

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 Hiram¹¹⁴ and Erwin Goodenough¹¹⁵ suggest that the side room with the bench along one wall could have been the women's section, while Eliezer Sukenik,¹¹⁶ 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,¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ 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*¹¹⁹ 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.¹²⁰

Erwin Goodenough, however, who is very interested in establishing the mystery nature of ancient synagogue worship, writes:

Those who have discussed the synagogue as such have thought that the two rooms were respectively for men and women, but this I should doubt. As in the early structure at Dura, I should think the women stood in the outer chambers of C, or did not attend at all, but not that benches were provided for them in Room B. The inner chamber, A, seems to me to be the adyton which in Capernaum, for example, lay behind the screen.¹²¹

This discussion demonstrates the arbitrariness of assigning a particular room to the women. While some scholars would relegate the women to Room B, where they could at least sit and hear, though not see very much, Goodenough sends them off to Room C, where they could neither see nor hear, nor even have a bench to sit upon. There is no archaeological reason for any of these room assignments; they are, rather, the result of the presupposition that there must have been a separation of the sexes in the ancient synagogue. Room B could as easily have been a classroom as a women's section and Room C could have served as a hostel or some other purpose.

On the island of Aegina,¹²² just across from Piraeus, which is in Attica, were found the remains of a synagogue which the excavator Belle Mazur dates to the fourth century,¹²³ while noting that the foundations of an older building, possibly also a synagogue, lie under the present structure. Due to abutting houses, the entire complex could not be excavated. What was excavated is a single hall exactly enclosing a mosaic floor which measures 13.5 by 7.6 meters. An apse on the east side extends beyond the mosaic. On the level of the older building and running parallel to its northern wall were found two chambers. Mazur suggests that the younger synagogue made use of these older chambers as women's quarters or as levitical chambers.¹²⁴ One must note that it is not even clear that these older rooms had anything to do with the prayer hall at all.

The largest ancient synagogue found to date is the basilica synagogue in Sardis¹²⁵ in Asia Minor. (The main hall alone is 54 by 18 meters in size.) The building went through a number of building stages, with the present interior of the structure dating from the fourth century,¹²⁶ although some portions of it are older. One entered through an atrium with a colonnaded portico and proceeded into the prayer hall; an internal apse was situated at the west end and the famous "eagle table" in the nave. There were two rows of piers, one along the northern and

one along the southern wall. In his 1963 report, David Gordon Mitten notes, "It is still uncertain whether these features were bases for roof-supports or for piers on which galleries, similar to those familiar from synagogues in Palestine, rested."¹²⁷

Andrew R. Seager also shows a second story for the main prayer hall in his 1968 reconstruction of the Sardis synagogue.¹²⁸ By 1972, however, probably after more careful study of the matter, Seager writes, "Two rows of piers within the hall may have supported side galleries as well as the roof, but no cogent evidence for galleries has been found."¹²⁹ This development is worth noting. At first one assumed a gallery on the basis of the supposed Galilean parallels, but further study revealed that the site itself produced no cogent evidence for such an assumption.

The German excavators Theodor Wiegand and Hans Schrader discovered the ruins of what they took to be a house church in 1895-1898 in Priene¹³⁰ in Ionia. Subsequently discovered Jewish symbols in the building are evidence that the building, which measures 10 x 14 meters, was actually a synagogue.¹³¹ One entered through a small forecourt into the prayer hall, which, as stylobates attest, was divided into a nave and two side aisles. A stone bench ran along the northern wall, and a small square niche in the eastern wall probably served as a Torah niche. No suggestion has been made of a women's gallery or women's section, and there is nothing in the ruins to indicate such a thing.

In Miletus¹³² in western Asia Minor are the remains of a building which could be a synagogue, although no Jewish evidence has been found. I believe that there is insufficient evidence to identify this as a synagogue, but cite it here to illustrate the way in which A. von Gerkan deals with the issue of the women's gallery. The date of the building is uncertain, but a late, i.e., Byzantine, date seems likely. Located in a complex of buildings, the room in question is oblong (18.5 by 11.6 m) and is divided into a nave and two side aisles by two rows of columns. One proceeded from a forecourt with a peristyle through one of three doors (at an earlier stage) into the large room; at the present stage the two outer doors are blocked by two piers. Gerkan is of the opinion that the columns must have borne a gallery because they are so close together; he does not suggest that this would have been a women's gallery, nor does he mention any fragments that might have belonged to it or stairs leading to it.¹³³

Recent excavations in Stobi¹³⁴ in Macedonia (Yugoslavia) have brought to light the remains of two synagogues underneath

Christian basilica ruins. The older synagogue (possible 1st C. C.E.), which measures ca. 7.9 x 13.3 meters, contains donative inscriptions mentioning the name Polycharmos, thus tying it in with the dedicatory inscription mentioning Claudius Tiberius Polycharmos found on a column in the atrium of the basilica. This latter inscription (CII 694)¹³⁵ speaks of "upper chambers" (hyperōa) of which the donor and his descendants were to maintain disposal, perhaps for living purposes. In other words, far from being a women's gallery, these "upper chambers" were for the private use of the donor. A women's section or women's gallery has not been suggested for the younger synagogue.

