

ART AND JUDAISM IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology explores the Jewish experience with art from the Hellenistic era through the rise of Islam. It starts from the premise that Jewish art in antiquity was a “minority” or “ethnic” art and surveys ways that Jews fully participated in, transformed, and at times rejected the art of their general environment. *Art and Judaism* focuses on the politics of identity in the Greco-Roman world, even as it discusses ways that modern identity issues have sometimes distorted and at other times refined scholarly discussion of ancient Jewish material culture. *Art and Judaism*, the first historical monograph on ancient Jewish art in the English language in fifty years, evaluates earlier scholarship as it sets out in new directions. Placing literary sources in careful dialogue with archaeological discoveries, this “New Jewish Archaeology” is an important contribution to Judaic studies, religious studies, art history, and classics.

Steven Fine is Jewish Foundation Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati, where he specializes in the history of Judaism during the Greco-Roman period. His particular interest is the relationship between ancient Jewish literature (particularly rabbinic literature) and archaeology and art.

**ART AND JUDAISM IN THE
GRECO-ROMAN WORLD**

TOWARD A NEW JEWISH ARCHAEOLOGY

STEVEN FINE
UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521844918

© Steven Fine 2005

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fine, Steven.
 Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman world: toward a new Jewish archaeology / Steven Fine.
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
 ISBN 0-521-84491-6 (hardback)

1. Jewish art and symbolism. 2. Judaism – History – Post-exilic period, 586 B.C.–210 A.D.
 3. Judaism – History – Talmudic period, 10–425. 4. Synagogue art. 5. Synagogue architecture. 6. Judaism and art – History – To 1500. 7. Archaeology and religion. I. Title.

NK1672.F56 2005
 704.03'924038 – dc22 2004019667

ISBN-13 978-0-521-84491-8 hardback
 ISBN-10 0-521-84491-6 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this book and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

For Leah

נר מאיר על מנורת קדש
ויפי פנים על קומה זקופה

*A lamp shines on the holy menorah,
and a beautiful face on an upright figure.*

Ben Sirah 26

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>A Note on Transliteration and Translation</i>	xvii
Introduction	I
PART ONE. “THE ‘MOST UNMONUMENTAL PEOPLE’ OF THE WORLD”: MODERN CONSTRUCTIONS OF ANCIENT JEWISH ART	5
1 Building an Ancient Synagogue on the Delaware: Philadelphia’s Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue and Constructions of Jewish Art at the Turn of the Twentieth Century	12
2 The Old–New Land: Jewish Archaeology and the Zionist Narrative	22
3 Archaeology and the Search for Nonrabbinic Judaism	35
4 Art History: Textbooks and the Rhetoric of Jewish Artlessness	47
5 Toward a New Jewish Archaeology: Methodological Reflections	53
PART TWO. ART AND IDENTITY IN THE GRECO–ROMAN WORLD	57
6 Art and Identity in Latter Second Temple Period Judaism: The Hasmonean Royal Tombs at Modi’in	60
7 Art and Identity in Late Antique Palestine: The Na’aran Synagogue	82
8 Art and Identity in Diaspora Communities in Late Antiquity: From Rome to Nehardea	124
PART THREE. JEWISH “SYMBOLS” IN THE GRECO–ROMAN WORLD	135
9 Between Rome and Jerusalem: The Date Palm as a Jewish Symbol	140
10 “The Lamps of Israel”: The Menorah as a Jewish Symbol	146

CONTENTS

PART FOUR. READING HOLISTICALLY: ART AND THE LITURGY OF LATE ANTIQUE SYNAGOGUES	165
11 Liturgy and the Art of the Dura Europos Synagogue	172
12 Synagogue Mosaics and Liturgy in the Land of Israel	184
The Sepphoris Synagogue: A Liturgical Interpretation • 186	
The Torah, Its Shrine, and the Decoration of Late Antique Palestinian Synagogues • 189	
The Zodiac, Synagogue Mosaics, and Jewish Liturgy • 196	
13 Sanctity and the Art of Ancient Synagogues	206
Epilogue	210
<i>Notes</i>	215
<i>Selected Bibliography of Secondary Literature</i>	247
<i>Index of Primary Sources</i>	253
<i>General Index</i>	258

