

The Decapolis: History and Archaeology

11 Jewish archaeology Burial practises

MAGNESS, J. 2011: *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. Grand Rapids and Cambridge.

Jewish archaeology

- Presence and distribution of certain items of material culture is thought to reflect ethnicity of their bearers
- Particularly for Jews during the Second Temple period (mainly from the 2nd c. BCE to the 2nd c. CE) such items were identified as:
 1. Ritual baths (*mikva'ot*)
 2. Stone vessels
 3. Ossuaries
 4. Synagogues
- Further we may add Jewish symbols (menora, four species etc.) used in decorative art on everyday items (oil lamps etc.)
- Not all items must be present at an archaeological site to identify its inhabitants as Jews
- Ritual baths and stone vessels are connected to the perceptions of purity in Judaism
- However, ritual purity practises in ancient Judaism were apparently varied and not all Jews adhered to the same set of rules
- It also does not necessarily mean that all the inhabitants of a given site were Jews
- Ossuaries disappear during the late 1st/early 2nd c. CE (after the Great Revolt), usage of stone vessels sharply drops around the same time but they are sporadically and locally used until the Byzantine period
- Synagogues and ritual baths are continually built and used in predominantly Jewish areas well into the Late Antiquity
- Synagogues are particularly widespread in the Late Roman-Byzantine period

Jewish archaeology

Ritual baths (*mikwa'ot*)

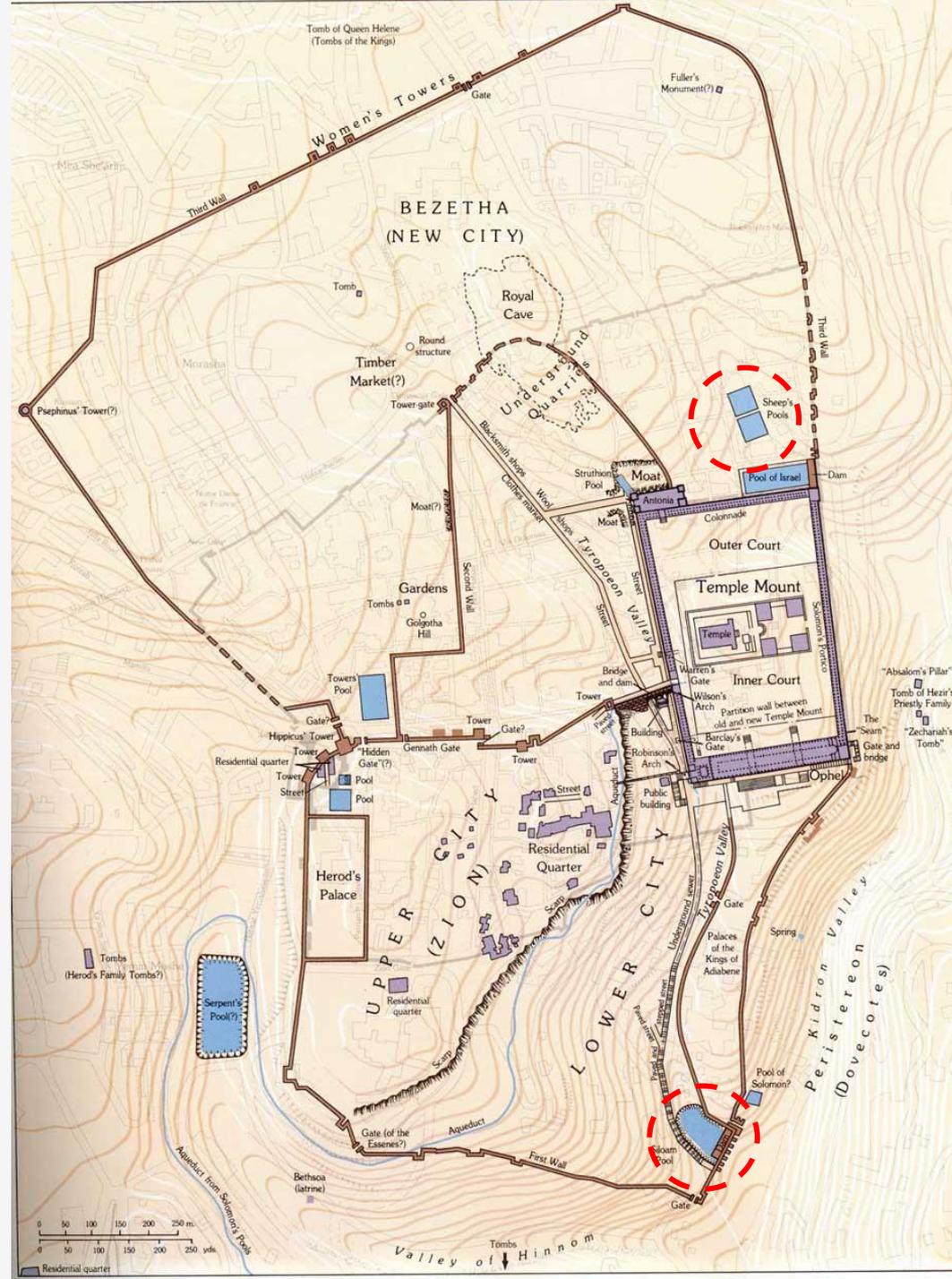
- In Judaism a full body immersion of naked body in water (tvilah/טבילה) is mandated before certain rituals (connected with the priests in the Temple, before marriage etc.) or after activities that render a person ritually impure (e.g. contact with dead bodies, menstruation)
- It is required that the water is free-flowing rain or spring water (i.e. not drawn from a cistern)
- Originally such immersion was probably indeed done close to the actual natural springs as built *mikwa'ot* start to appear only during the 1st c. BCE
- The Bible specifically does not mention *mikwa'ot*, all known regulations are laid out in the Mishnah (3rd c. CE)
- The bath typically consists of a simple plastered stepped pool, large enough to fit an adult person, and is found in a domestic context, but sometimes also in the fields
- Both private and communal baths are known
- In Jerusalem several large communal pools could have served as ritual baths for large number of pilgrims travelling each year to the city for Pesach, Shavu'ot and Sukkot
- During the Hasmonaean and Herodian period a hybrid hygienic installations combining Greek bathtubs and *mikwa'ot* appear (see Herodian palaces)
- Such installations on the one hand reflect current Hellenistic bathing standards and at the same time a need to maintain Jewish ritual purity

Jewish archaeology

Ritual baths (*mikwa'ot*)

- Jerusalem
- Siloam pool (southern entrance to the city, fed by Gichon spring)
- Bethesda (Sheep's) pool (north-eastern entrance to the city)
- Pilgrim's *mikwa'ot*?
- Bethesda is also connected with healing (Jesus' healing ministry in John 5:1-8)

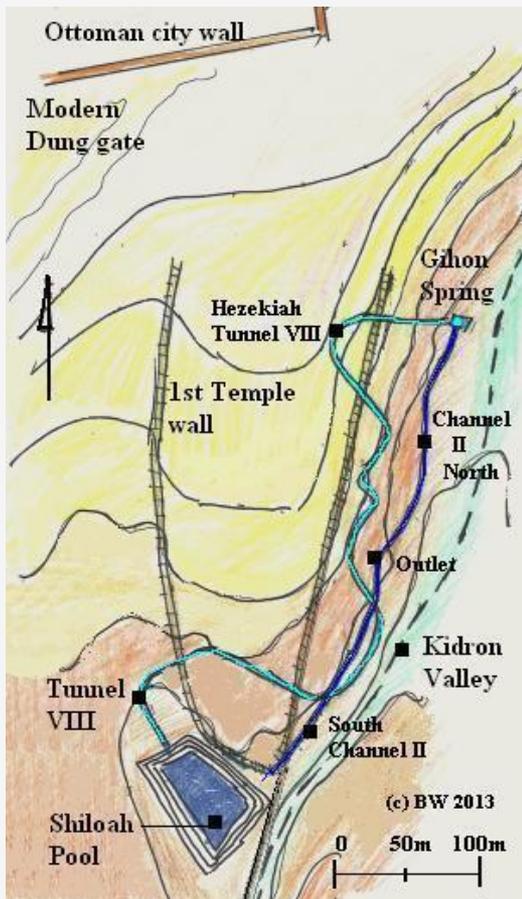
“Some time later, **Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.** Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate **a pool**, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and **which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.** Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’ ‘Sir,’ the invalid replied, ‘I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.’...”



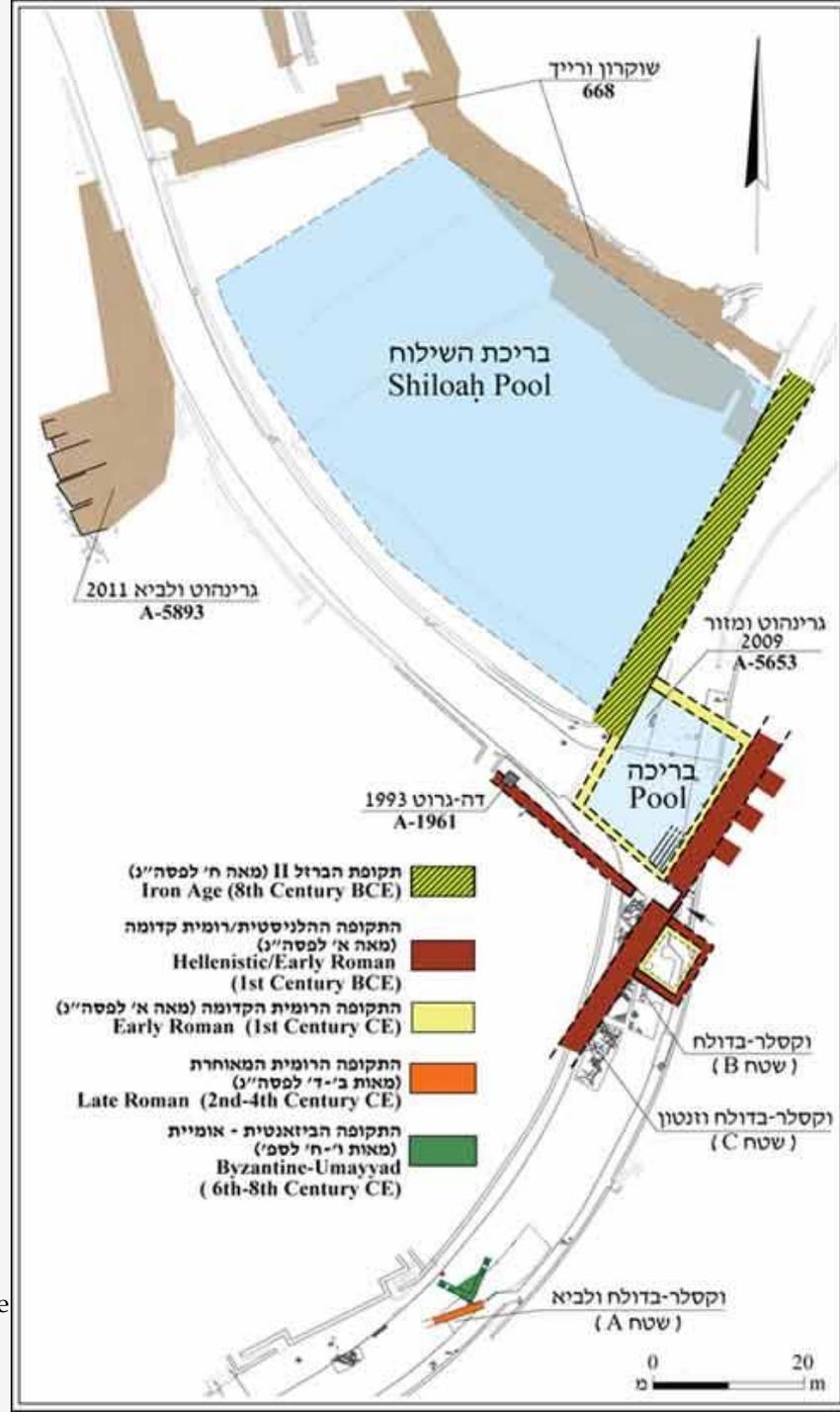
Jewish archaeology

Ritual baths (*mikwa'ot*)

- Jerusalem - Siloam pool
- First pool (probably open air water reservoir) was built already in the Iron Age by erecting a dam across the valley
- A large stepped pool (ca. 50x70 m) was rebuilt in the 1st c. BCE and CE



Water system bringing water from the Gichon spring to the pool



Jewish archaeology

Ritual baths (*mikwa'ot*)

- Jerusalem – Siloam pool
- The stepped pool



Jewish archaeology

Ritual baths (*mikwa'ot*)

- A suite consisting of a bathtub and a stepped pool (*mikweh*) in a rich mansion on the Jerusalem's western hill, 1st c. CE (Jewish Quarter Excavations)



Jewish archaeology

Stone vessels

- Although stone vessels are known also from non-Jewish context in the Eastern Mediterranean (and from very early periods) a particular group is again connected to the Jewish perceptions of purity
- Stone vessels cannot be (ritually) polluted (unlike earthenware pottery, metal and glass) – they are used for water storage (water for ritual hand washing – netilat yadayim/נטילת ידיים, food storage and consumption etc.)
- In some pre-Revolt domestic context more than half of the domestic ware is made of stone
- They are manufactured from soft limestone/chalk (basalt vessels are very rare), either carved in hand or hewn on a lathe
- The ware starts to appear at the end of the 1st c. BCE in Jerusalem with a peak production before the Great Revolt, smaller quantities are found in the period 70-135 CE and it mostly disappears during the 2nd c. CE
- The ware is equally found in regular (“poor”) domestic contexts and in the houses of the Jerusalem élite, which is reflected in the great variety of shapes and different levels of craftsmanship – from crude mugs to the nicely carved pieces reminiscent of fine wares – the ware reflects social standing of its user as well as his Jewish identity

Jewish archaeology

Stone vessels

- Assemblage of stone vessels from a rich mansion on the Jerusalem's western hill (Jewish Quarter Excavations)
- The "mugs" (also "measuring cups") with two handles and other cups and bowls are the most typical shapes)



Jewish archaeology

Stone vessels

- The mugs (on the right) are drilled from a core and then finished in hand, whereas large jugs (for water storage, below) are carved on a lathe