The ancient synagogue excavated in Ostia,¹³⁶ the port of ancient Rome, dates from the fourth century. The prayer hall, which measures 24.9 by 12.5 meters, is part of a complex of rooms including one with an oven for baking. One approached through an area with a mosaic floor, then proceeded through an inner gateway with four columns and finally entered the innermost section, an oblong room with a bema at the western end and an aedicula, or Torah shrine, at the southeastern end. Two fallen marble columns were found in the main prayer hall. The excavators have not suggested the existence of a gallery or separate women's section. Beneath this synagogue were found the remains of a first-century C.E. building, which may also have been a synagogue. Here, too, the excavators do not assume the existence of a separate section for women.

The third-century synagogue found in Dura Europos¹³⁷ has been one of the most spectacular synagogue discoveries to date, due to the excellent condition of the building and especially of the frescoes decorating its walls. The main prayer hall, measuring 13.65 by 7.8 meters, is located in a complex. No one has suggested the existence of a gallery, which would be impossible given the architecture. A separate women's room has, however, been suggested. Beneath the third-century synagogue were found the remains of an earlier synagogue, and in this earlier synagogue, Room 7, a small room to the east of the prayer hall has been taken to be a possible women's section.¹³⁸ Erwin Goodenough, however, sees this as impossible due to the wear on the threshold between Room 7 and the main prayer hall, Room 2. Goodenough writes:

First, the well-worn threshold of the little door that joined Room 7 with Room 2 indicates a frequency of going back and forth unthinkable if the room was used for women, but quite intelligible if processions from one room to the other were a

regular part of the ritual. A glance at the plans of oriental synagogues strengthens this feeling. Kohl and Watzinger give a number of such plans, from which it is at once clear that if women were accommodated in the synagogues at all, they did not stroll in with the men and sit in full view of them. Rather they had a separate entrance from the outside to a room entirely screened off from the room where the men worshiped. The heavy wear of the sill shows that Room 7 in the early synagogue could not thus have been blocked off.¹³⁹

The oriental synagogues referred to by Goodenough, several floor plans of which are given by Kohl and Watzinger,¹⁴⁰ are none other than modern oriental synagogues. With this it becomes clear that the true analogy for the women's section and the starting point for the search thereof is the contemporary Orthodox synagogue. Given the absolutely strict separation implied by the modern concept of the women's section, Goodenough seems to me quite right in insisting that a worn threshold could not have served as the barrier between women and men. Presumably, Goodenough assumes that, in the absence of a women's section, women did not go to the synagogue at all.

The later synagogue did not have this separate room, for the whole area was taken up by the forecourt. Carl Kraeling therefore suggests that the women prayed with the men in the main prayer hall, but that they sat on the south side of the room. Kraeling writes:

What we know about the nature of the wall decorations in this area, and what we can infer from the existence of the smaller door, makes it clear that the benches in question were those normally used by the women and that here the raised footrests were omitted lest modesty and propriety be offended. Along the south wall in the benches used by the women two additional provisions were made to safeguard modesty and simultaneously to provide easier access. One was a rectangular recess in the lower bench where it abutted on the reveal floor of the smaller door, the other a rectangular platform set into the southwest corner of the chamber floor below the lower bench.¹⁴¹

By the "nature of the wall decorations," Kraeling means that the west wall bears the fresco with Elijah raising the widow's son. He suggests that this scene is especially appropriate vis-à-vis the women's entrance.¹⁴²

While it must be emphasized again that Kraeling is doing what archaeologists should do, namely reconstructing, one must nevertheless note how shaky the evidence is upon which he builds his theory. The fact that a woman appears in a certain fresco can hardly be taken as evidence that it was women who sat beneath

it, and there are many reasons why one door is smaller than another. The special features of the benches (steps, etc.) could be taken as safeguards for feminine modesty, but they could also mean no more than that a different person built the benches on that side of the room, adding some features (steps) and omitting others (footrests). In spite of all this, Kraeling's suggestion that the women sat together on one side of the room in the later synagogue at Dura fits in better with the archaeological evidence than other possible suggestions, such as a gallery or a women's room. It may well be that if there was any separation of the sexes at Dura, then it was of the informal type proposed here. In any case, the later synagogue at Dura did not have a women's gallery or a separate room for women.¹⁴³ Most likely, neither did the earlier synagogue.