ILLUSTRATIONS

1	Ancient synagogues in the Land of Israel	page 6
2	Diaspora synagogues	7
3	The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue	13
4	The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue, main entrance	13
5	The large synagogue at Kefar Baram	14
6	Nahum Slouschz (center) and his team with the Hammath Tiberias menorah	24
7	Nahum Slouschz with a British inspector and workmen, Hammath Tiberias Synagogue excavations	27
8	E. L. Sukenik in the Arbel Synagogue	28
9	Menorah from a synagogue in Priene	29
10	Drawing of the Beth Alpha Synagogue mosaic	30
11	Tomb of Jason, Jerusalem	62
12	Tomb of Zechariah, Jerusalem	62
13	Tomb of Absalom, Jerusalem	63
14	Tomb of the Kings, Jerusalem, reconstruction drawing	64
15	Image of a funerary monument with three pyramids, on an ossuary	64
16	Graffito of a ship, Tomb of Jason, Jerusalem	64
17	Anchor on a lepton of Herod the Great	65
18	Image of a funerary monument on an ossuary	65
19	Reconstruction drawing of Herod's Temple	68
20	Tyrian sheqel	71
21	Eagle on a lepton of Herod the Great	74
22	Silver denarius of Vespasian, <i>Judaea Capta</i> Series	77
23	Fragment of the interior vault of Hulda's Gate	78
24	Drawing of the Na'aran Synagogue mosaic	84
25	The zodiac panel of the Na'aran Synagogue mosaic	85
26	Silver tetradrachm of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, year 2, 132/134 C.E.	86
27	The Leda sarcophagus, Beth She'arim	87
28	The synagogue of Maon in Judaea, phase 1, reconstruction drawing	88
29	The mosaic of the synagogue of Hammath Tiberias IIa	89
30	The synagogue of Hammath Tiberias IIa, reconstruction	90
31	Zodiac panel of the Sepphoris Synagogue mosaic	91
32	Zodiac panel of the Beth Alpha Synagogue mosaic	92
33	The Rehov Synagogue inscription	93

ILLUSTRATIONS

34	Mosaic from the House of Leontis, Beth Shean	93
35	The Chorazin Synagogue	94
36	Fragment of a sculpted lion, Chorazin Synagogue	94
37	Torah shrine base, En Samsum	95
38	Torah shrine base, En Samsum, image of Daniel in the lions' den	95
39	Mosaic of the Jericho Synagogue	96
40	Image of a soldier from the Meroth Synagogue mosaic	96
41	Synagogue screen from Tiberias	97
42	Ahasveros on his throne with Esther crowned with a "city of gold" to the upper right, Dura Europos Synagogue	106
43	Bas relief of a soldier and vintners from the Chorazin Synagogue	107
44	Bas relief of Medusa from the Chorazin Synagogue	107
45	The Temple of Jerusalem, model at the Holyland Hotel, Jerusalem	109
46	The mosaic of the synagogue at Hamman Lif (Naro), Tunisia	125
47	The Sardis Synagogue, looking eastward	126
48	The Sardis Synagogue, looking westward	127
49	Jewish gold glass from Rome	127
50	Villa Torlonia catacomb, Rome	128
51	Seasons sarcophagus, Rome	129
52	The Ark of the Covenant in the Temple of Dagon, Dura Europos Synagogue	130
53	A Samaritan symbol of the State of Israel, Holon	137
54	Bronze coin of the First Jewish Revolt	143
55	Bronze <i>Judaea Capta</i> coin of Vespasian	143
56	Bronze coin of the Bar Kokhba Revolt	144
57	Lozenge of a palm tree, Capernaum Synagogue	144
58	The Arch of Titus, Rome	147
59	The sacred objects of the Jerusalem Temple, Arch of Titus, Rome	148
60	Lepton of Mattathias Antigonos	149
61	Menorah graffito, Jerusalem	149
62	A menorah from the Roman catacombs	153
63	Limestone menorah from the Synagogue of Maon in Judaea, reconstruction drawing	154
64	Menorah in the mosaic of the Hammath Tiberias IIa Synagogue, juxtaposed to a ripe pomegranate	155
65	Christian grave marker, Avdat	156
66	The Samaritan synagogue of el-Ḥirbeh, reconstruction drawing	158
67	The menorah with other sacred objects, mosaic of the Samaritan synagogue of el-Ḥirbeh	158
68	Limestone menorah from Hammath Tiberias A	161
69	Model of the Beth Alpha Synagogue, Yeshiva University Museum	170
70	The Dura Europos Hebrew liturgical parchment	175
71	Drawing of the Dura Europos Synagogue	178
72	Moses with a scroll, Dura Europos Synagogue	178
73	Wilderness encampment and the miraculous well of Be'er, Dura Europos Synagogue	180
74	Samuel anointing David, Dura Europos Synagogue	182

