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Was the Western Diaspora Cut Off from Israel? A Case Study of Sardis and Hamath Tiberias

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**Was the Western Diaspora
Cut off from Israel?
A Case Study of Sardis and Hamath Tiberias**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of Classical Studies
from The College of William and Mary

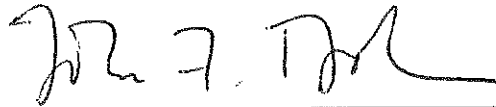
by

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Accepted for HONORS



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Williamsburg, VA
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Was the Western Diaspora Cut Off from Israel?

**A Case Study of Sardis
and Hamath Tiberias**

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Illustrations on previous page:

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Abbreviations

<i>AJ</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Dig. Just.</i>	<i>Digest of Justinian</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panerion</i>
<i>Quest. Ex.</i>	<i>Questions from Exodus</i>

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Introduction

In 2007, Israeli scholars Arye Edrei and Doron Mendels co-authored an article entitled “A Split Jewish Diaspora: Its Dramatic Consequences.”¹ Their thesis is that two distinct diasporas arose during the Second Temple Period, a western diaspora, Greek in outlook and language and an eastern diaspora more closely tied to Israel due to their common reliance on Hebrew and Aramaic. The Jerusalem temple had provided the main artery of communication between the two until its destruction in 70 C.E. With the administrative center no longer in existence, the two diasporas went through a substantive split, creating two separate Judaisms.

In support of their argument, Edrei and Mendels point out that two radically different literatures arose from the East and the West: an oral corpus comprised of the *Mishnah*, *Midrash* and the *Talmuds* in the East and a written corpus of the *Apocrypha* and *Pseudepigrapha* in the West. The Rabbis summarily rejected the western corpus and there was no attempt to translate the eastern corpus into Greek or Latin.²

To Edrei and Mendels, this was evidence of a language barrier that was already in place even during second temple times. The Palestinian sages seem to have known Greek to varying degrees, but it cannot be concluded that Jews in the Greek diaspora understood Hebrew. Edrei and Mendels write that all the western diaspora synagogue

¹ Arye Edrei and Doron Mendels. “A Split Jewish Diaspora: Its Dramatic Consequences.” *JSP* 16.2 (2007): 97-137.

² Edrei and Mendels, “Split Diaspora,” 95.

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inscriptions are written in Greek in contrast to the Palestinian synagogue inscriptions, which are in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew.³

The Greek inscriptions of the western diaspora further illustrate this supposed split. They emphasize a Hellenistic focus on the individual donor while the Aramaic and Hebrew inscriptions reflect a rabbinic worldview that places the community at the center. The Greek inscriptions in Israel are direct translations of Hebrew and Aramaic terminology.⁴ To Edrei and Mendels, the difference in the epigraphy illustrates three things: First, there existed a difference between the character of the synagogues in Israel and in Greek-speaking diaspora. Secondly, Israel was under a strong rabbinic influence while the western diaspora was under a Hellenistic influence. Third, Greek and Hebrew culture influenced the synagogues in the Land of Israel while the western synagogue did not draw at all from the eastern synagogue model.⁵

Edrei and Mendels assert that no Jewish spiritual centers were developed in the West because there are no laws or sayings attributed to western rabbis in the entire corpus of rabbinic literature and there are very few references to the western diaspora in general. Further, when the Romans sent spies to infiltrate a Jewish center of learning, they had to send them all the way to Usha, in Galilee, to do so.⁶ Thus religious innovations such as the *haggadah* and the liturgy which came from the Palestinian academies and *yeshivot*

³ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 101; This is the most erroneous claim of Edrei and Mendels. See the Epigraphy section of this study.

⁴ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 101.

⁵ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 102.

⁶ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 102-103.

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were lost to the West. This included the seminal prayer of Jewish liturgy, the *amidah* which was not mentioned once in the entire corpus of western Jewish literature.⁷

There would be many ways to test the theories of Edrei and Mendels. Since they relied so heavily on literary evidence, one way to do this would be to compare and contrast archaeological sites in Israel and both diasporas. Unfortunately, the eastern diaspora, with its cultural center in Babylonia, exists solely in the literary record and there are no archaeological remains to date.⁸ Therefore this study will serve as a case study of two synagogue sites, one in the western diaspora and one in Israel to see whether the split that Edrei and Mendels see as so explicit in the literary record is as evident in the archaeological record. It should be noted that many archaeological sites exist in Israel and throughout the western diaspora and different combinations of synagogues from each may yield markedly different results. Ancient synagogues range from the quite small to the very large and their decoration and ornamentation range from the lavish to the spartan. The two synagogues chosen for this study, Hamath Tiberias in Galilee and Sardis in Anatolian Peninsula, were lavishly decorated. The rich nature of their material culture made them prime candidates for a contrast and comparison.

Due to Edrei's and Mendels' extensive reliance on the literary record, much of their argument cannot be substantiated archaeologically. Instead, by comparing and contrasting the orientation of the two buildings, the decorations and ritual objects and the epigraphy found in each, this study will test whether continuity existed between Galilee

⁷ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 123.

⁸ Lee Levine. *The Ancient Synagogue, The First Thousand Years*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2000), 266.

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and Anatolia. Continuity would run counter to Edrei's and Mendels' claim that communication between the West and Israel ceased after 70 C.E.

Both buildings reoriented toward Jerusalem around the third century C.E.⁹ This is significant because this seems to agree with the formation and implementation of the *amidah* prayer sequence. Edrei and Mendels claim that there is no evidence of the *amidah* prayer sequence reaching the West because it is never specifically mentioned in western Judaic literature.¹⁰ While that may be the case, the physical remains would seem to indicate otherwise.

By reviewing the material culture and decoration found at both Hamath Tiberias and Sardis, we find the Judaic symbols of *menorot*, lions and ritual incense holders belie a common Jewish identity. Edrei and Mendels claim that Hellenistic influence pervaded western synagogues while Palestinian synagogues followed rabbinic norms.¹¹ This is simply not the case in this study sample. Both sites contained evidence of Hellenistic influence: the Hamath Tiberias floor mosaics portray the Greek god Helios and the zodiac alongside *menorot* and *shofarot* and the Sardis synagogue contained cult objects of the goddess Cybele alongside typical Jewish symbols.

Lastly, the epigraphy found at both sites fall into two categories: labels and dedications. The label inscriptions reveal a common perception of both buildings as places of worship. The dedicatory inscriptions add some credence to the theory of Edrei and Mendels since the formulaic inscriptions from Hamath Tiberias and the more

⁹ Andrew Seager, "The Building History of the Sardis Synagogue." *AJA* 76.4 (1972), 434; Moshe Dothan. *Hamath Tiberias, Early Synagogues and the Hellenistic and Roman Remains*. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 25.

¹⁰ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 126.

¹¹ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 102.

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personal inscriptions from Sardis fit a pattern suggested by them.¹² Also, a review of the names listed in the donor texts reveals Hebraic names alongside Hellenized names. The prevalence of the Hebrew and Aramaic origins to the Hamath Tiberias Greek names places that synagogue squarely in Galilee. Yet enough of a continuity exists because some of the same names were found at both places. While the dedicatory pattern and name evidence suggests a cultural difference, it does not follow that the two communities were completely cut off from one another.

The evidence listed above reveals that although cultural differences between the two communities can be seen, Hamath Tiberias and Sardis are overwhelmingly similar to one another. This casts doubt on the theory of a split diaspora as advocated by Edrei and Mendels.

¹² Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 101.

Chapter 1: Orientation

The cities of Hamath Tiberias in the Levant and Sardis on the Anatolian Peninsula are in many respects quite different from one another. The Jewish communities that resided in each possessed a different history and even a different cultural outlook. Yet from the orientation of the two buildings and the architectural features of each, we can determine that some continuity existed between these markedly different fourth century C.E. congregations.

Sardis and its Jewish Community

The ruins of the Sardis synagogue are the largest on record and it was placed very prominently in the city. Upon review of the building stages of the Sardis synagogue, a connection with the contemporary trends in worship coming out of the Jewish centers in Israel, particularly the *amidah* prayer sequence, can be seen. This is adverse to the claim of Edrei and Mendels that the *amidah* sequence does not appear in the literary corpus that came out of the West.¹³ Secondly, the description of the large Alexandrian synagogue found in the *Tosefta* bears striking resemblance to the ruins of the Sardis synagogue. The significance of this resemblance rises out of Edrei's and Mendels' claim that a divisive split occurred after the events of 70 C.E. and according to them, the community of Sardis would not have been aware of the *Tosefta* and its description of the Alexandrian synagogue.

It took the Sardis Jewish community several centuries to reach the prominence it enjoyed by the late third – early fourth centuries C.E. Jews had resided in

¹³ Edrei and Mendels, *Split Diaspora*, 126.

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Sardis for nearly seven centuries by this time. The Jewish community in Sardis began in the early third century B.C.E. In 334 B.C.E., the city had capitulated to Alexander the Great as he chipped away at Persian interests in the Anatolian peninsula. Upon Alexander's death, Sardis became the focal point of a struggle between the Seleucids and the kings of Pergamon. In 282 B.C.E. the Seleucids won the struggle and Sardis officially became a Greek city-state.¹⁴

To shore up the new eastern holdings, the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III ordered the governor of Babylonia to forcibly resettle about 2000 Jewish families to strategic locations in Lydia and Pyrgia. The emigrants were supposedly given land for homes, vineyards and tax incentives. (Josephus, *AJ* 12.147-151).¹⁵ About 80 years later, the Seleucids won their struggle against the Egyptian Ptolemaic dynasty in Judea and controlled the center of Jewish life, Jerusalem. The Jews who dwelt in Sardis now had a greater connection to their coreligionists in Judea. This connection would continue through the Roman and Byzantine Periods.

In 133 B.C.E., the Romans took over Sardis and it became the principal city of its judicial district.¹⁶ By this time, the Jewish community had thrived in this overwhelmingly Greek city for over a century and a half. At times, their relationship with the Greek officials was less than cordial. On at least one occasion, the Jews of Sardis had to rely on Roman intervention:

Decree of the people at Sardis...Whereas the Jewish citizens living in our city have continually received many great privileges from the people and have now come before

¹⁴ Collete Hemingway, "Sardis." n.p. [cited 10 September 2010]. Online: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/srds/hd_srds.htm.

¹⁵ Marianne Bonz, "The Jewish Community of Ancient Sardis: A Reassessment of Its Rise to Prominence." *HSCP* 93 (1990): 347.

¹⁶ Hemingway, "Sardis."

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the council and the people have pleaded that as their laws and freedoms have been restored to them by the Roman Senate and people, they may, in accordance with their accepted customs, come together and have a communal life and adjudicate suits among themselves and that a place be given them in which they may gather together...and offer their ancestral prayers and sacrifices... (Josephus *AJ* 14.259-261)¹⁷

Thus, it would seem that the Jewish community of Sardis enjoyed privileges perhaps unprecedented in the Roman world. The political and perhaps economic status of the Jewish community in Sardis, as well as throughout the Roman Empire, improved even more under the Severan dynasty in the late second and early third centuries C.E., especially under the 212 C.E. *Constitutio Antoniniana* of Caracalla, in which subjects of the Roman Empire were given citizenship in an effort to broaden the tax base and defray the ruinous debt incurred by the luxurious Severan lifestyle. The downside of this legislation for the Jews is that new citizens who wished to hold public office needed to perform the rituals of the city liturgies.¹⁸ Sardis always possessed an intense Greek character from the Archaic Period onward, even under Persian rule, so it is not surprising that the Christianity and Judaism practiced in the city were heavily Hellenized. Had the Jewish community wished to remain a separate and closed society, it seems that they need only have kept to themselves and still reaped many of the benefits of citizenship. However, it is a testament to the aims of this minority community that they wished to be involved in civic life in Sardis and throughout the Empire. The third century C.E. jurist Domitius Ulpianus wrote : “The deified Severus and Antoninus [Caracalla] allowed those who profess the Jewish superstition to hold office, but also imposed on them only those obligations which would not damage their superstition.” (*Dig. Just.* 4-.2.3.3)¹⁹

¹⁷ Bonz, “Jewish Community of Sardis,” 349.

¹⁸ Bonz, “Jewish Community of Sardis,” 350.

¹⁹ Bonz, “Jewish Community of Sardis,” 350.