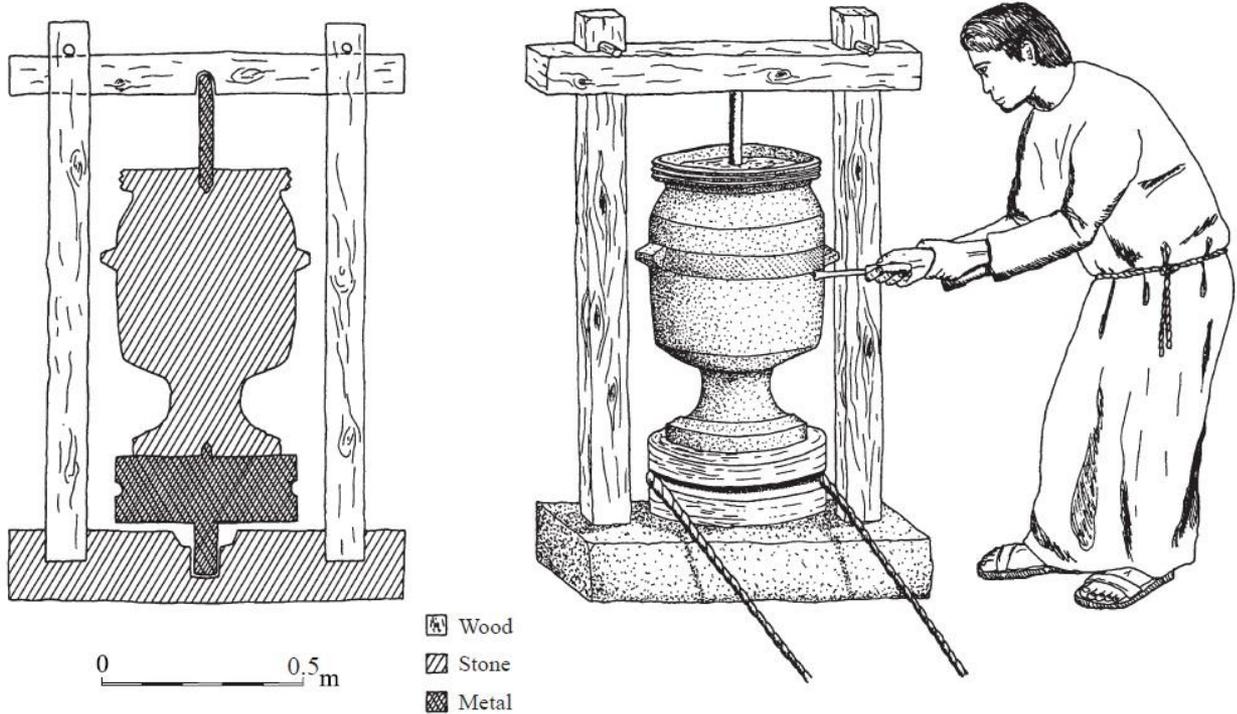
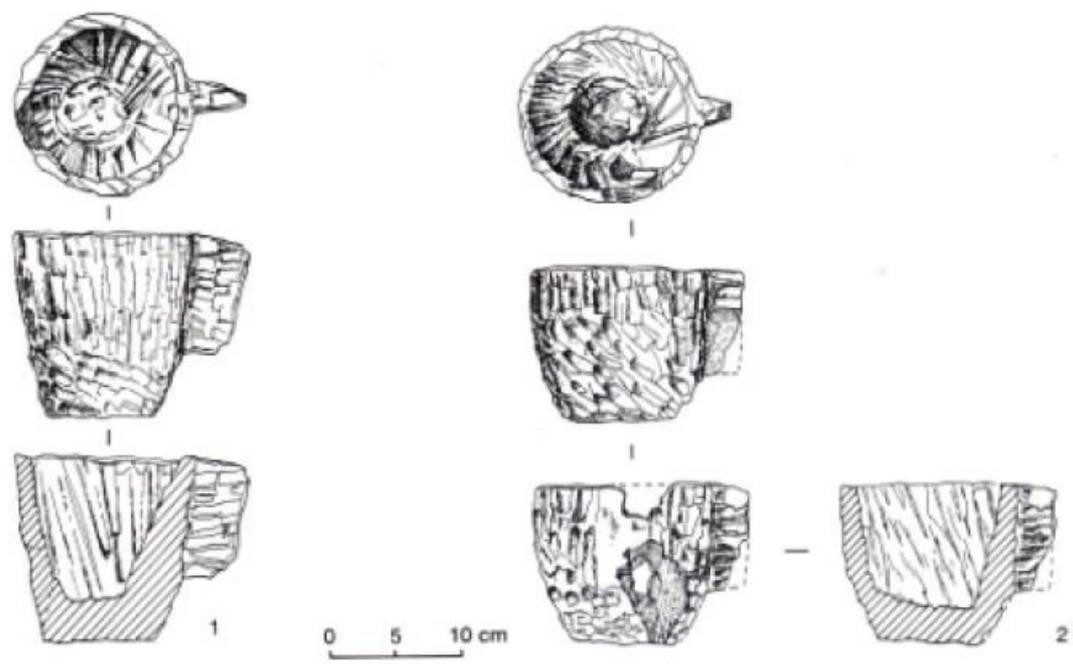
Not to scale



Jewish archaeology

Stone vessels

- Production
- Right: unfinished mugs from a workshop in Hizma, ca. 6 km NE from Jerusalem, carved in hand
- Below: example how a large vessel is carved using a lathe



Jewish archaeology

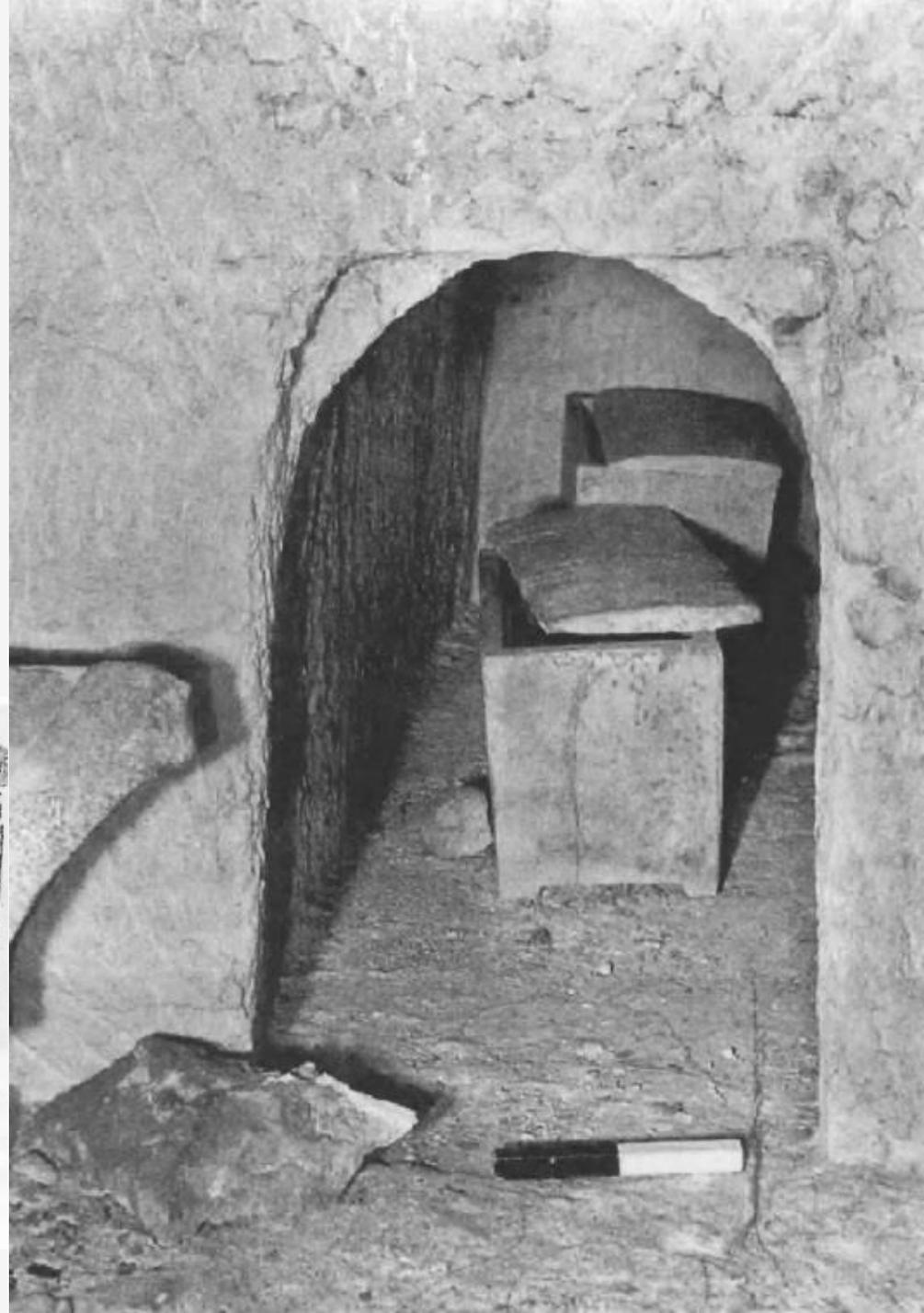
Ossuaries

- The southern Levantine burial customs included burials in rock-cut tombs with secondary burials, where bones were collected and put in an ossuary after decay of the soft tissues, alternatively the bones were just collected in one of the niches in the tomb or in pits
- These secondary burials start to appear in the Chalcolithic (ca. 4,500-3,200 BCE) and continue to the Roman period
- Ossuaries start to appear during the last quarter of the 1st c. BCE in Jerusalem and like the stone vessels they gradually disappear after the Bar Kochba revolt
- Majority of the surviving examples are from limestone/chalk (same material as for the vessels) but they were manufactured also from wood and clay
- The ossuaries might be plain or decorated, with a lid
- Typically for bones of a single person (whose name is inscribed on the ossuary) or for a family
- It seems that decoration and craftsmanship of the ossuary is not correlated to the social status of the deceased as plain and crude ossuaries were found also in the tombs of prominent families
- The appearance and quick proliferation of the ossuaries before the Great Revolt might be connected with the belief in physical resurrection of the body
- Other scholars suggested inspiration from Roman cinerary urns (and hence their disappearance during the 2nd-3rd c. when they are replaced with sarcophagi and loculi which are again influenced by the Roman funerary customs)

Jewish archaeology

Ossuaries

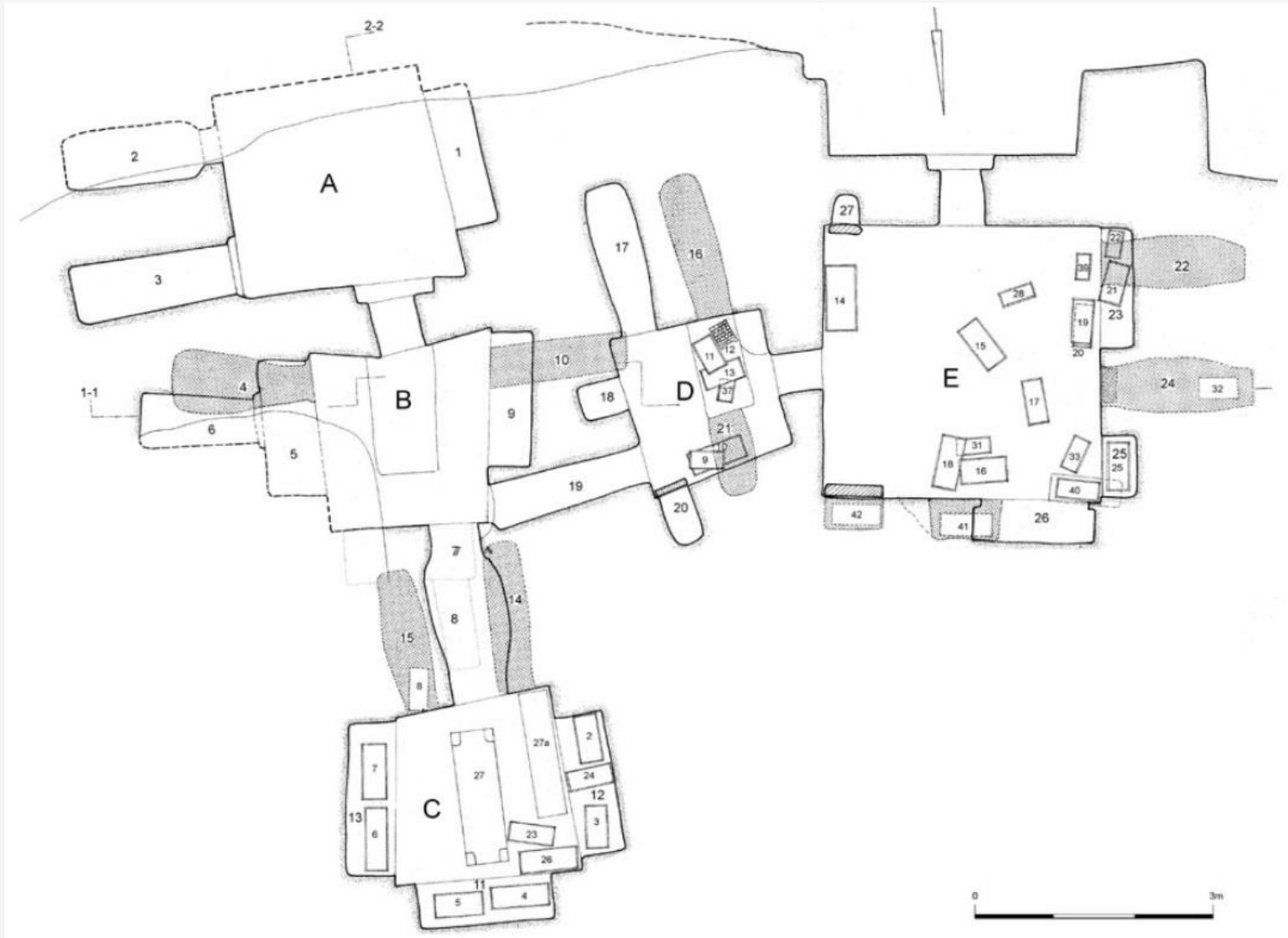
- Two ossuaries from Akeldama tomb in Jerusalem in situ inside a loculus (*kokh* in Hebrew)
- Decorated ossuary from Akeldama tomb
- Geometrical motives, elements taken from architectural decoration and especially rosettes carved using a pair of compasses are typical for Jewish ossuaries



Jewish archaeology

Ossuaries

- Plan of a rock-cut tomb complex at the Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem showing ossuaries in situ



Jewish archaeology

Ossuaries

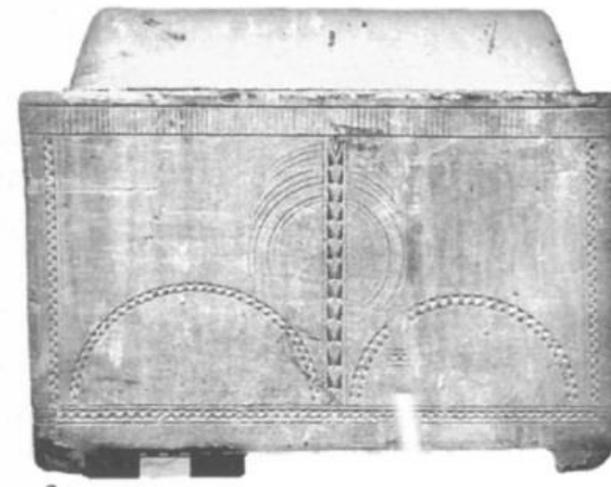
- More simple example from vicinity of Jerusalem
- 58x28x37 (+12 lid) cm
- Inscription reads:

ŠM'WN BN ZKRYH

“Shimon son of Zacharia”



1



2



3



4

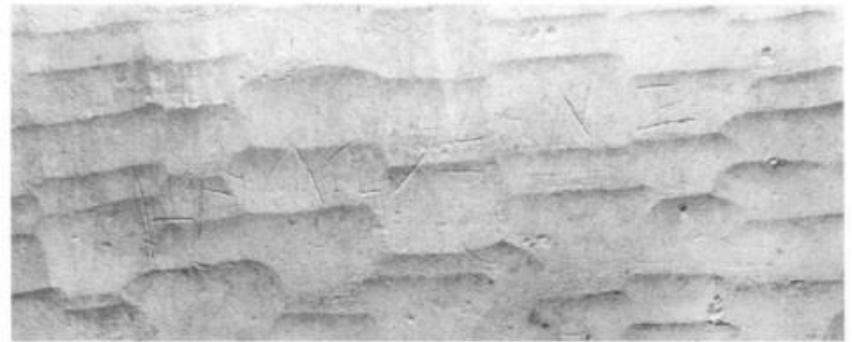
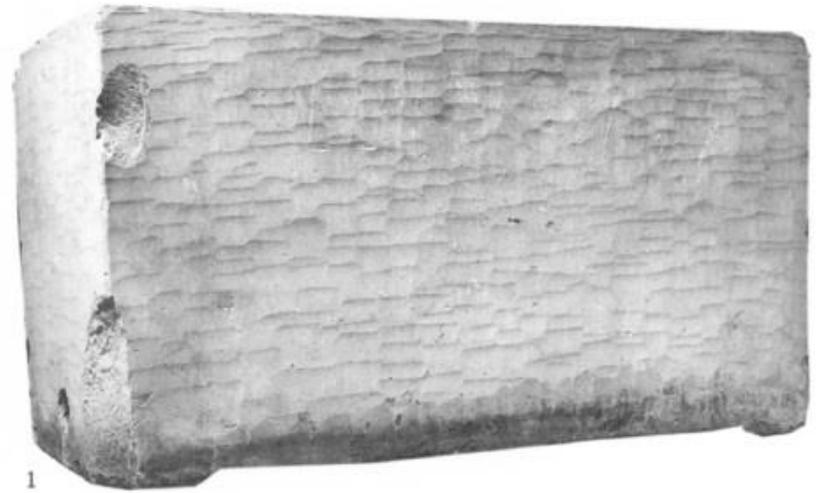
Jewish archaeology

Ossuaries

- Undecorated ossuary, with rough surface finish from vicinity of Jerusalem
- 64x28x36 cm
- Inscription reads:

'RBGL' BN ?