ILLUSTRATIONS

75	Drawing of the Sepphoris Synagogue mosaic	186
76	Basket of first fruits, Sepphoris Synagogue mosaic	187
77	The Gerasa Synagogue mosaic	187
78	Torah shrine aedicula from the Nabratein Synagogue	190
79	Torah shrine panel, Beth Alpha Synagogue mosaic	190
80	Reconstruction drawing of the Beth Alpha Synagogue	191
81	“Ancient Synagogue Apse” in the exhibition installation of <i>Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World</i>	192
82	The binding of Isaac, Sepphoris Synagogue mosaic	194
83	Wall mosaic, Church of San Vitale, Ravenna	195
84	The binding of Isaac, Beth Alpha Synagogue mosaic	196
85	Fragment of the zodiac panel of the Huseifa Synagogue mosaic	196
86	Zodiac panel, Tallaras Baths, Island of Astypalaea, Greece	198
87	Illustration of the Zodiac and the heavens in <i>Sefer ha-Evrontot</i>	201

ABBREVIATIONS

In deference to readers from numerous disciplines who might use this volume, abbreviations have been kept to a bare minimum.

- AJR* *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994.
- AJAAD* R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998.
- AJAALI* R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988.
- ASHAAD* *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, eds. D. Urman and P. V. M. Flesher. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995.
- ASR* *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981.
- b.* *Babylonian Talmud*.
- EJ* *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Jerusalem: Keter, 1972.
- FDS* *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, eds. L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss. *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series*. Portsmouth, RI, 2000.
- GLAJJ* *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, ed. M. Stern. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976–84.
- JCP* *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction During the Greco–Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine. London: Routledge, 1999.
- JE* *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901–6.
- JLA* *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 3: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, Volume Four: The Special Problem of the Synagogue*, ed. J. Neusner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001.
- m.* *Mishnah*.
- NEAEHL* *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1993.
- NJPS* *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985.

ABBREVIATIONS

- OCD* *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, eds. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, 3rd ed.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- OENEA* *Oxford Encyclopedia of Near Eastern Archaeology*, ed. E. M. Meyers. New
York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- t.* *Tosefta*. Unless otherwise noted, ed. S. Lieberman (New York and
Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992) is cited through
tractate *Baba Batra*, ed. M. S. Zuckerman (Jerusalem: Wahrman,
1970) is cited from *Sanhedrin* through *Uqtsin*.
- γ.* *Jerusalem (or Palestinian) Talmud*.

PREFACE

On a sunny January afternoon in the year 2000, I boarded a white tram for the descent from the elegantly situated J. Paul Getty Center above Los Angeles to Sepulveda Canyon below. My mind was racing. I had just met with Catherine Soussloff, editor of *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History* (1999),¹ and Margaret Olin, whose *The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art*² was nearing completion. Both were then Fellows at the Getty. It was an eventful lunch. Soussloff and Olin were studying the difficult attitude of modern scholarship toward Jewish visuality. I, by contrast, had lived it. They researched the giants of Jewish art scholarship, whereas I had studied with some of them, met others late in their lives, or known their students. They articulated the disdain toward this material in much of the scholarly discourse, whereas as a young student I had been stung by the arrogance of scholars who “knew” that Jewish art was inferior – or even nonexistent. This situation had so perplexed me that after completing my M.A. in art history in 1984, I left this discipline behind to try my luck in the study of ancient Judaism – where years later I realized that this attitude had also left its mark. Taking my leave of Olin and Soussloff and energized by their postmodern perspective, I decided that the time was finally right to write the volume that you hold in your hands – a project for which I had been preparing myself since my first visit to Israel as a high school student. Since those days during the mid-1970s, I have worked to gain some of the skills necessary to interpret Jewish history, rabbinic literature, the history of art, and the history of religions. More recently, I have focused on developing some of the professional maturity and sophistication necessary to integrate these disciplines.³

Before presenting the results of this study, I am pleased to thank all those who have supported this project. I thank the Society of Biblical Literature for support of my visit to study Jewish remains in Rome and vicinity and Robert O. Freedman of Baltimore Hebrew University for my sabbatical in 2001–2, which I spent in Israel. The Charles Phelps Taft Memorial Fund at the University of Cincinnati awarded me a Faculty Research Fellowship for study in Israel during the Summer of 2004 that allowed for some last-minute tuning of this manuscript. Libraries, museums, and archives have been extremely generous with their time and resources. In Baltimore I thank the Joseph Meyerhoff Library of Baltimore Hebrew University, the Milton S. Eisenhower Library at Johns Hopkins University, and the library of the Walters Art Museum. Israeli institutions include the A-B Institute of Samaritan Studies, the Central Zionist Archive, the Hebrew University Archives, Genazim: The Archives of the Hebrew Writers’ Association in Israel, the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology Library and Slide Library, the Israel Antiquities Authority Archives, the Israel Exploration Society, the Israel Film

PREFACE

Archive–Jerusalem Cinematheque, the Israel Museum, the Israel State Archives, the Jewish National and University Library, the Shalom Hartman Institute, the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, and the Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute Library. In Cincinnati, I am most grateful to the University of Cincinnati Library System, the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion’s Klau Library, the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, and the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. I also thank the Semitic Museum at Harvard University, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, and the Palestine Exploration Fund in London for their assistance. This volume was published with the help of the Charles Phelps Taft Memorial Fund of the University of Cincinnati.

My students in Baltimore, Jerusalem, and Cincinnati have greatly contributed to this volume. I especially thank Bonnie Gracer, Sara Lewis, Heather Murphy, J. Renee Dunnagan, Gerdy Trachtman, Derika Wellington, and Libby White for their challenges and insights. More than I can recount, colleagues, friends, and teachers near and far have helped to make this a better book. I particularly thank Dan Barag, Albert Baumgarten, Joseph Baumgarten, George Berlin, John Brolley, Isaiah Gafni, Stephen A. Kaufman, Lee I. Levine, Eric M. Meyers, Gila Naveh, Jacob Neusner, Benyamim Tsedaka, Steven M. Wasserstrom, and Anthony D. York for their assistance at various stages. Steven Bowman, David Ellenson, Louis Feldman, Elka Klein, Frederic Krome, Ruth Langer, Stuart S. Miller, Rachel Neis, Margaret Olin, Tessa Rajak, Richard S. Sarason, Jonathan D. Sarna, and the late Joseph Gutmann read and commented on specific chapters, adding much to my process. Mark Chancey, Jaś Elsner, Yaacov M. Moses, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Ziony Zevit read the entire manuscript, for which I am especially grateful. Andrew Beck and his staff at Cambridge and Eleanor Umali and the people of Techbooks have made the final stages of this project most pleasant, for which I owe them much. J. Renee Dunnagan prepared the Index of Primary Sources. I would be remiss if I were not to thank my teachers, many of whose footprints may be felt throughout this volume. I particularly thank Yearl E. Schwartz, Richard D. Hecht, Bezalel Narkiss, Dov Noy, Dov Berkowitz, Selma Holo, Pratapaditya Pal, Bruce Zuckerman, Daniel Landes, Elieser Slomovic, Arie Strikowsky, Lee I. Levine, Avigdor Shinan, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, and remember the late Stephen S. Kayser, Amos Funkenstein, and Menahem Stern.

Most of all, I thank my wife, Leah Bierman Fine, for her loving and constant support, for her unwavering concern for all that I find exciting – and for pushing me to keep my writing “interesting.” The reader will decide if I have succeeded in this task. Our elder son, Elisha Nir Fine, now thirteen, is my tireless travel companion, discussion partner, and sometimes research assistant. The contribution of our preschooler, Yaakov Meir Fine, to this project resides in his ability to effortlessly interrupt my deepest concentration with a giggle and with a glimmer of his shining eyes to teach me what is really important. Leah, Elisha, and Koby are my constant reminders that human beings, created in the image of the Divine, are the only true “Jewish symbols.”⁴

Jerusalem, Israel
 Tammuz, 5764
 July 2004

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

Transliteration of Hebrew and Aramaic characters follows the “general” system used by the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972, 1:90) with the exception that the letter *qof* is transliterated with a “q.” Hebrew and Greek nouns that appear in the *American Heritage Dictionary: Second College Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991) are treated as English words. Names that appear in Biblical literature are spelled in standard English forms, except when other transliterations have become standard in scholarly literature. *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version* (London: Nelson, 1965) generally served as the starting point for translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and the Apocrypha.