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The Sardis Synagogue

It is improbable that anti-Semitism had totally disappeared by the third century C.E., but the Jews of Sardis appear to have enjoyed an unprecedented social and political stability and even prominence. We know this because they took over a large part of the huge bath complex which dates from the first century C.E. The excavator George Hanfmann believes that the bathing complex was built after the catastrophic earthquake of 17 C.E. and that the construction lasted a long time since at least one of the rooms containing an apse with a statue base inscribed to the emperor Lucius Verus seems to have not been completed until well into the second century C.E. The large room which would later become the synagogue was completed around the same time since the construction seems to have progressed from east to west.²⁰ (See Illustration 1.1 and 1.2)

In stage two, the inhabitants of Sardis made drastic changes to the room in the bathing complex that would later become the synagogue. The three rooms which comprised the southwestern end of the complex were combined into a single long basilica with a small separate space at the end. The workers closed off all access to the large *palaestra* onto which all three rooms of stage one had opened and an apse was added in the northwestern end. It has been suggested that if the room became a judicial basilica, the apse was built as a tribunal.²¹ Stage three has left little evidence, as little work was actually done. Excavators found two applications of marble revetment on the forecourt

²⁰ Seager, "Building History," 432.

²¹ George Hanfmann and L. Majewski, "The Ninth Campaign at Sardis (1966)." *BASOR* 187 (1967), 23; Seager, "Building History," 432.

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walls under the mosaics. The southeast wall was removed and the basilica covered the entire section of the bathing complex.²²

In the fourth stage, a wall was added to the southeastern end of the room, shortening it slightly and creating a forecourt/atrium. The Jewish community began using the building as a synagogue in the second half of the third century C.E., but the final cosmetic changes can be dated numismatically to the second half of the fourth century C.E. It is these cosmetic changes that are most connected with the fourth stage.²³

The Literary Palestinian Connection

The sheer size and the architectural features of the Sardis synagogue provides a somewhat tentative connection to the Palestinian Rabbis. As stated earlier, in stage two of the Sardis synagogue, the workmen added this apse in which it was suggested that a judicial tribunal met during the building's civic basilica phase. The seating raised on a platform seems to have been added during the third stage, when it is uncertain if the Jewish community had gained control of the area. Whether or not the Jewish community added the seating in the third stage, the raised platform with its three-tiered semi-circular seating formed a focal point during the height of the Jewish use of the space in the fourth stage. Directly in front of the platform was placed the *bema* table with its eagle reliefs flanked by the already almost eight hundred year old pairs of lions. When one views the synagogue from the street through the door into the atrium, the *bema* with the apse behind it is central to the viewer.

Apses became more common during the Byzantine Period in church and synagogue basilica architecture. Typically the apse at the far end of the nave formed the

²² Seager "Building History," 429, 432.

²³ Seager, "Building History," 432-433.

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focal point of the central aisle. Synagogues containing an apse have been documented throughout Palestine during the same period in which an apse was installed in the Sardis synagogue.²⁴ The Sardis apse is unusually large and it has been estimated that the three-tiered seating could have seated seventy people.

The number seventy itself has significance in Jewish traditional numerology. For instance, seventy (sometimes seventy-one) men comprised the Jerusalem Sanhedrin according to Rabbinic sources and Josephus reports that he appointed seventy leaders of the Galilean revolt in 66/7 C.E. Likewise, the zealots appointed seventy men to serve on the Jerusalem high court during the First Jewish Revolt.²⁵

The idea of seventy elders being seated in a synagogue has a particular connection to a story related in *Tosefta Sukkah* 4:6. The story is also cited in both *Talmuds*, in *Yerushalami Sukkah* 4, I, 55a-b and in *Bavli Sukkah* 51b. According to the tradition, the proportions of the Alexandrian synagogue were said to be so monumental that the synagogue could accommodate two times the number of people who left Egypt in the Exodus. This posed a problem for the responsive readings because the person leading the prayers could not be heard by the entire congregation. He is said to have resorted to waiving a piece of cloth to signal the proper time of the congregational responses. The mythical *stoa* was to have been extremely glorious and unrivaled in its grandeur. At the head of the main hall of the synagogue, seventy-one golden honorary chairs were placed in which an equal number of elders sat. The correlation between the literary Alexandrian and physical Sardis examples is not perfect: In Sardis, the elders who occupied the triple

²⁴ Levine, *Synagogues*, 331.