“Arbagla/ Arbugla son of... ?”



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- Both the Greek and Hebrew (בֵּית כְּנֶסֶת/bet kneset) means the “place of assembly”
- It may refer to both the structure and to the gathering of people
- In the ancient Judaism, the worship and sacrifice was exclusively focused on the Temple in Jerusalem – hence the importance of the three pilgrimage festivals
- We do not know when and where synagogues first start to appear
- Some 3rd c. BCE Egyptian inscriptions and papyri mention *proseuche*, which might imply assembly for the purpose of prayer or even a prayer hall

“On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children, the Jews [dedicated] the *proseuche*” (CIJ II.1440; Ptolemy II between 246-221 BCE)

- However, its development in diaspora might have been independent from the development in the Land of Israel
- Persian-Hellenistic period was suggested for the emergence of the institution in Israel, focusing on reading the Torah and learning the laws after example set by Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 8.1-9)
- Hasmonaean period was also proposed due to its growing factionalism and ascendancy of Pharisaic schools, which much later developed into Rabbinic Judaism

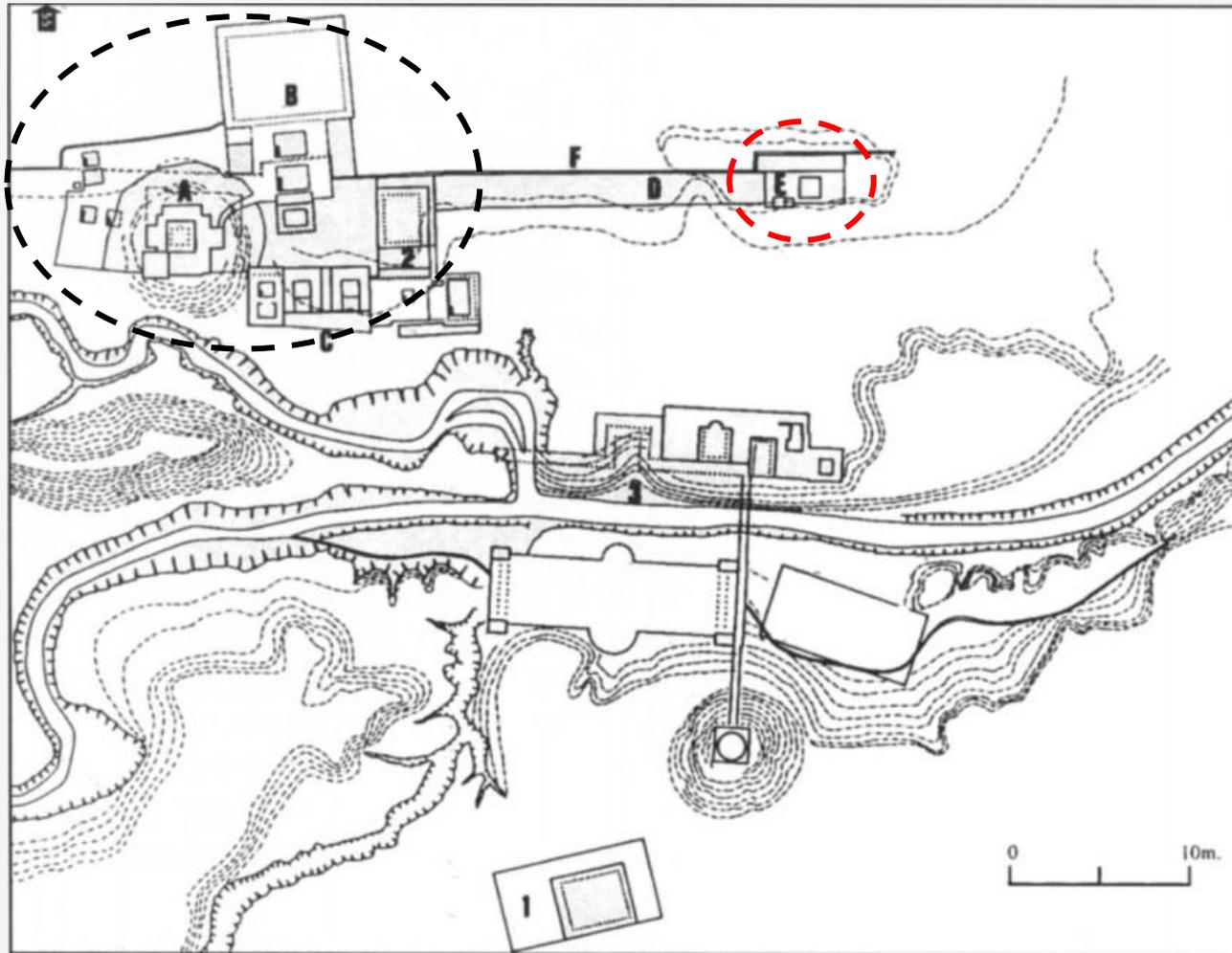
“The people known as Jews, who inhabit the most strongly fortified of cities, called by the natives Jerusalem, have a custom of **abstaining from work every seventh day; on those occasions** they neither bear arms nor take any agricultural operations in hand, nor engage in any other form of public service, *but pray with outstretched hands in the temples* until the evening.” (Agatharchides quoted by Josephus in Contra Apionis 1.209, 2nd c. BCE source)

- Are “**the temples**” referring to the synagogues?

Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

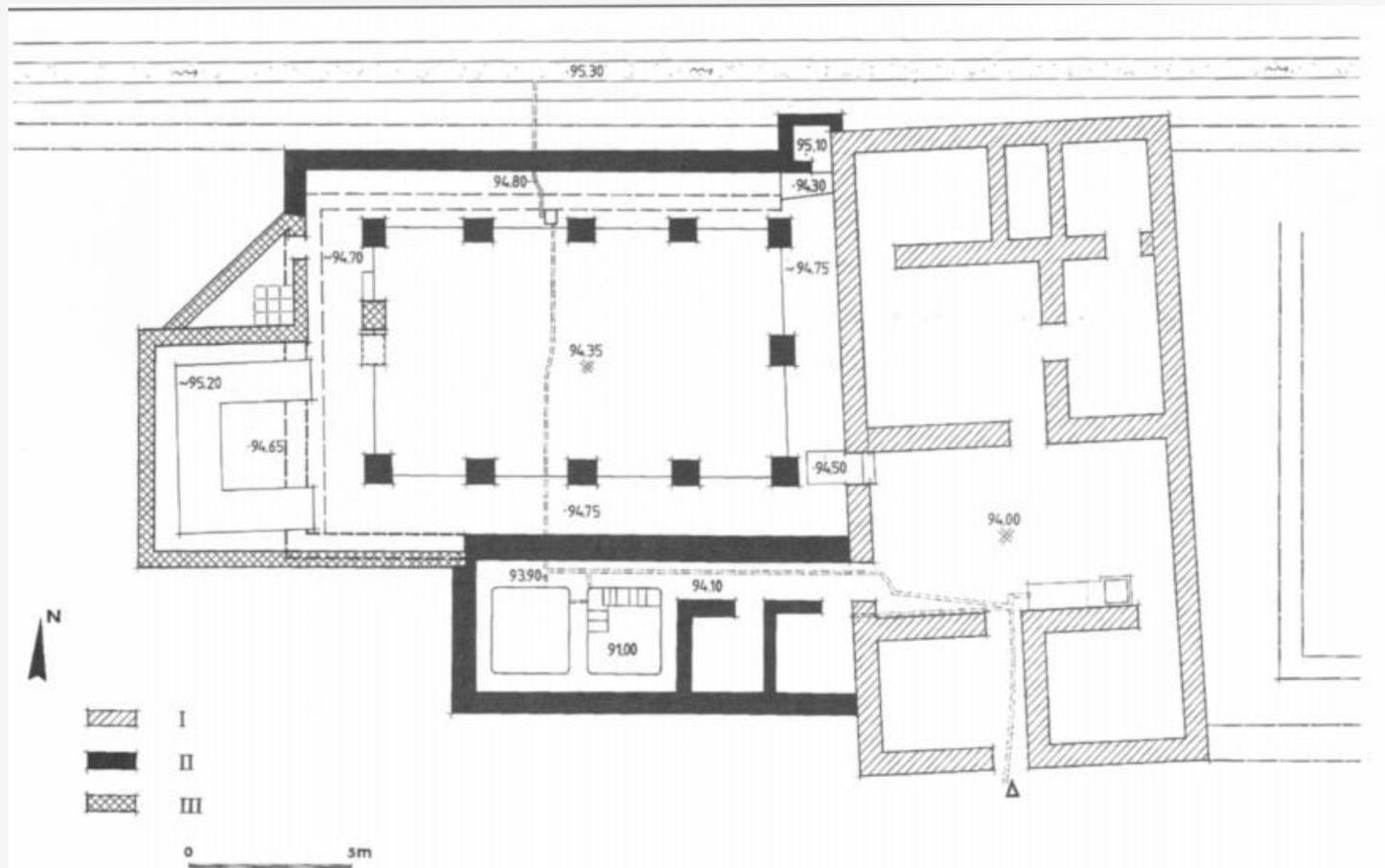
- The earliest tentative synagogue building was identified on the island of Delos and dated probably after Mithridatic conquest of the island in 88 BCE
- The building is thought to belong to the Samaritans (not “mainstream” Jews) but its identification is contested
- Another early synagogue was identified in the service wing/industrial area (in red) of the Hasmonaean palace in Jericho (in black) and dated around 70-50 BCE



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

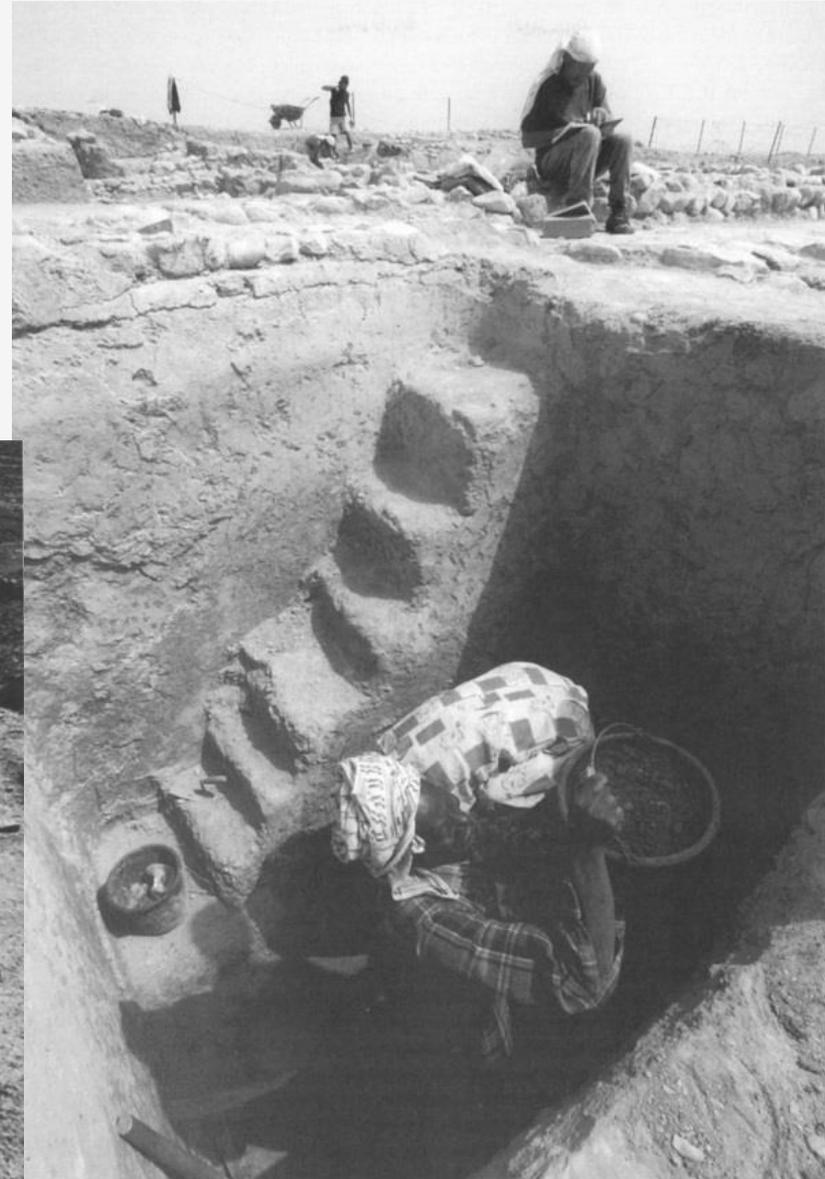
- In the final phase the complex (ca. 28x20 m) consisted of a main hall (16x11 m) with roof supported on pillars, a triclinium (6.4x5 m) and kitchen attached on the west, a *mikveh* to the south and a building to the east
- A bench was apparently running along the three sides of the main hall
- The building is built of local stone, mudbrick and was plastered on the inside
- Triclinium further suggest feasting and social function of the complex, giving it truly multifunctional purpose
- The identification of the structure as a synagogue was however also contested



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- Right: the *mikweh*
- Below: general view of the complex, triclinium in the foreground, note the water conduit below the main hall bringing water to the mikweh (on the right)
- The position of the synagogue indicates it was not used by the Hasmonaean family but by the servants/workers on the estate



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- Undisputed synagogues are attested from the 1st c. CE
- The Early Roman synagogues are known from Judaea, Galilee and Gaulanitis, i.e. the core areas of the Jewish settlement before the Great Revolt – corroborated to the finds of *mikwa'ot*, stone vessels and ossuaries
- The best pre-Revolt example is a synagogue in Gamla in the Golan and a series of synagogues built in the Herodian palaces by the rebels between 66-72 CE
- Few synagogues are built in the 2nd-3rd c. CE
- New construction wave spans the 4th-6th c.



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

- Gamla is for the first time mentioned by Josephus in connection with Alexander Yannaeus' conquest of the Golan, at that time it was probably a Seleucid fort
- A settlement developed during the Hasmonaean period and before the Revolt the town grew to considerable size
- It was fortified by Josephus during the Revolt
- Destroyed in 67 CE by Vespasian and never re-settled



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

“...yet did not **Gamala** accede to them, but relied upon **the difficulty of the place**...for it was situated **upon a rough ridge of a high mountain**, with a kind of neck in the middle: where it begins to ascend, it lengthens itself, and declines as much downward before as behind, insomuch **that it is like a camel in figure, from whence it is so named**...Both on the side and the face there are abrupt parts divided from the rest, and **ending in vast deep valleys**...but then the people belonging to the place have cut an oblique ditch there, and made that hard to be ascended also. On its acclivity, which is straight, houses are built, and those very thick and close to one another...It is exposed to the south, and its southern mount, which reaches to an immense height, was in the nature of a citadel to the city...” BJ 4.4-8



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

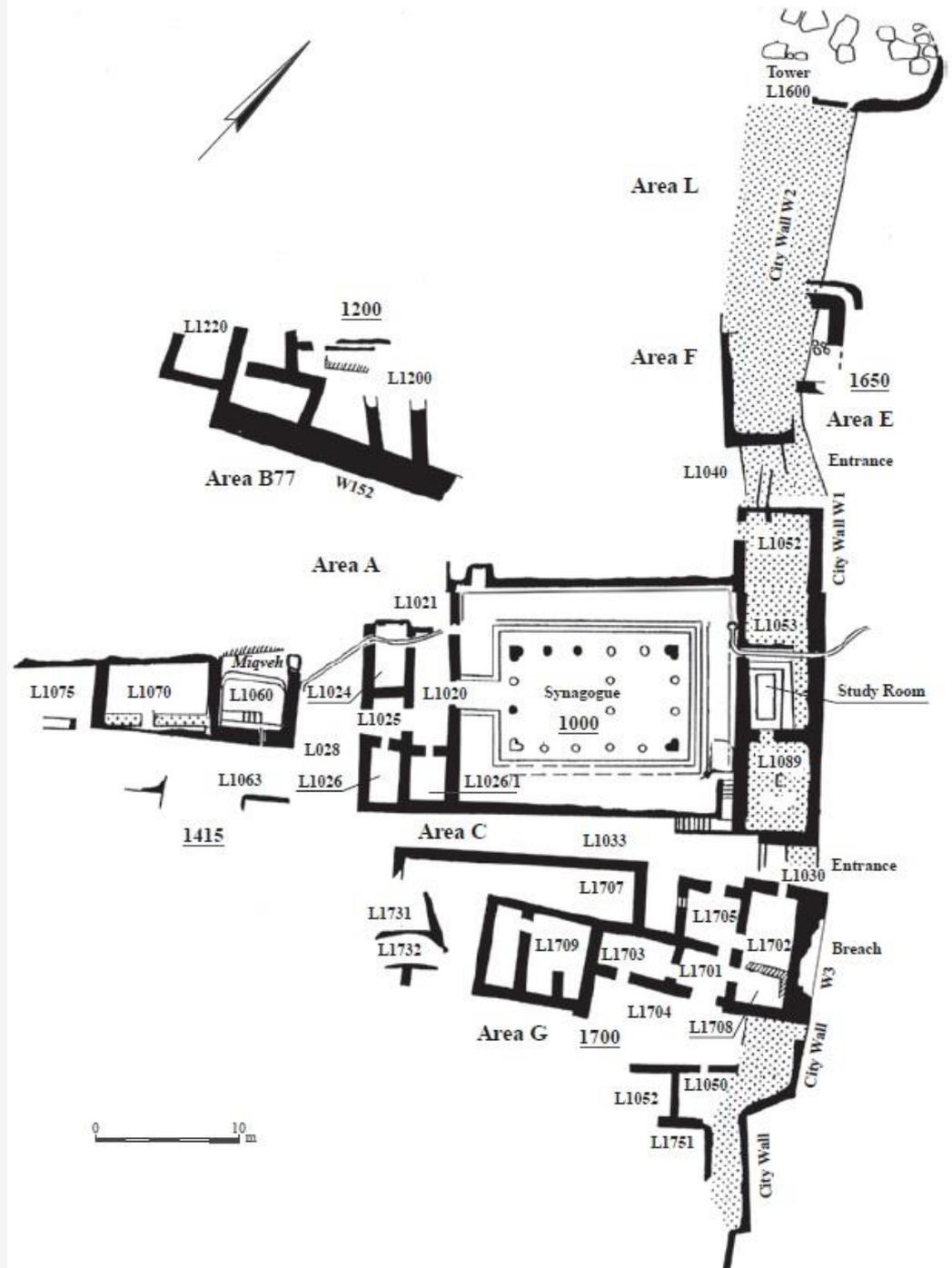
- Breach in the city wall below the synagogue through which the Roman entered the town



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

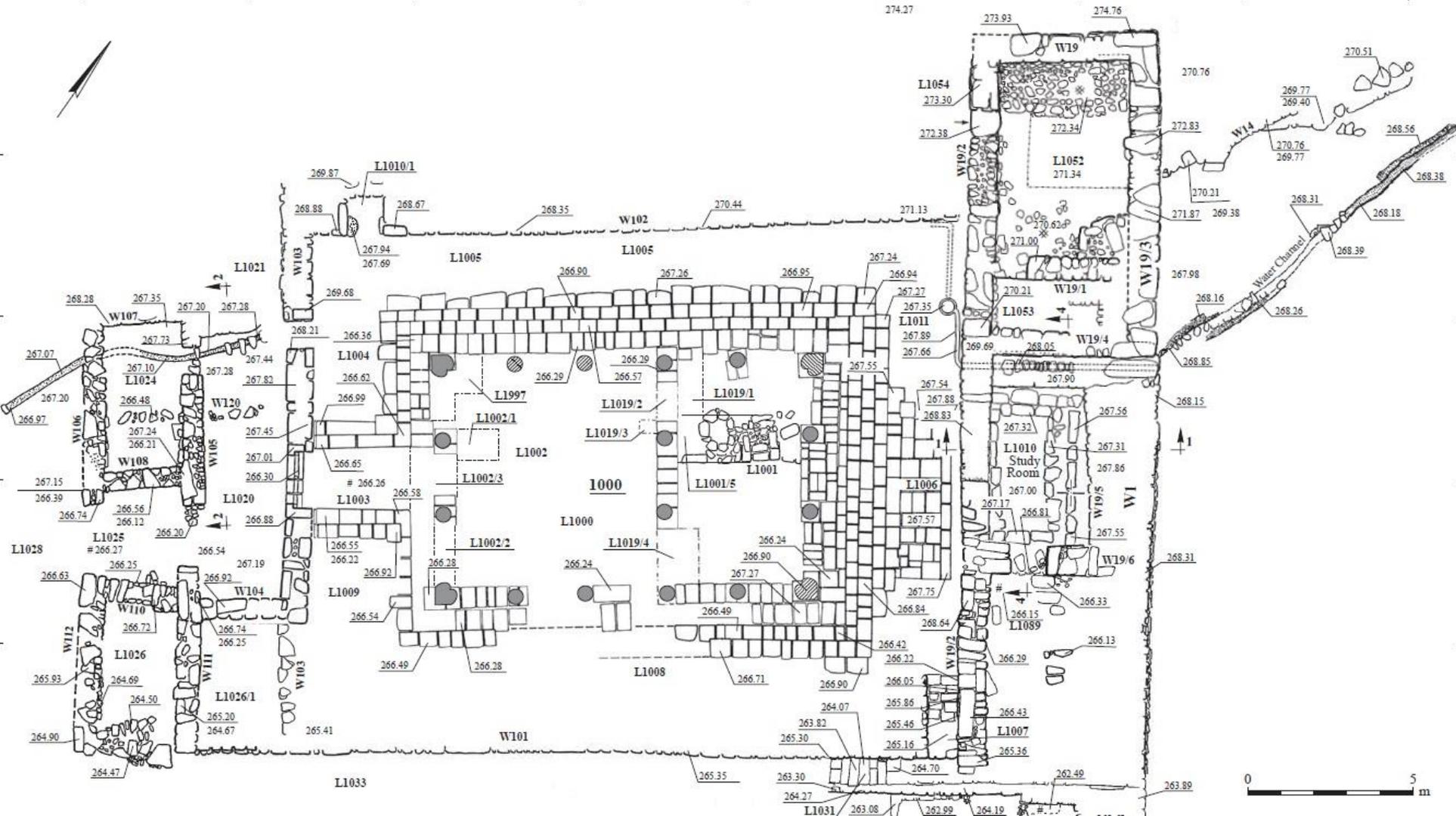
- The city wall was built by connecting back sides of the houses with additional connecting walls
- Few small posterns were left in the wall
- Plan of the so-called Eastern Quarter adjacent to the wall
- The main elements are the synagogue with an eastern wing containing a small “study room” (bet midrash) and a *miqveh* (to the west) opposite the entrance to the building
- Water conduit brings water directly to the main hall of the synagogue (for ritual washing of hands) and to the *miqveh*
- The *miqveh* is large (56 m³) so it apparently served all people incoming to the synagogue before prayers



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

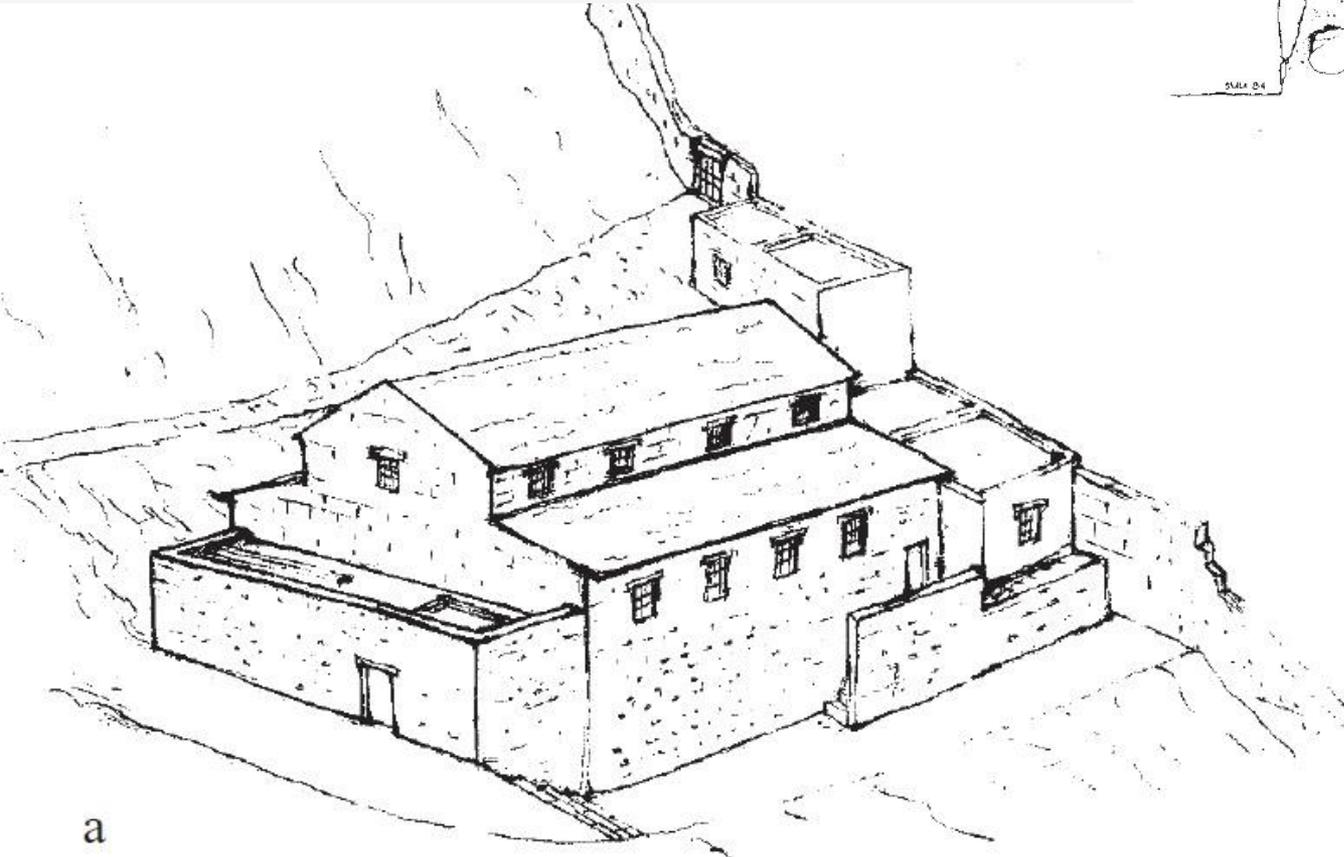
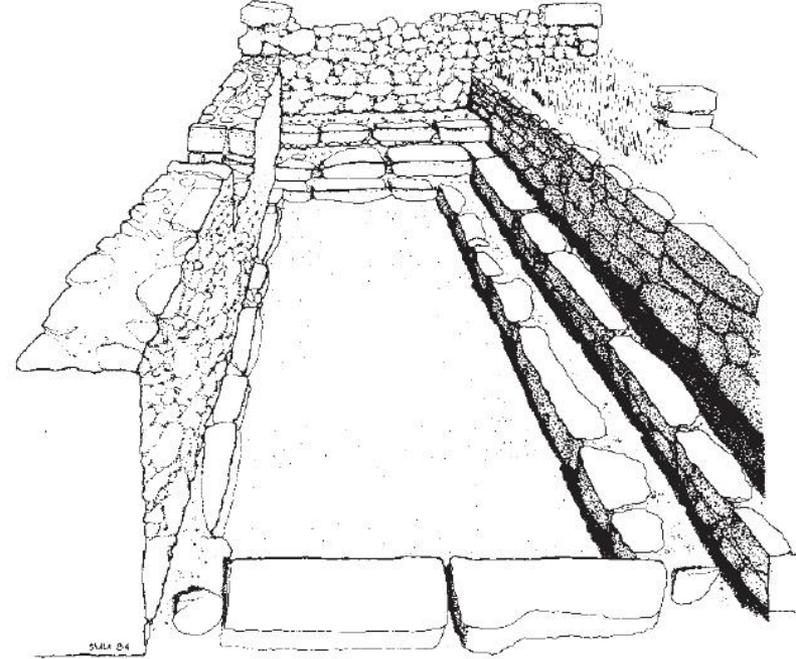
- The main hall is ca. 16x20 m with main entrance facing west (1.5 m wide) with a side entrance to the N and in the SE corner
- Stone steps – benches – were raised around the hall, whose roof is supported by Ionic and Doric columns with decorated lintels
- Basilical roof was suggested in order to let enough light inside (as the northern wall is completely built against the slope)



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

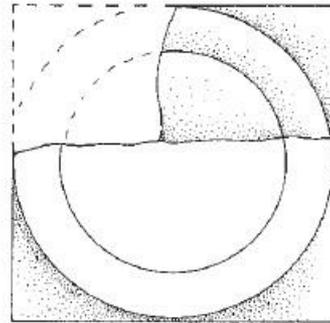
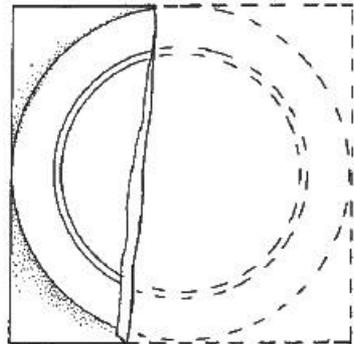
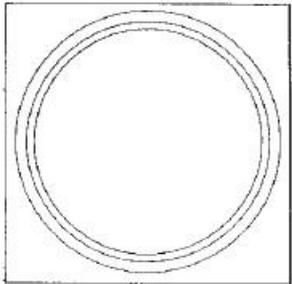
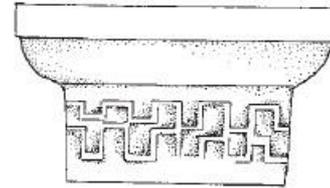
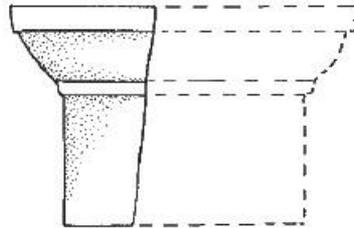
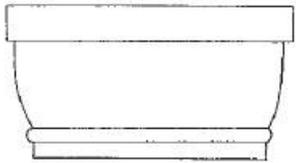
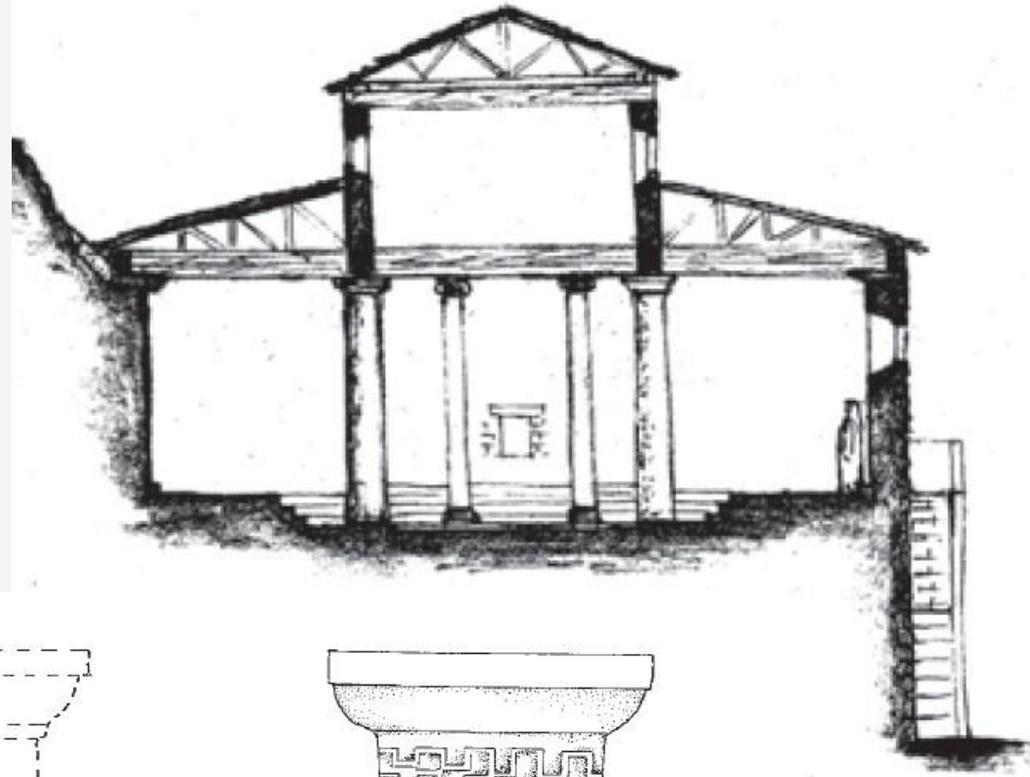
- Right: a “study room” with benches in the eastern wing
- Bottom: suggested reconstruction of the synagogue



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

- Right: section through the building, the basilical hall rest on the Doric and Pseudo-doric columns, while the pair of Ionic columns supports the central stylobate
- Below: Doric and Pseudo-doric columns from the synagogue, note the relief decoration below the capital on no. 17



15

16

17

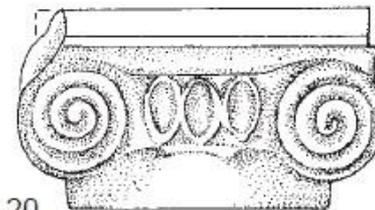
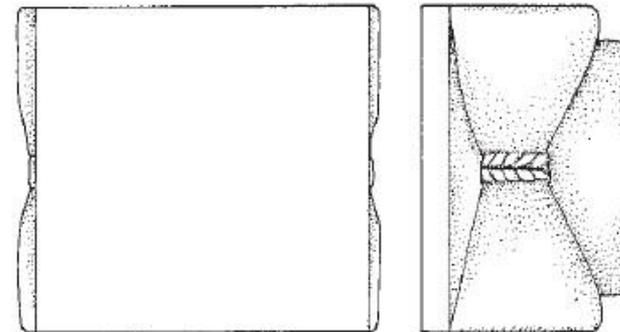
Jewish archaeology

Gamla

- Right: Ionic capital from the synagogue, note the poor workmanship on the basalt and that both volutes turn in the same direction (unlike in regular Ionic capital where the volutes mirror each other)
- Below: door lintel of the synagogue, decorated with a rosette carved using compasses (see the ossuaries above)



Fig. 5.13. Ionic capital from the synagogue.



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

- General view of the synagogue



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

- General view of the synagogue



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

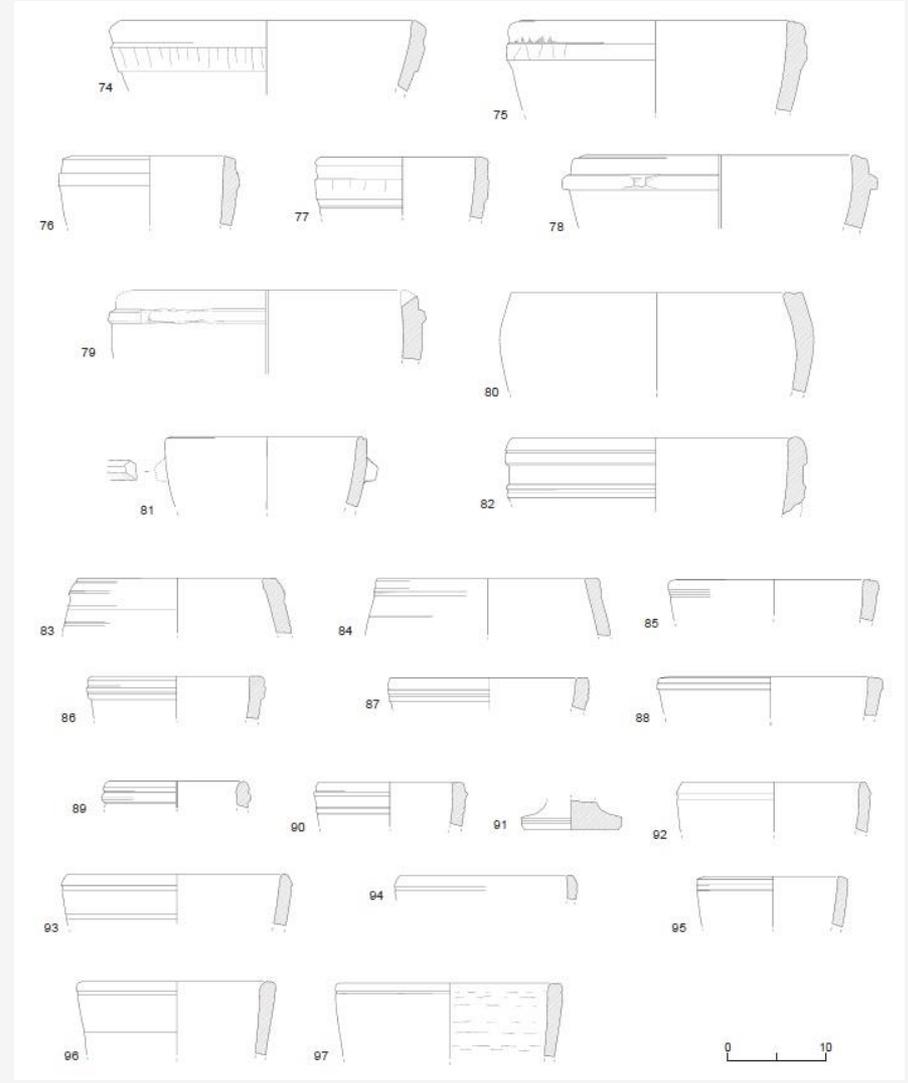
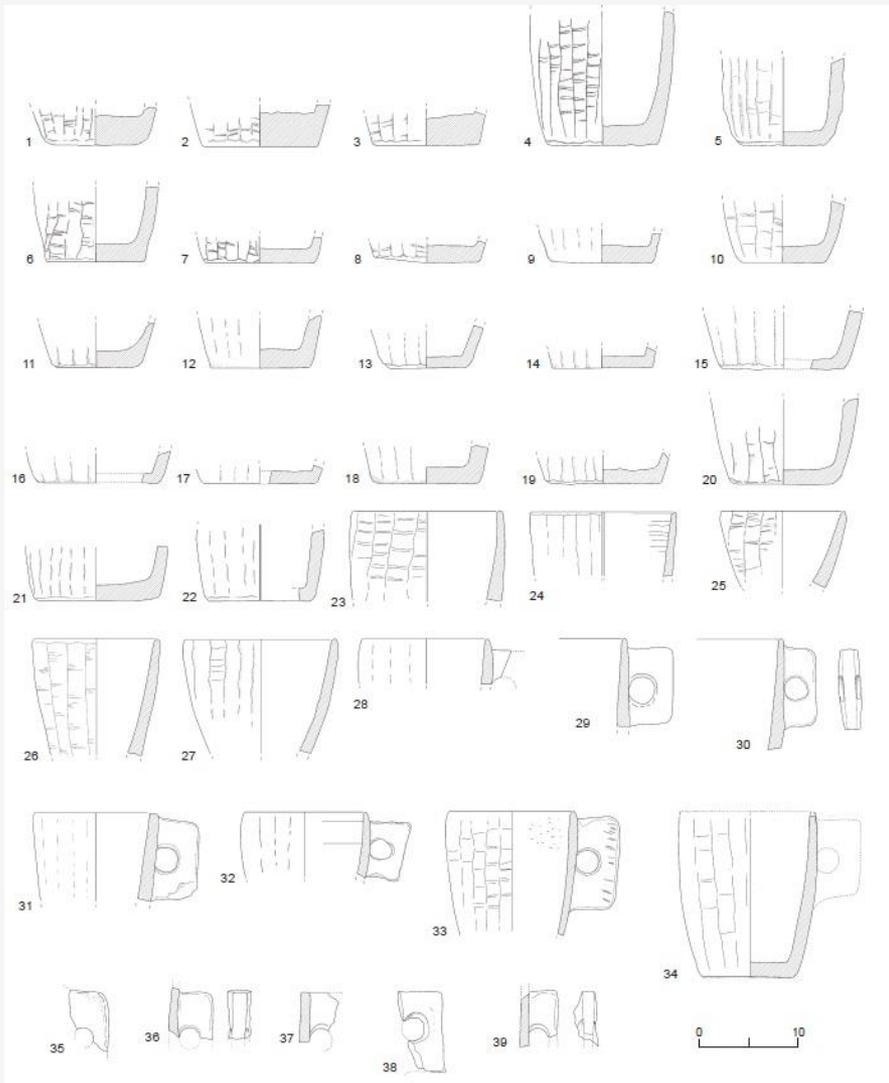
- Entrance to the synagogue
- Note the heart-shaped corner columns with Pseudo-doric capitals in the central hall



Jewish archaeology

Gamla

- Selection of limestone vessels from Gamla (locally produced)
- The Gamla perfectly fits all the ethnic indicators for the Jewish settlement (with exceptions of the ossuaries, no necropolis is known for the Early Roman settlement) further supported by the Josephus' testimony



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

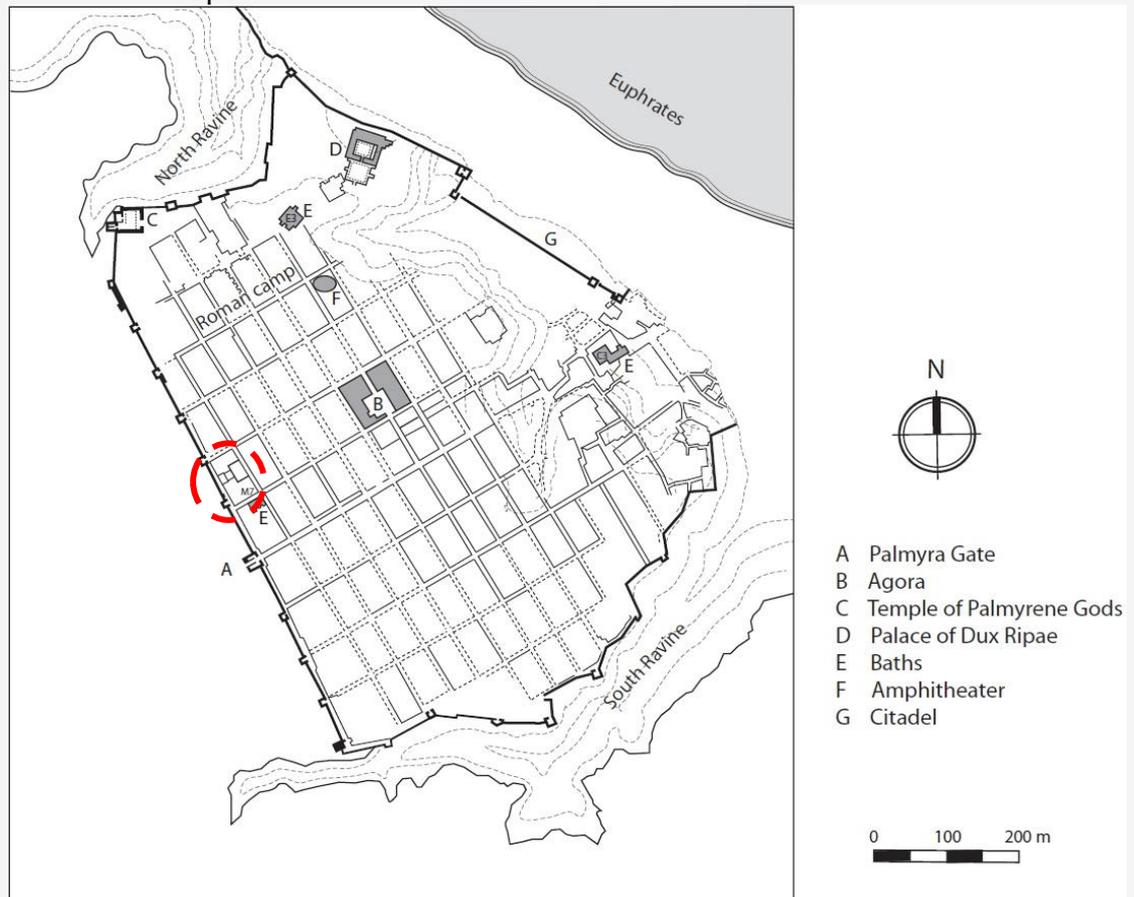
- All other synagogues of the Early Roman period are very similar to Gamla – with benches around the central hall that is supported by columns
- Zealot synagogue at Masada, built by expanding a casemate in the fortification wall (between 66-72 CE), column visible in lower right



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- Synagogues of the 2nd-3rd c. CE are more rare (e.g. Majduliyya - Golan Heights), although recent research indicates that quite few of the Late Roman/Byzantine synagogues are built over earlier structures that could have been synagogues as well
- After the Great and the Bar Kochba revolt the Jewish settlement was confined mainly to Galilee, Golan and southern fringes of Judaea
- While the Early Roman synagogues are not decorated (apart from few architectural elements) later synagogues often contain rich decorative program (mosaic on the floors and frescoes on the walls)
- There is increase in the synagogue building also in the diaspora
- The Hellenistic and Early Roman Jews strictly refused figurative art
- Sometime during the Roman period the Jewish view of the figurative art changed (presumably under the influence of Greek and Roman culture) and ca. from the 3rd c. it is used in the decoration of the synagogues
- The Rabbinic argument is that depictions of human or animal figures do not constitute idol worship per se

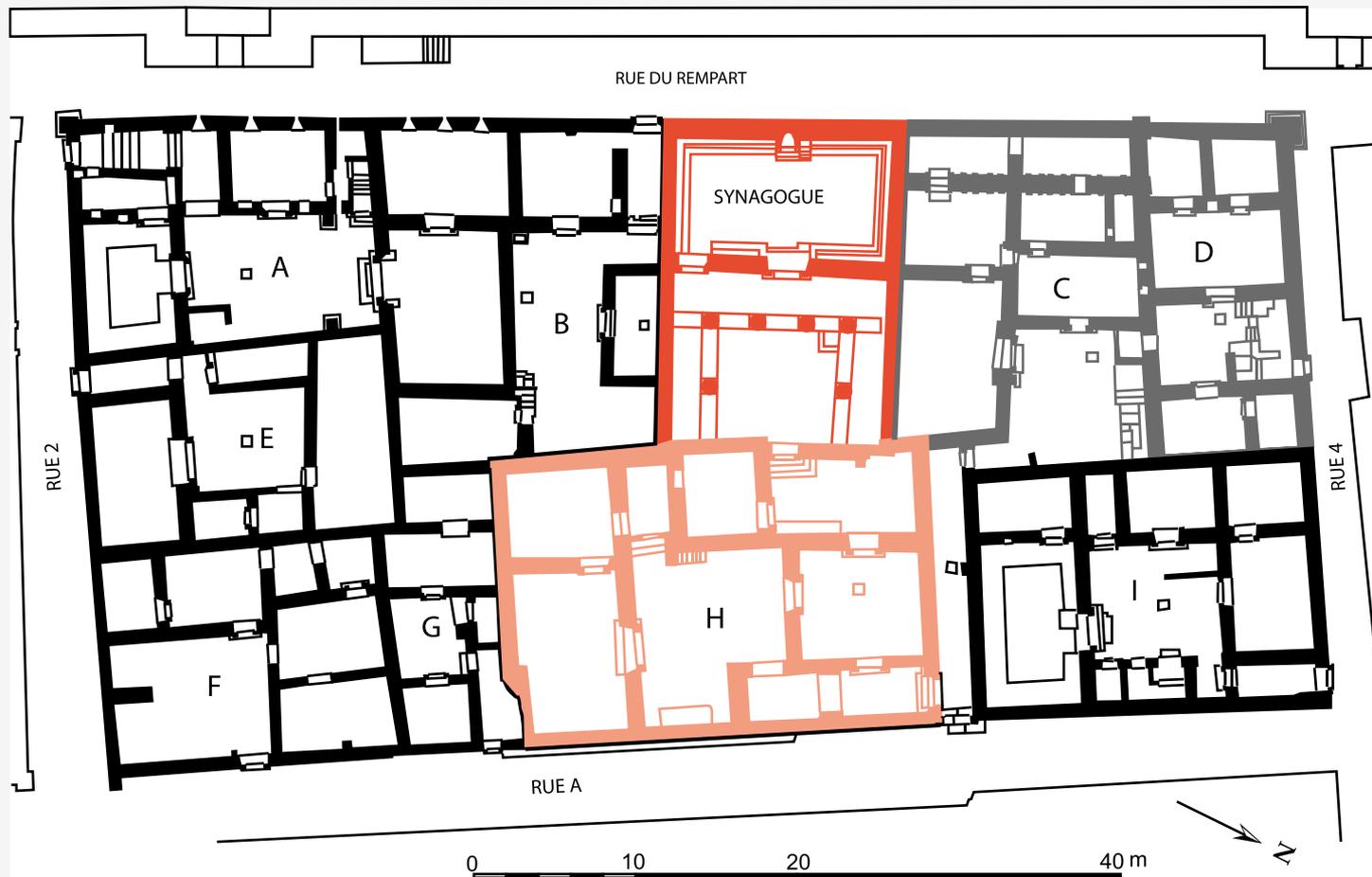


The 3rd c. synagogue in Dura

Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- The synagogue in Dura was built by adapting part of an insula next to the city wall, the building was accessed through a house
- The building consist of a peristyle courtyard and an assembly hall (13.7x7.7 m) with benches, but without the supporting columns
- In the center of the western wall is a semi-circular niche (facing Jerusalem) under arch supported by two columns - apparently the *'aron ha-qodesh* where the Torah scroll was stored
- The first synagogue was built in the second half of the 2nd c., the last phase (on the plan) is dated to 244/5 CE



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- The Dura synagogue has rich parietal fresco decoration, such that nobody at the time of the discovery expected
- It suggests developed tradition of narrative decoration based on Biblical stories (at least in the diaspora), but some details of the stories are based on oral tradition later found in *midrashim* and *agadot* (i.e. not necessarily canonical)
- Right: 'aron ha-qodesh at the time of the excavation
- Below: west wall at the time of the excavations, the whole wall is divided into scenes framed by ornamental frieze



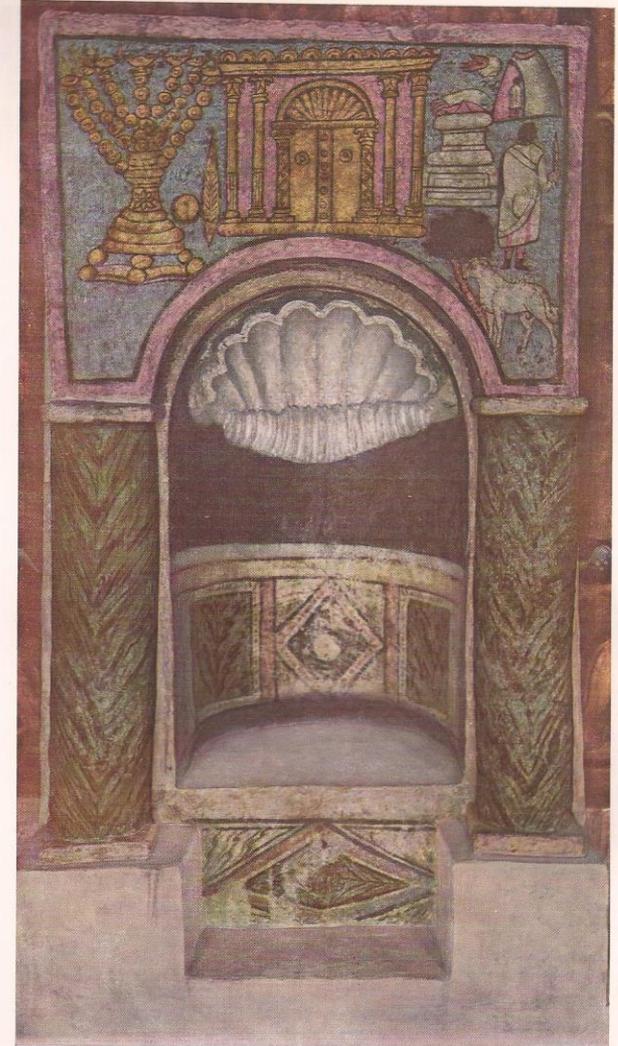
Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- The narrative includes story of Isaac and Jacob, Moses and crossing of the Red Sea, the history of the Ark of Covenant, stories of kings Solomon and David, prophets Elijah and Ezechiel and of Mordecai and Esther (festival of Purim)
- The centrality of Jerusalem and the Temple is emphasized in the program even after its destruction almost 200 years earlier



- Above: Temple in Jerusalem with Aron as the first High Priest (or the consecration of the Tabernacle)
- Right: 'aron ha-qodesh, depiction of the Temple façade above, menorah left and the sacrifice of Isaac right



Jewish archaeology

Synagogues

- The style of the frescoes is characterized by frontality, repetitiveness and schematic depictions (details of anatomy and garment), the importance of the personages is often indicated by their different size, the figures are often “floating” in the air without connection to the scene
- Such features put the frescoes from Dura firmly in the Near Eastern tradition although the execution is somewhat Western



- Above: Infant Moses is being put into the Nile
- Left: Mordecai and Esther

Burial practises

- The inhumation is absolutely predominant in the Levant
 - Cremation is found only in certain contexts, such as Phoenician *tophets* or in Roman colonies, where the settlers brought their cremation ritual with them from Italy
 - Practise of secondary burials in pits/designated chambers/ossuaries was already mentioned
 - The burial practises are varied and we cannot say that certain practise was exclusive to distinct ethnic or religious groups (exceptions, e.g. Jewish ossuaries, Roman cremations, exist) as different types of burials are often found alongside
 - There are however few regionally confined phenomena (e.g. tumuli in Hauran, tower tombs in Palmyra)
 - Social stratification plays larger role
1. Rock-cut tombs/hypogea – typically family/community tombs used for generations and continually expanded
 2. Mausolea – built or carved tombs above ground, typically containing sarcophagi
 3. Sarcophagi in the open (i.e. not in mausolea or hypogea)
 4. Pit/cist graves

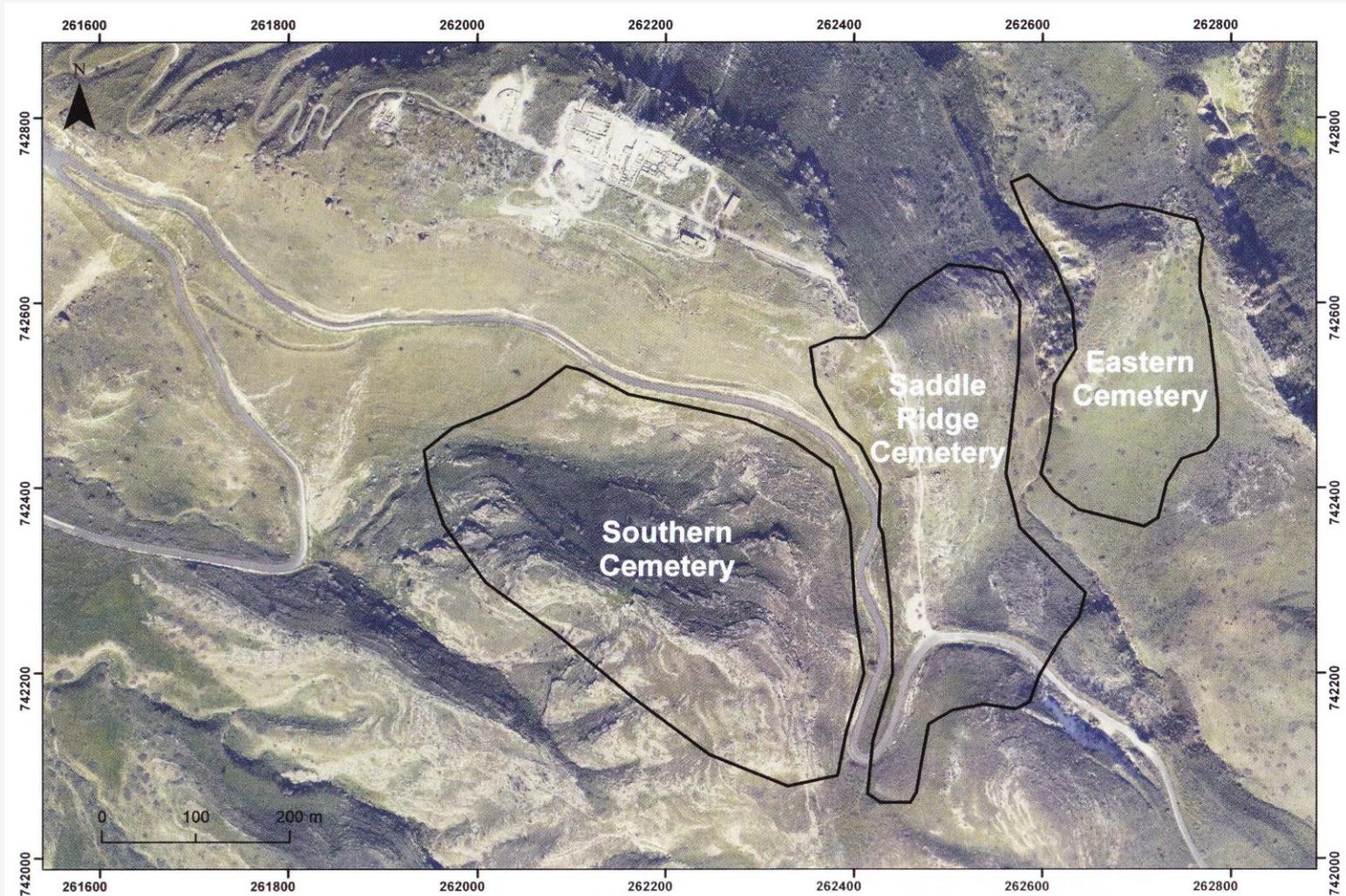
Special cases are:

- a) Tower tombs in Palmyra – several storeys high with loculi for internment like in the hypogea
- b) Roman cremations
- c) Hauran tumuli

Burial practises

Hippos

- The necropoleis developed to the south and east of the city along the main access road
- Southern Cemetary ("Necropolis Hill") contains rock-cut tombs
- Eastern Cemetery is exclusively composed of pit graves (likely poor strata of society)
- The Saddle Ridge Cemetary contains dug-out pit graves, sarcophagi in the open and built mausolea



Burial practises

Hippos

- The Saddle Ridge Cemetary contains pit graves (dug-out in the bedrock), sarcophagi in the open and built mausolea



Burial practises

Pit/cist graves

- The pit graves are simple dug/carved pit sometimes covered with slabs and equipped with a headstone
- Cist graves are lined with stones creating small chambre for the body and covered with slabs
- Both are wery common in all periods
- Headstones are the most common epigraphic source, although they often record only name and age of the deceased
- Pit graves on the eastern slope of the Saddle Ridge are indicated by basalt cover slabs (nowadays often displaced)