In 1883 a Captain Ernest de Proudhomme who was stationed at Hamman Lif (Naro),¹⁴⁴ not far from Tunis in North Africa, performed an amateur excavation of a synagogue mosaic and of the building complex in which it was located. What seems to have been the main prayer hall can be approached from two directions, with many small rooms on either side of the approach ways. In the prayer hall was a magnificent mosaic (much of it now lost) with a large inscription in the middle:

Sancta sinagoga Naron pro salutem suam ancilla tua Iuliana p(ateressa?) de suo proprium teselavit. Menorah¹⁴⁵

L. 1: read sanctam synagogam.

Your servant Juliana, "fatheress" (?), paved with mosaic, from her own funds, the holy synagogue of Naro for her salvation.

A woman donated the entire mosaic for the prayer hall; given the high costs of mosaics, this must have been a very substantial donation. Does it seem reasonable that the wealthy woman who donated the mosaic should also have had the right to tread upon it? Not so to Erwin Goodenough, who writes:

She herself could presumably not have attended the services in this sancta synagoga; but as with all daughters in Israel, her hope was in the maintenance of Jewish worship and life.¹⁴⁶

Goodenough places the women worshipers in the room to the left of the prayer hall, for it has a separate entrance and no access to the prayer hall at all; indeed, one could neither see nor hear anything from this room. Goodenough notes, "This room might have

been used for a guest hostel, but seems to me more likely, from its total isolation, to have been designed for the women."¹⁴⁷

Methodologically it is important to keep open the possibility that the ancient Jewish men in Ḥammam Lif were of the mentality described by Goodenough, that they desired to isolate totally the women in a room from which they could not see into the prayer hall nor hear the Torah being read or the sermon being given. It is also important not to exclude the possibility that the ancient Jewish women in Ḥammam Lif accepted this, that the benefactor Juliana did not take offense at never being allowed to pray in the room in which lay the mosaic she had donated. All of this is possible, but where is the literary or archaeological evidence for it? There being no Jewish literary sources from Ḥammam Lif, we are dependent on the monumental remains. Archaeologically, there is no reason to assume that the room in question is a women's section rather than a hostel, a meeting room or a schoolroom.

This survey has shown that there is no Diaspora synagogue in which a strong archaeological case can be made for a women's gallery or a separate women's section. At Priene and Ostia a gallery or room for the women has not even been suggested. In the later synagogue at Dura there is also no separate room or gallery for women. Although there was some speculation in the earlier phases of excavation as to whether the Sardis synagogue might have had a gallery, it has now been recognized that there is "no cogent evidence" for such a gallery. The Stobi inscription does speak of "upper chambers" but these were not for women but rather for the use of the donor, Claudius Tiberius Polycharmos, and of his heirs. At Aegina, the earlier synagogue at Dura, Ḥammam Lif and Delos, a side room (or rooms) has been suggested as a possible women's section. At Aegina it is not even clear that the rooms suggested had any connection with the synagogue. At Dura the worn threshold between the hypothetical women's room and the main prayer hall speaks against the use of Room 7 as a strictly separate women's section. At Ḥammam Lif there are many side rooms, and we do not know the exact use of any of them. There is no archaeological reason for assigning any one of them to women. At Delos we have seen that, while Plassart supposed that the division between Rooms A and B represents the division between the men and the women, Goodenough assigns the women to Room C and makes Room A into an inner chamber for the men, Room B being the men's outer chamber. It is time to recognize that we can only guess at the function of the many

adjoining side rooms in the Diaspora synagogues. It is arbitrary to assign one or the other to women.

B. Is there Literary Evidence for a Women's Gallery or a Separate Women's Section?

No scholar is of the opinion that ancient Jewish literature attests to a general regulation that the sexes be separate in synagogue worship. All admit that this regulation cannot be found in ancient Jewish sources. Eliezer Sukenik, for example, writes:

The ancient literature nowhere mentions a specific regulation to the effect that men and women must be kept separate at public worship; still less is it prescribed that the women's section shall be built in the form of a gallery.¹⁴⁸

In spite of this consensus, scholars have argued that even without a regulation, it was in fact the case that the sexes were kept separate in the synagogue worship. What is the literary evidence for a factual separation?

In the Second Temple there existed a women's forecourt (ʿezrat hannāšim; gynaikōnitis),¹⁴⁹ which contrasted with the forecourt of Israel. This meant that women were normally only allowed into the women's forecourt, but not beyond that;¹⁵⁰ only the men were allowed into the inner forecourt of Israel. What is often overlooked, however, is that the women's forecourt was not reserved for women. It was the large outer court where both sexes mingled together freely. It was not an area where women could pray quietly by themselves, undisturbed by men, for the men had to pass through this area in order to enter the forecourt of Israel. Therefore it can hardly be taken as an example of the separation of the sexes. "Women's" here does not mean reserved for women, but rather restrictively that women could not pass beyond this outer court. Thus, the men had a court reserved for them, but the women did not. This is a totally different model from the one presupposed by those archaeologists who reconstruct a women's gallery with a separate entrance in the Galilean synagogues.

Once a year, however, an actual separation of the sexes was ordained. This was during the water-drawing celebration on the night following the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

B. Sukk. 51b-52a reads: