khirbet Shema' does bear evidence for a space of some sort upon bedrock, but the actual gallery, wall and door must be entirely reconstructed. Even if one were to accept the existence of a wooden gallery, rather than assuming an area for storage or some other purpose, there is no archaeological reason for assuming that it must be for women. Maybe a gallery existed for no other reason than that the builders wanted to make the best use of the space available to them and decided that a gallery was the best way to utilize the bedrock.<sup>64</sup> What is clear from this is that while the analogy of other synagogues could be used to posit the existence of a gallery at Khirbet Shema', Khirbet Shema' itself, due to the particular problems raised by its building site, cannot be used as an analogy for other synagogues.

Just one kilometer to the north of Khirbet Shema', also on a hill, were found the ruins of the synagogue of Meiron,<sup>65</sup> probably dating from the second half of the third century. The building, cut out of the rock on the northeastern side of the hill, is about 27 by 13.5 meters in size. Very little of the building has survived. Kohl and Watzinger<sup>66</sup> were the first to posit the existence of an upper gallery, and later archaeologists have not called this into question. The evidence for such a gallery consists of the base of a corner column, the diameter of which is somewhat less (47 cm) than that of other columns which were found (60-69 cm). Even Kohl and Watzinger recognize that

this is rather meager evidence upon which to reconstruct an entire gallery, and they concede that the fragment in question may have belonged to a narthex, as in Bar'am, although no traces of such a narthex remain, making such a suggestion fairly speculative. What is significant about this suggestion, however, is that it shows that a column, base or capital of lesser diameter than others found on a given site could have come from several parts of the synagogue, with narthex, aedicula and forecourt being alternative suggestions to gallery.<sup>67</sup>

Just outside of Gush Halav (Arabic: al-Jish),<sup>68</sup> a Maronite village not far from the Lebanese border, are found the ruins of a synagogue, the first phase of which dates from ca. 250-306. The building was last used as a synagogue in around the middle of the sixth century. The prayer hall of the synagogue measured 13.75 by 10.6-11.0 meters. Two rows of columns divided the room into a nave and two side aisles. According to Kohl and Watzinger, three columns against the back wall formed a further row of columns. In their view, it was by these three columns which the hypothetical women's gallery would have been supported. The evidence given by Kohl and Watzinger for such a gallery consists of two Ionic capitals, 39 and 42 cm in diameter respectively, a drum of a column 41 cm in diameter and a small ashlar with a carved rosette which would form part of a wall frieze, the supposition being that the frieze ran along the back wall of the gallery.<sup>69</sup>

In 1977-78 Gush Halav was re-excavated under the direction of Eric M. Meyers, and further side rooms were discovered, the function of which is unclear. The excavators note that especially "the function of the area to the north between the outer and inner wall has been difficult to determine."<sup>70</sup> They suggest that there was a gallery across the north end of the building. "This gallery would have been entered either from outside the basilica or possibly from within by wooden stairs, although there are no traces of such an entrance."<sup>71</sup>

As further evidence for such a gallery they note, "The debris underneath the architectural dump of the final phase of the synagogue (VIIIb) was virtually sterile, suggesting a kind of raised gallery area above it."<sup>72</sup> They do not suggest that this hypothetical raised area was for women. Note that although the recent excavators call this hypothetical raised structure a gallery, they envisage something quite different than Kohl and Watzinger had imagined. The putative raised area is simply a

raised platform in the main prayer hall rather than an upper story gallery.

The synagogue found in Arbel<sup>73</sup> in Galilee, six kilometers northwest of Tiberias, measures 18.2 by 18.65 meters and is separated into a nave and two side aisles by two rows of columns, a third row of columns extending along the northern side. The synagogue probably dates from the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century. The evidence for a women's gallery consists of the base of a column with a molded side and bottom as if it were meant to be placed on top of another row of columns.<sup>74</sup> The diameter of the column fitting this base would be 41 cm; one shaft of this diameter, as well as one other base without the molded side and bottom portion, but of the same size, were also found. On the basis of these three pieces of evidence, Kohl and Watzinger conclude:

It is therefore certain that there was a two-story structure also in Arbel, a structure with a gallery on three sides above the ambulatory formed by the columns; the entrance to the gallery was probably directly from the slope which juts into the south wall.<sup>75</sup>

What of this entrance? Are any traces of it extant? Kohl and Watzinger show on their plan a small room, noting that the entrance to the gallery was probably above it.<sup>76</sup> In other words, no trace of a staircase has been found. As for the column base in question, the form does indeed make one think that it was placed above something else, and the theory of a second row of columns is a quite attractive one, although why only one of these was found on the site, while quite a number of other columns are still there, is a question which remains unanswered. If we nevertheless assume a second row of columns and do not assume a stone staircase which later disappeared or a wooden staircase (the latter should by no means be excluded), there remains the possibility of a pseudo-gallery, i.e., of a second row of columns above the first, creating the look of a gallery, a device which would not be unprecedented in ancient architecture. A number of dressed stones with engaged columns were also found on the site of the Arbel synagogue, which Kohl and Watzinger suggest ran along the northern wall behind the gallery. This reconstruction would fit in with either a genuine or a pseudo-gallery.

Samuel Krauss is of the opinion that the women did not sit in a gallery at Arbel, but rather on the tiered stone benches found at the sides, which he calls "terraces." Krauss writes:

Now if our assumption concerning the purpose of this loft [i.e. the terrace] is correct, then one cannot really speak of a separation of the sexes in the ancient synagogues of Galilee, and we would therefore have to concede that all of the Reform congregations which build their synagogues with only a loft for the women on the two long sides of the building are right.<sup>77</sup>

His words, spoken in 1911, make clear what has been at stake here. For a Jewish scholar to admit that there may not have been a women's gallery in the ancient synagogue would be to raise the question as to just how much a necessary part of the Jewish tradition the women's gallery really is. Krauss was confronted with the Reform congregations of his day, for whom the equality of the sexes was an important issue and who had begun to do away with the strict separation between the sexes in the worship service. Krauss perceived the absence of a women's gallery at the ancient synagogue of Arbel as a threat to the practice of having women sit in a gallery or closed-off women's section in the Orthodox synagogues of his day.

The ancient synagogue in Umm al-'Amad<sup>78</sup> in Galilee, a few kilometers due west of Arbel, dates to the turn of the fourth century. The prayer hall is 22.55 by 14.06 meters in size. Two rows of columns divide it into a nave and two side aisles, with a third row of columns running along the back wall. On the basis of several columns of lesser diameter than the others, Kohl and Watzinger suggest that there may have been a gallery,<sup>79</sup> although they do not press this hypothesis because the diameter of all the columns is quite variable. No stairs have been found at Umm al-'Amad.

In Hammat Teverya (Tiberias; Arabic: Tabariya),<sup>80</sup> on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, just south of the hot springs, were found the layered ruins of several buildings dating from the third through the eighth centuries. The earliest recognizable synagogue, dating from the second half of the third century, is 13 by 14 meters in size and is divided by three rows of columns into a nave and three side aisles. Moshe Dothan suggests that the side aisle to the extreme left may have been a women's section, adding, "nevertheless, there was no trace of wall or other division between this aisle and the remainder of the hall, though there may have been some temporary partition (such as a curtain) between the columns."<sup>81</sup> After the second synagogue was destroyed at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century, the "Severus Synagogue," also measuring 13 by 14 meters,

was built. Here, too, one assumes that the side aisle to the extreme left may have been for women.<sup>82</sup>

When this synagogue was destroyed in the fifth century a synagogue in the form of a basilica was built. One entered through a narthex into the main prayer hall, which had an apse at the southwest side and was divided by columns into a nave and two side aisles, with a third row of columns running along the northwest side. The hypothesis is that these columns bore a women's gallery which would have extended over the side aisles and along the back aisle. No evidence is listed for this hypothesis.<sup>83</sup>

In Hammat Gader (Arabic: al-Hamma),<sup>84</sup> 7.5 kilometers to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee, a synagogue was found which measures around 13 by 14 meters and probably dates from the first half of the fifth century. Erwin Goodenough believes that a small room on the east side with a bench running along its east wall was meant for women.<sup>85</sup> Eliezer Sukenik, who takes this small room to be a schoolroom, imagines that there was a women's gallery. Sukenik writes:

The remains of the synagogue are practically confined to the foundation. Consequently no data are available for a restoration of the superstructure. It may, however, confidently be inferred that the basilica was provided with a gallery for women worshippers, from the massive pillars at the north-east and north-west corners of the colonnade, features which are shared by our synagogue with those of Chorazin, Capernaum and some other sites.<sup>86</sup>

Since there exist no material remains from the gallery, it is difficult to understand why it may "confidently be inferred" that one existed. Sukenik is working on an analogy with other synagogues where he believes that the women's gallery is archaeologically certain. As this survey of the evidence shows, the gallery is far from being archaeologically certain at the other sites.

The ruins of a synagogue, probably dating from the third century, were found in Umm al-Qanatir<sup>87</sup> in the Golan Heights, 19 kilometers to the northeast of Hammat Gader. The building is 14 by 19 meters in size and is divided into a nave and two side aisles by two rows of columns, with a third row running along the back (west) wall. Kohl and Watzinger conjecture that a gallery ran along the north, west and south sides.<sup>88</sup> No trace of a staircase has been found. As evidence for the hypothetical gallery, Kohl and Watzinger cite a fragment of the base of a half column (found in front of the building) which would fit with the

fragment of a shaft of a half column. The fragments could have decorated the wall of the gallery. Kohl and Watzinger further note that there are two types of capitals and suggest that the one type could have been for the lower story and the other for the gallery. Goodenough, in citing Kohl and Watzinger's reconstructed gallery, is faced with the dilemma of where to place the Torah shrine. Although the main entrance is in the east and Jerusalem to the south, Goodenough writes, "The Torah shrine with its Shekinah could not have stood anywhere but in the east, for it is inconceivable that women would have been allowed to stand or pass above it"<sup>89</sup> (i.e., in the gallery). Presumably Goodenough is in some way identifying women with impurity and implying that the men would not tolerate this impurity above the sacred Shekina, but the meaning of his thought is rather unclear here.

Mention should be made here of ad-Dikka,<sup>90</sup> which is located on the eastern side of the Jordan river, four kilometers north of where it enters the Sea of Galilee. The building, 15.3 by 11.9 meters in size and divided into a nave and two side aisles by two rows of columns, probably dates from the third century. Even Kohl and Watzinger admit that there is not enough clear evidence to reconstruct a gallery.<sup>91</sup> They note the existence of one base, one shaft and one capital, as well as a double quarter column from a corner. No trace of a staircase has been found. It is unclear why this evidence, i.e., several fragments of columns and no stairs, should be insufficient at ad-Dikka, while at most of the other sites where Kohl and Watzinger reconstruct a gallery there is not a bit more evidence to support such a hypothesis. In spite of their caution in the text, Kohl and Watzinger nevertheless show a gallery in their reconstruction sketch of the synagogue.<sup>92</sup>

The synagogue in Beth Alpha,<sup>93</sup> famous for its beautiful and well-preserved mosaic, is situated 7.5 kilometers northwest of Beth She'an and can be dated at the latest to the end of the fifth century. The basilica is 10.75 by 12.4 meters in size and is divided into a nave and two side aisles by two rows of pillars. One entered the prayer hall through a narthex. Sukenik believes that the entrance to a gallery extending over the two side aisles and the narthex was through a small side room to the west of the prayer hall. No traces of the gallery or of the reconstructed stairs in this small room remain.<sup>94</sup> Asher Hiram suggests that this small room may have been a schoolroom.<sup>95</sup>

The ruins of a third- or fourth-century synagogue were found in Caesarea Maritima.<sup>96</sup> It was 9 by 18 meters in size and is of the broadhouse type. Michael Avi-Yonah believes that the synagogue possibly had a gallery.<sup>97</sup> The evidence consists of the fact that the columns and capitals found were of two sizes, 50 and 25 cm respectively; the reports include no mention of stairs. The synagogue was destroyed in the middle of the fourth century and a new one built in its place in the middle of the fifth. No mention is made of this synagogue having had a gallery.

In 'En-Gedi<sup>98</sup> on the western side of the Dead Sea were found the remains of a synagogue around 12 by 15 meters in size, consisting of a nave and side aisles on the east and west sides, with a further aisle at the south end with stepped benches. A narthex ran along the western side. A number of smaller rooms surround the prayer hall; two of these can be entered from the prayer hall itself. The others are accessible only from the outside. In one of these outer rooms, traces of stairs were found which could have led to a gallery.<sup>99</sup> Further, an Aramaic donative inscription, found in the western side aisle, speaks of "the great (?) steps," which Dan Barag takes as possibly referring to the steps leading to the gallery.<sup>100</sup> Benjamin Mazar, on the other hand, translates "the upper (?) step."<sup>101</sup> Thus, there is not a consensus as to what this inscription refers to. The inscription itself is clearly later than the other mosaic inscriptions, which are from the late Byzantine period,<sup>102</sup> so that whatever step or steps the inscription refers to must be a later addition to the synagogue. The synagogue itself is a Byzantine-period reconstruction of an early third-century synagogue and was probably in use until around 530.<sup>103</sup>

The synagogue ruins in Khirbet Susiya<sup>104</sup> in Judea, thirteen kilometers south of Hebron, probably date from the fourth or fifth century. The building, 9 by 16 meters in size, is of the broadhouse type. One entered the prayer hall through a courtyard and then a narthex. Extending along the south side of the prayer hall are two rooms, which could be entered through the narthex, the second room also from an outside door. At the southern end of the narthex are the remains of several steps, which have been taken as leading to a gallery,<sup>105</sup> which was a later addition and would have extended over these two side rooms and possibly the narthex. It is also possible, however, that these steps led to an area above the courtyard. In the small southwestern room, a stairs was later installed when the room was used for storage.

In addition to the monumental remains, one inscription has been adduced as evidence for a synagogue gallery. The inscription,<sup>106</sup> written in Aramaic with the last two words in Greek, was found in Dabbura in the Golan Heights. Partially reconstructed, it reads, according to Dan Urman:

אלעזר ברן | ... | בה עבד עמון | דיה דעל מן  
[ΡΟ]ΥΣΤΙΚΟΣ ΕΚΤ[ΙΣΕΝ | ... | ]ימיה

El'azar the son of . . . made the columns above  
the arches and beams . . . Rusticus built (it).<sup>107</sup>

The inscription, probably dating from the third century, consists of two lines carved in three fragments of a basalt architrave, the total length of which is 110 cm. Urman writes concerning "the columns above the arches and beams":

These seem to be columns standing on top of a construction of arches and beams or pilasters. In a synagogue such columns could only be in the upper gallery, that is, the women's gallery.<sup>108</sup>

We have seen from the survey thus far that there is no archaeological reason to assume the existence of a women's gallery and that the evidence for any kind of a gallery at all is surprisingly meager. Nevertheless, one could take this inscription as independent evidence for a gallery.

The inscription is not unambiguous, however, and before we simply accept it as evidence for a gallery, the vocabulary must be carefully examined. It is not "gallery" which is mentioned, but "columns." These "columns" could indeed be the columns of a gallery, but they could also be demi-columns built into the wall or the columns of a pseudo-gallery, i.e., a row of columns placed on the architrave for decoration and giving the appearance of a gallery. There is, however, one architectural difficulty with the gallery or pseudo-gallery reconstruction. If these fragments are a portion of the architrave on which the columns rested, which it is reasonable to assume, the donative inscription usually being fairly close to the object donated, where are the arches? The Palestinian synagogues have usually been reconstructed as being trabeated rather than arcuated, and this architrave itself would fit in with the reconstruction. Further, the word kippattā can mean "arches" and passimayyā can mean "beams," but kippā can also mean "arched doorway"<sup>109</sup> and passim (Hebrew and Aramaic) can, and usually does, mean "door post."<sup>110</sup> An alternative suggestion would be that these fragments do not



come from an architrave at all, but from a lintel,<sup>111</sup> and that the passmayvâ are door jambs and the kippattâ are rounded arches of the type found above the central door in Bar'am. What, then, would the columns be? Perhaps they are tall columns of the type found in Bar'am in the porch. This would be a rather loose interpretation of dê 'al min, however, so that this interpretation, like that of Urman, does not solve all of the architectural problems. It must be concluded that this inscription is possible evidence for a gallery.

What can we conclude from this survey? First, it is clear that a number of Palestinian synagogues had no gallery. These include the three first-century synagogues, Masada, Gamla and Herodion--if these are indeed synagogues--as well as Beth She'an, Eshtemoa', and probably also the other synagogues where archaeologists have not even thought of reconstructing a gallery. As for those synagogues where archaeologists have reconstructed a gallery, we have seen that the evidence ranges from literally no evidence at Beth Alpha, Ḥammad Teverya (south of the hot springs, basilica synagogue) and Ḥammad Gader to the base of one corner column at Meiron, the base of one column (and possibly some additional fragments) at an-Nabraten and one base, one shaft and one capital at ad-Dikka to several steps, fragments of smaller columns and fragments of a frieze at Korazim and steps, several Doric columns and several fragments of an architrave, as well as a number of demi-columns, at Capharnaum.

Archaeological reconstruction must be based on analogy and on material evidence from the site in question. In my view, most excavators of the Palestinian synagogues have taken for granted that there exists solid evidence at other synagogues for a (women's) gallery, and have therefore maximalistically interpreted the minimal evidence at their own sites. One searches in vain for the archaeologically well-founded example of a synagogue with a gallery. Capharnaum has long served as the prime example of a synagogue with a gallery, but, as we have seen, the most recent excavators are of the opinion that they do not have sufficient archaeological evidence to assume the existence of a gallery.

The most serious barrier to the reconstruction of a gallery seems to me to be the lack of staircases. It is simply unrealistic to suppose that campers would have selectively removed all traces of a staircase while leaving behind courses of ashlar, numerous pillars and entire mosaic or flagstone floors. Conversely, the best candidates for having had galleries are those

synagogues where traces of staircases have been found. A staircase is at least solid evidence that people ascended to something. However, even here caution is advised. Gamla is a good example of the need for caution. The first reaction at finding the steps outside the Gamla synagogue was that they led to a gallery. Further excavation showed that the steps formed the culmination of a road leading up to the synagogue. Of the Palestinian synagogues there are five with traces of a staircase: Gamla, Capharnaum, 'En-Gedi, Khirbet Susiya and Korazim. Gamla must be excluded for the reasons just mentioned. As for the others, the possibility must be taken very seriously that these steps led to a gallery. However, one must also note that in none of these cases is it clear that the steps in question actually led to a gallery. At Capharnaum the most recent excavators believe that the steps led to a storage room. At 'En-Gedi the steps are situated in front and to the side of the narthex among a number of rooms surrounding the synagogue proper. The steps could have led to a gallery, but they could just as easily have led to the roof or second story of one of the adjoining structures. The reconstruction of a gallery at Khirbet Susiya seems fairly plausible on the basis of the steps, which are located in the narthex and must therefore lead to something above either the prayer hall or the courtyard. The difficulty at Khirbet Susiya, however, is that no other finds indicating a gallery have been found. Further, one must remember that there are also steps in the second small room to the south of the prayer hall which apparently led to a storage room; these should remind us of the variety of things to which steps can lead. Korazim has both steps and some fragments which could have come from a gallery, and therefore a reconstructed gallery does not seem implausible, although here again the steps could have led to the roof or second story of the storage room on the northwest corner of the building or to another installation. In spite of all these difficulties one can say that a reasonable case can be made for the existence of a gallery at Capharnaum, 'En-Gedi, Khirbet Susiya and Korazim.

Khirbet Shema' is a special case and must be treated separately. Here stairs are not necessary, due to the synagogue's being built into the side of the hill. As with the four synagogues just mentioned, here, too, it is not implausible that a gallery existed. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that nothing remains of the gallery itself except the bedrock on which it may have rested and a trace in the stone which could

have been for a door. The several small pieces of architecture found among the ruins could just as easily belong elsewhere as in the gallery.

As for the other synagogues discussed where archaeologists have reconstructed a gallery, one must say that the evidence is entirely insufficient to support such a hypothesis.<sup>112</sup> The fragments of columns and capitals which have been assigned to the galleries of the various sites, if all taken together, would hardly be enough for one single gallery. Why should campers and builders in search of reusable materials have carefully selected columns, capitals, bases and architraves just from the gallery, leaving behind considerably more of the first story? No synagogue has been found where more of the gallery was extant than of the first story, and yet if left to chance this situation should certainly occur. In addition to the lack of stones from all of these hypothetical galleries, we are confronted with the lack of stairs leading up to them. Now, one could begin reconstructing wooden galleries with wooden staircases, but this seems highly speculative, and the lack of stairs and columns must be taken as a very serious hindrance to the reconstruction of a gallery.

Further, it is not at all clear that these fragments of architecture had to come from a gallery. Perhaps the smaller columns, capitals and bases belonged to other installations, such as an aedicula or a porch. The diameter of columns often varied considerably within a single synagogue<sup>113</sup> and it is purely a matter of definition to assign one column to the lower story and another to the gallery. The diameter of the columns in one portion of the synagogue can also vary from that of another portion, as, for example, between the main prayer hall and the courtyard at Capharnaum. For these reasons, the architectural fragments in question can no longer simply be treated as clearly having come from a gallery.

In summary, then, there are at least five synagogues (if the three first-century structures are synagogues) which clearly had no gallery, and there are five synagogues where a gallery could plausibly be reconstructed, although the evidence is by no means conclusive. In addition to these, there are a considerable number of synagogues where no one has reconstructed a gallery, as well as over a dozen where some archaeologists have reconstructed a gallery, but where a closer examination shows that the evidence is insufficient for supporting such a hypothesis. In other

words, the vast majority of the ancient synagogues in Israel do not seem to have possessed a gallery.

Brief mention of side rooms for women must also be made here. The reader will notice that most of the synagogues whose floor plans are included here do not have a side room. Several, however, do, and it has been suggested that they served as women's sections. The general rule seems to have been that if one did not reconstruct a gallery, one took such a room to be a schoolroom or other type of room. A good example of this is *Ḥammāt Gader*, where Asher Hiram<sup>114</sup> and Erwin Goodenough<sup>115</sup> suggest that the side room with the bench along one wall could have been the women's section, while Eliezer Sukenik,<sup>116</sup> who assumes the existence of a gallery, takes it to be a schoolroom. *Ḥammāt Teverya* (south of the hot springs) is a further example. In the Severus Synagogue, where a gallery is not assumed, one has taken the aisle to the extreme east to be a women's section,<sup>117</sup> whereas in the later basilica synagogue built on the same spot a gallery is assumed and the side room to the west of the prayer hall is considered a schoolroom.<sup>118</sup> One cannot exclude the possibility that the side rooms found in some Palestinian synagogues did serve as women's sections, but there is no archaeological or, as we shall see, literary reason to do so. The real analogy has been the use of a separate room as a women's section in modern synagogues. This is an anachronistic analogy and therefore methodologically questionable.

## 2. Synagogues in the Diaspora in the Roman and Byzantine Periods

A number of synagogue remains have also been found in the Jewish Diaspora. A brief survey of the evidence for a women's gallery or women's section will complete the collection of Palestinian evidence considered thus far.

The most ancient synagogue (1st C. B.C.E.)--if it is indeed a synagogue--found to date is the synagogue on the island of *Delos*<sup>119</sup> in the Southern Aegean. The building consists of three oblong rooms side by side. The wall separating Room A from Room B is later than the structure itself and is pierced by three doors. Benches lining the northern and western walls of Room A are broken by a highly decorated stone chair. In Room B benches run along the western wall and part of the southern one. It has been suggested, presumably because of the stone chair, that Room A served the men and that Room B was for the women.<sup>120</sup>