Burial practises

Sarcophagi

- The first sarcophagi start to appear on the coast in the 5th/4th c. BCE, and these are prestigious items imported from the Aegean
- They became more common in the 1st c. CE (now locally manufactured), start to quickly disseminate in the region during the 2nd c. CE and are being used until the Early Islamic period
- Their proliferation is probably connected to the rising fashion of sarcophagi in Rome and its dissemination in the provinces
- Marble sarcophagi are often imported from Asia Minor

Fragment of an unadorned limestone sarcophagus from the Saddle Ridge Cemetary



Burial practises

Sarcophagi

- Limestone sarcophagus in the open with garlands, Tel Kedesh

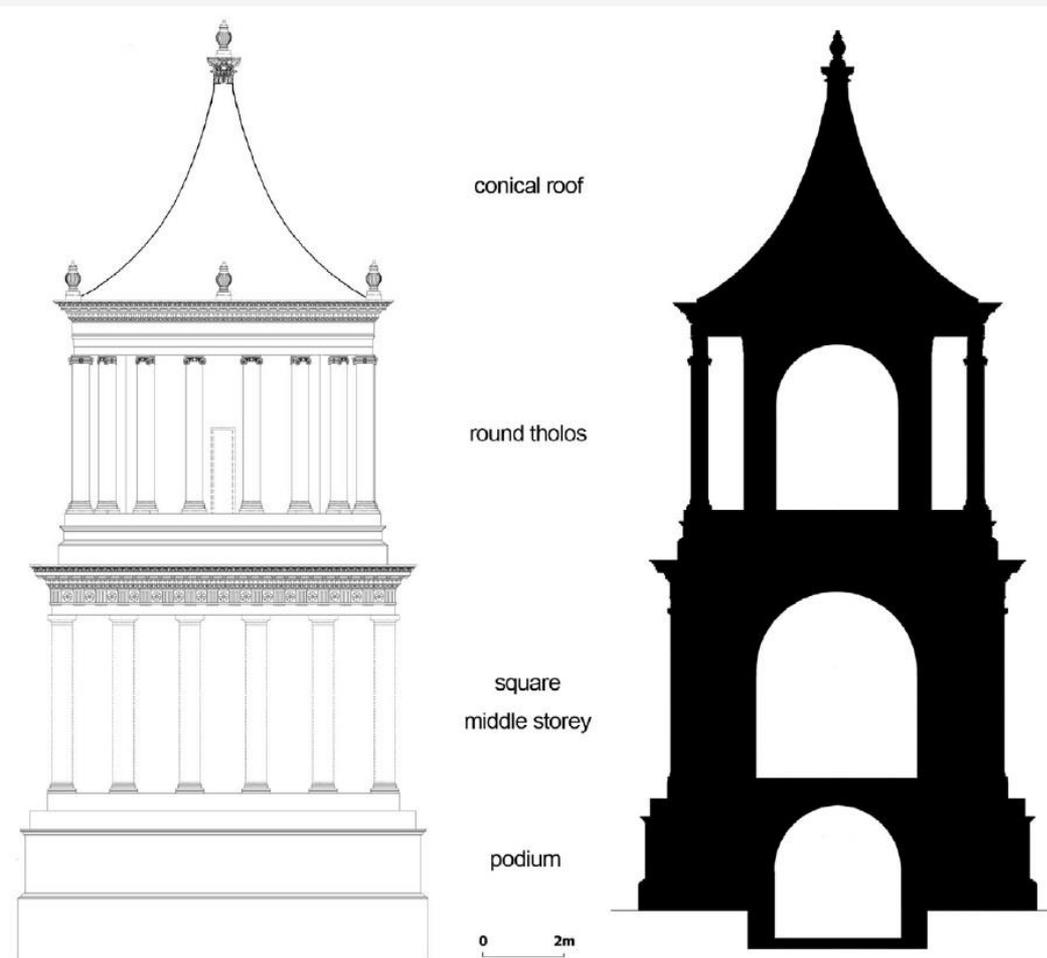


Burial practises

Mausolea

- Monumental mausolea start to appear already in the Hellenistic period, best examples being partly hewn and partly built tombs in Jerusalem and Herod's mausoleum at Herodium
- They typically consist of multiple storeys, might be rectangular or circular (or combination of both), sometimes in the shape of a temple
- The outer façade is often decorated with half-columns/pilasters, frieze and cornice

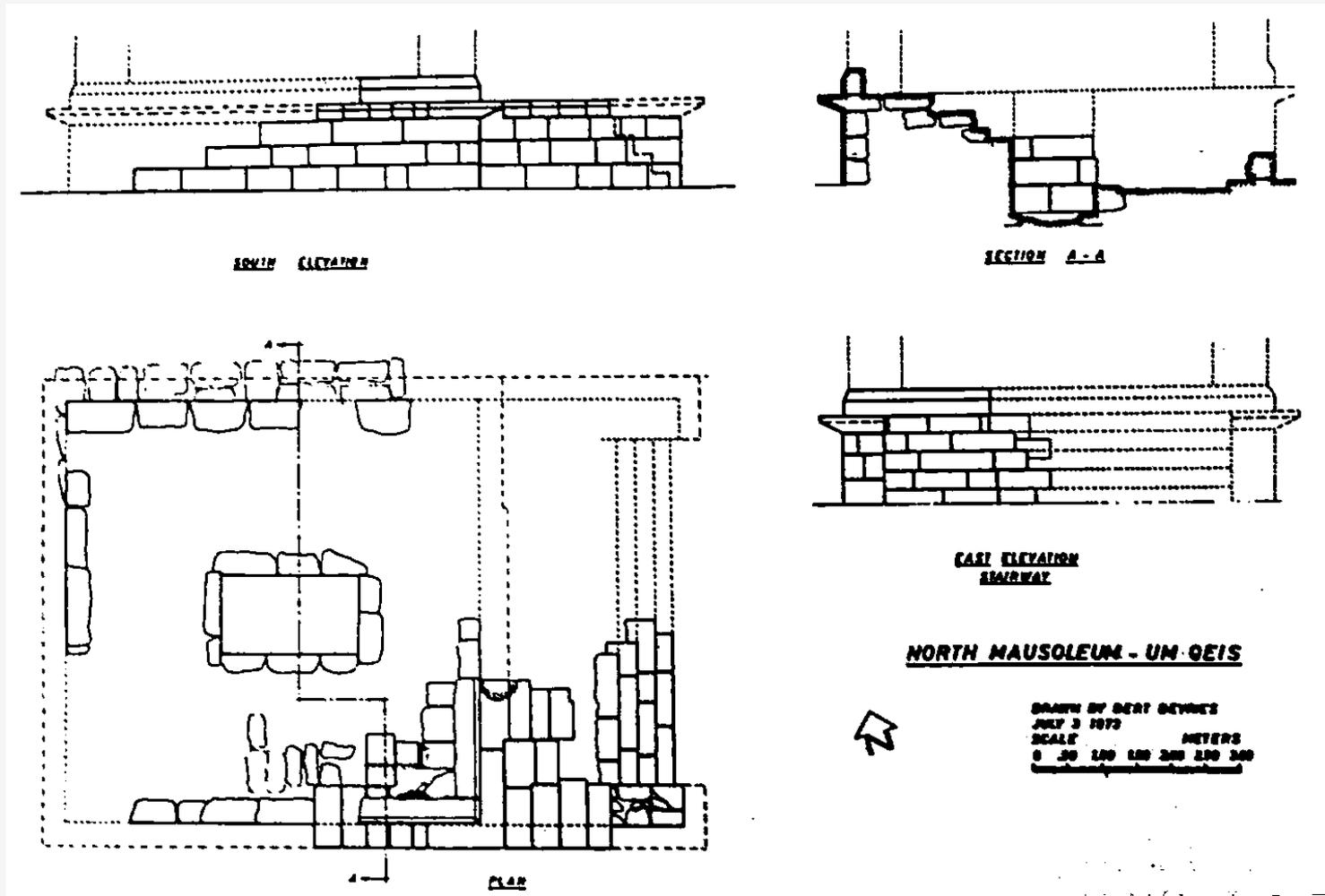
Left: Herod's Mausoleum, right: so-called Absalom's Tomb in Jerusalem, partly hewn and partly built



Burial practises

Mausolea

- A mausoleum built in the shape of a small podium Ionic temple, Gadara, dated according to rhymed epitaph found on the podium to 354 CE
- Ca. 6.38x6.25 m, note the single grave pit in the centre of the monument



Burial practises

Mausolea

- A mausoleum at the saddle ridge at Hippos
- There are remains of at least 3 other mausolea
- All were multistoreyed buildings with decorated façade similar to Herod's tomb
- Note the remains of a sarcophagus lid and a cist grave built next to the mausoleum
- Destroyed in the 363 earthquake

Bottom: fragment of a Doric frieze with rosettes from the mausoleum



Burial practises

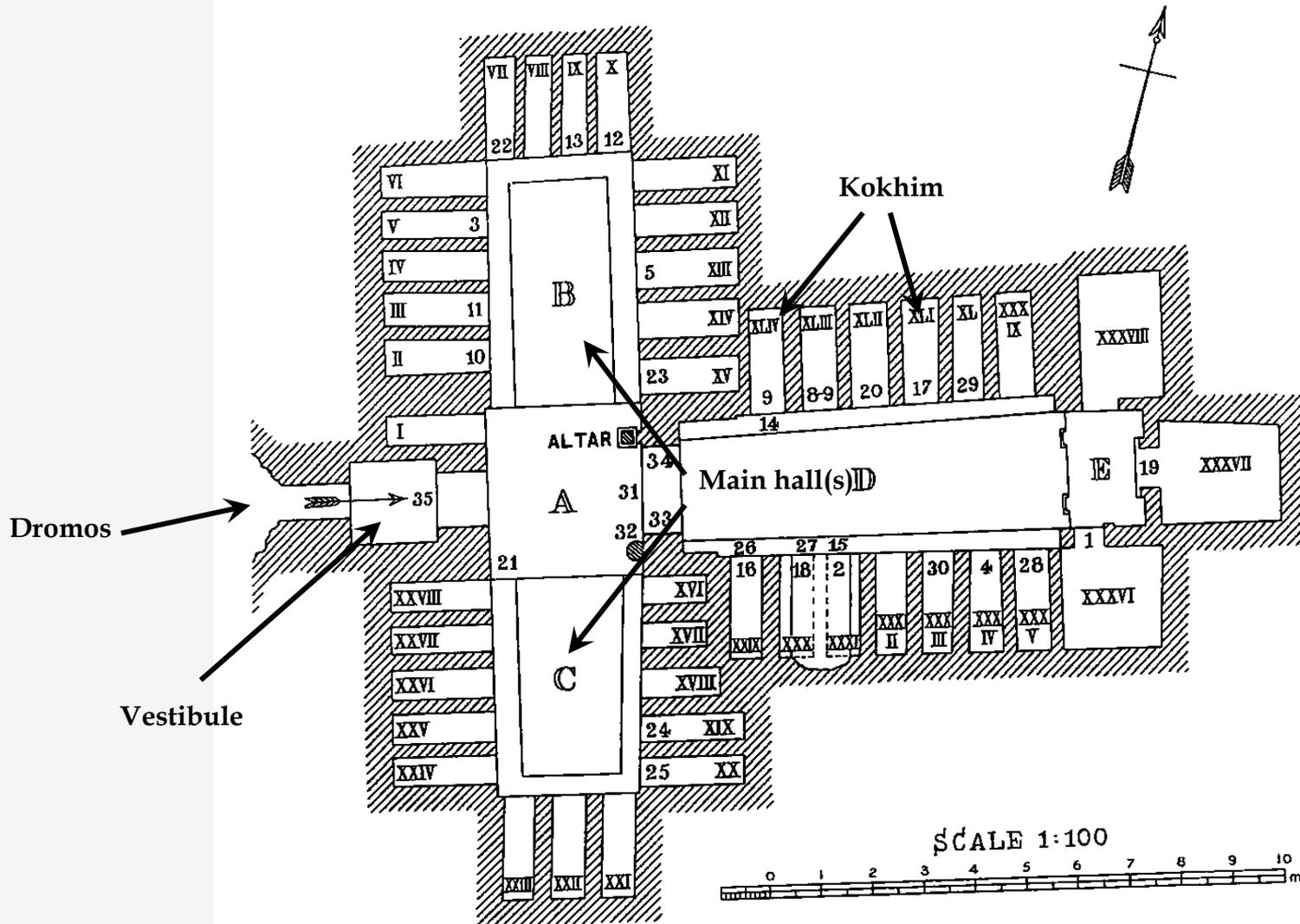
Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- The most common type of burial after the pit graves
- The components of a rock-cut tomb are: an access shaft (dromos), a forecourt, vestibule, main (standing) hall and loculi (Heb. *kokh*, pl. *kokhim*)
- Bodies/ossuaries were interred in *kokhim*/loculi
- Some were made to hold number of sarcophagi
- In the Late Roman and Byzantine period acrosolia/quadrosolia are used instead of *kokhim*/loculi – these are vaulted or rectangular niches hewn parallel in the walls of the main hall
- Throughs or pits are also hewn in the floor in the late periods
- The outer façade and the inner space of the tombs might be decorated
- Since such tombs typically belong to a family or community they are continually expanded and create large complexes over time

Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

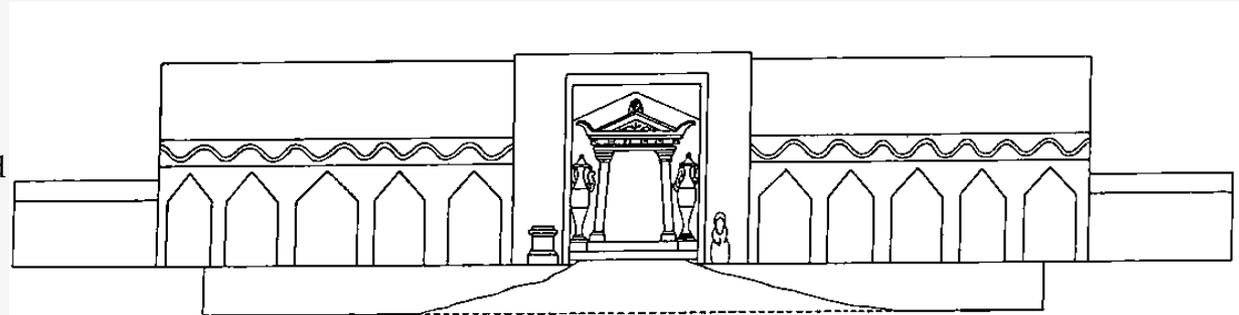
- Tomb I (17x21 m), Maresha, 3rd-2nd c. BCE (The Tomb of the Sidonians)



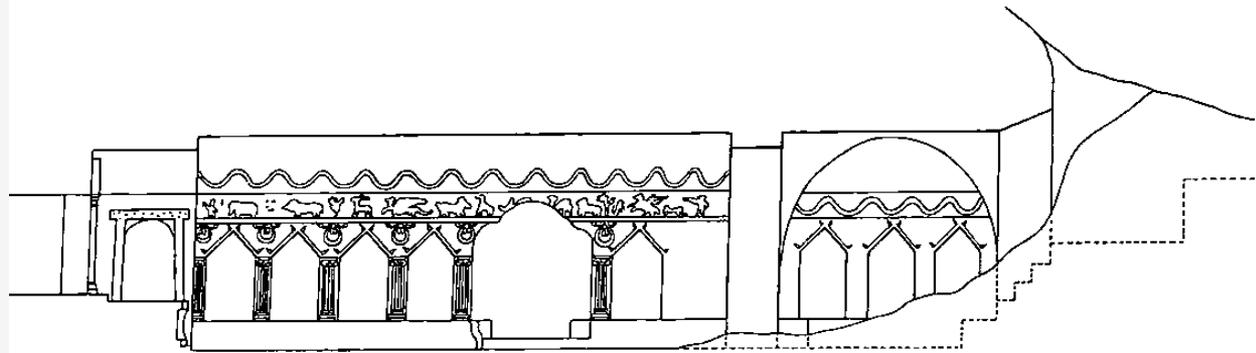
Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

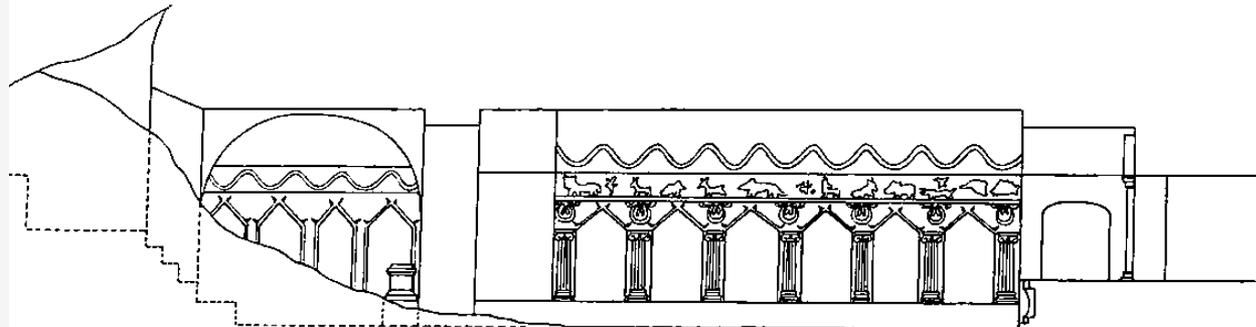
- Tomb I, Maresha, 3rd-2nd c. BCE
- The tomb is decorated with a painted frieze along the walls of the main halls (dotted garland) and additional animal and hunting frieze in the hall D
- Two passages are decorated with carved frame reminiscent of a Doric temple façade, flanked by painted amphoras
- All paintings are in style very Hellenistic with little Eastern features



Tomb I—Through Chambers B and C, looking East.



Tomb I—Through E D A, looking South.



Tomb I—Through E D A, looking North.

Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Tomb I, Maresha, 3rd-2nd c. BCE, the animals are identified in inscriptions, the deceased in the *kokhim* too



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Tomb I, Maresha, 3rd-2nd c. BCE, hunting scene



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Tomb I, Maresha, 3rd-2nd c. BCE, passage



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Beth Shearim, whose Jewish necropolis dates mainly between 2nd-5th c. CE

Small burial caves



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Beth Shearim Façade of the tomb of Yehuda ha-Nasi, note the original stone door



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Beth Shearim Tomb of Yehuda ha-Nasi, main hall containing acrosolia, loculi and passages to additional rooms



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Beth Shearim Tomb of Yehuda ha-Nasi, acrosolia with lids



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Beth Shearim Tomb of Yehuda ha-Nasi, one of the halls with sarcophagi



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

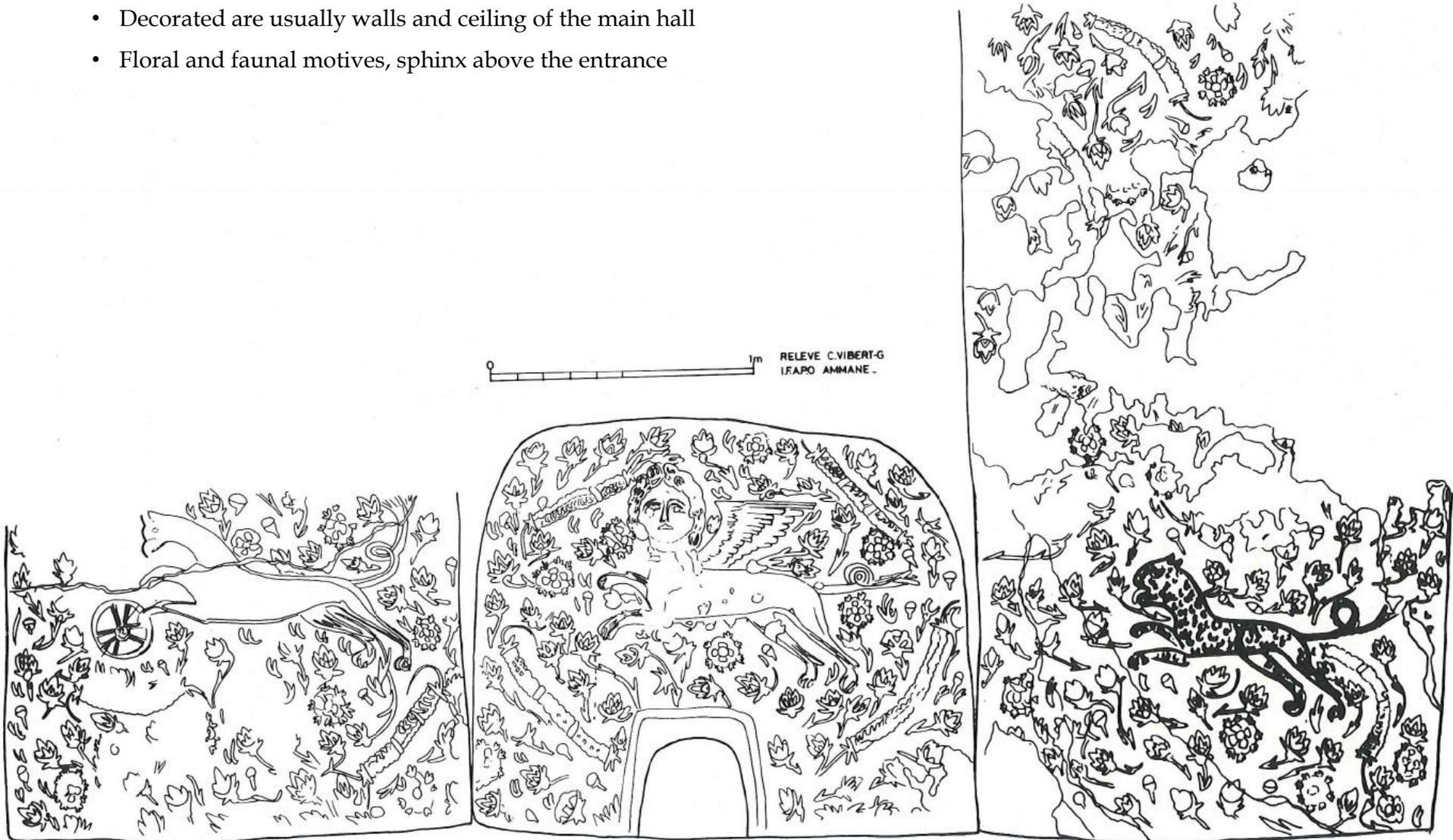
- Abila, city in white, necropoleis in red
- Several Roman period rock-cut tombs were decorated with paintings in the Roman period



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Abila, painted tombs of the 2nd-4th c. CE
- Decorated are usually walls and ceiling of the main hall
- Floral and faunal motives, sphinx above the entrance



Burial practises

Rock-cut tombs/hypogea

- Recently (2016) a new painted tomb was discovered in the necropolis of Capitolias
- The painting is well-crafted and very rich in detail and iconography – it apparently tells the story of the foundation of Capitolias, however the scene is set in semi-mythological dimension as the foundation is connected with the action of the gods
- Interestingly, while the execution, style and iconography is thoroughly Graeco-Roman, yet some inscriptions accompanying the depictions are in Aramaic written in Greek alphabet

Dionysus is helping workers clearing the place for the city



Burial practises

Sculptural decoration

- Apart from facades, some interior decoration and sarcophagi, funerary steles with depiction of the deceased or busts are often found, decorating pit-graves, mausolea and rock-cut tombs

Funerary steles from Scythopolis, soft limestone, note the crude workmanship and rigid frontality of all sculptures (3rd c. CE)



Burial practises

Sculptural decoration

- Funerary stele from Hippos, probably a wife and husband
- Tabula ansata probably held the names of the deceased (painted?)
- Again note the poor craftsmanship on the basalt and rigid frontality



Burial practises

Sculptural decoration

- Palmyrean tower tombs
- Built from the late 1st c. BCE to the 2nd c. CE
- The deceased were at first interred in loculi inserted in the outer face of the tower, later chambers with loculi are built on the inside
- The towers tombs, like hypogea and mausolea, are typically for a family/clan and are used for generations
- Hypogea were used alongside the towers

The valley of Tombs to the west of Palmyra



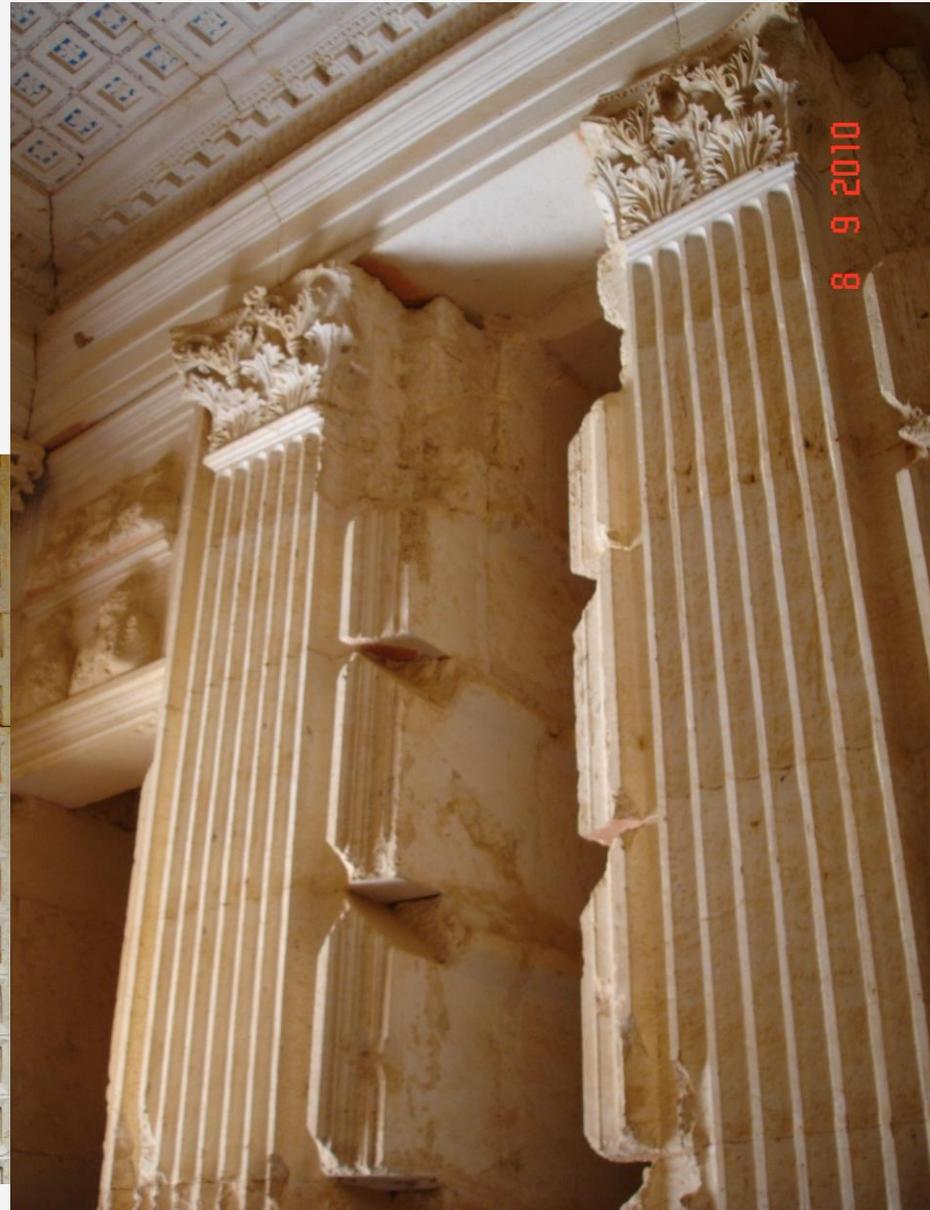
Tower of Elahbel (1st c. CE, destroyed in 2015)



Burial practises

Sculptural decoration

- Tower of Elahbel is richly decorated on the inside with Corinthian pilasters framing the loculi - note the etages for multiple burials above each other in the loculus
- Stucco decoration on the ceiling and walls



Burial practises

Sculptural decoration

- The funerary busts in Palmyra were carved from rectangular slabs of limestone and were used to seal the loculus with the body of the deceased
- They are manufactured between ca. 50 BCE-275 CE (production stops after conquest of Palmyra by Aurelian)
- Name is usually written on the slab most often in Palmyrene Aramaic but Greek also appear
- Attributes of profession might appear in the background
- The frontality of the depiction, lack of anatomic detail (e.g. smooth idealized faces), large eyes and stylized drapery place the sculptures in the Near Eastern tradition
- However, the garment, style of haircuts and facial hair and other details are clearly Roman
- Sculptures also follow technological development as after ca. 150 CE the eye pupils are commonly drilled (the method starts in the Antonine period)



Burial practises

Sculptural decoration

- Right: a priest



Brief summary

- Several markers of Jewish ethnicity can be identified in the Second Temple period
- Most of them is connected either with the perceptions of ritual purity (stone vessels, *mikwa'ot*) or particular funerary habits (stone ossuaries)
- Some of them are however confined to a short period of time (between ca. late 1st c. BCE to 70 CE), synagogues, *mikwa'ot* and some Jewish symbols in small art (menorah etc.) remain as the indicators of Jewish presence in the Late Roman-Byzantine period
- Synagogues performed several roles – as houses of prayer, schools, archives and village assemblies
- The shift from aniconic to figurative art in Jewish context occurred probably during the 2nd c. CE and Jews slowly developed iconography of the Biblical scenes (influenced by oral tradition and stylistically by Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern art)
- Burial practices in the Hellenistic and Roman period are varied, some phenomena are regionally confined (funerary towers), some could be linked to ethnic/religious background (cremations, ossuaries), others reflect social stratification (pit graves x monumental mausolea)
- Inhumation in family/clan/communal rock-cut tombs (often with secondary burials) is a tradition going back to the Chalcolithic period, persistent until the Early Arab period
- The diffusion of certain burial types (sarcophagi) and funerary sculptures (be it stelae or busts) can be linked to the influence of Roman funerary traditions and fashion
- These tendencies are combined with Near Eastern traditions (funerary, artistic etc.) creating quite original “provincial” art (e.g. Palmyrene funerary reliefs)
- This cross-fertilization is eventually transported back to Rome (artistic exchange on the sarcophagi between Asia Minor and Rome might be an example) in a process called “Globalization” where distant localities start to share similar ideas (as opposed to Romanization which is taken to be one-way influence from the centre to the periphery)