²⁵ Levine, *Synagogues*, 86.

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tiered seating in the apse faced towards Jerusalem and the Torah shrine, while the Alexandrian elders sat facing another direction.²⁶

Also in the *Toseftan* tradition, a raised wooden platform was placed in the middle of the Alexandrian synagogue from which the scriptures were read. In the Sardis synagogue, the stone *bema* table was placed in front of the elders and around midway down the long expanse of the basilica, excavators found the remains of what may have been a platform or canopy.²⁷

The dimensions and decoration of the Alexandrian synagogue are most likely fanciful. The reason for its being related here is that the description of the Alexandrian appears in three of the main literary works to come out of Israel and the eastern diaspora, the *Tosefta* and both *Talmuds*. The earliest of these works, the *Tosefta*, was composed after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, during the period when Edrei and Mendels argue that little to no contact existed between the western diaspora and Palestine. The immense nature and general layout, down to what is very likely the seating of the elders follows the *Toseftan* blueprint. It cannot be stated with a level of certainty whether or not the architects of Sardis synagogue deliberately followed the account of the Alexandrian synagogue in the *Tosefta*, but the similarities are striking nonetheless and could be seen as evidence of communication between the Israel and the West.

The Physical Palestinian Connection

A more convincing connection between Sardis and the Palestinian Jewish community can be found in the orientation of the Sardis synagogue. A new prayer

²⁶ Levine, *Synagogues*, 84.

²⁷ Levine, *Synagogues*, 86.

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sequence, known as the *amidah* prayer sequence began sometime after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The eighteen (eventually nineteen) blessings of the prayer sequence are recited standing (Hebrew, *amidah*) while facing Jerusalem. It cannot be stated with any certainty exactly when these prayers were written or when the tradition of facing Jerusalem while reciting them began, but their origin appears to be ancient. The benedictions themselves offer conflicting clues: for instance Benediction Ten refers to the dispersion of the community, very likely the result of the First Jewish Revolt although a diaspora existed prior to this. Benediction Sixteen petitions to have the temple service renewed, but shortly thereafter, refers to the temple ritual of the fire offering as though it was contemporary with the writing of the prayer.²⁸ The Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds offer further conflicting accounts. In *Bavli Berakoth* 33a, it reads that the “men of the Great Assembly instituted for Israel ...prayers...” *Bavli Megilah* 17b records two traditions regarding the origin of the prayer sequence, one that one hundred and twenty elders set the order of the eighteen benedictions and another that Simon the Flaxworker created the eighteen benedictions or perhaps recreated the forgotten sequence of prayers for R. Gamaliel II in Yavneh. It is also said that R. Gamaliel II ordered the redaction of these prayers and added Benediction Twelve against sectarians to weed out the new Christian sect from Judaism.²⁹ Regardless of the conflicting accounts in the literary record, many synagogues in the archaeological record reoriented in the third century C.E., probably coinciding with the implementation of the Eighteen Blessings.³⁰ In

²⁸ Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy, A Comprehensive History*. (trans. R. Scheindlin. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 26.

²⁹ Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 25, 31.

³⁰ Levine, *Synagogues*, 306.

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Sardis, the cosmetic changes and creation of the atrium in the fourth stage, reorienting the building towards the southeast, was completed under the auspices of the Jewish community in the third and fourth centuries C.E., probably to accommodate a change in Jewish worship.³¹ By orienting the building toward Jerusalem, the Sardis community was following a trend that originated in the Jewish centers in Israel during the time period in which Edrei and Mendels claim that the Western Diaspora had lost contact with Palestine and the East.

Brief History of Hamath Tiberias and its Jewish Community

To Sardis as a large Hellenized cosmopolitan center, Hamath Tiberias would have appeared provincial, even though its location put it at the center of the religious movements that resulted in Rabbinic Judaism. The sages mentioned the town repeatedly in the *Tosefta*, *Mishnah* and the Jerusalem *Talmud*. Originally two separate towns, each with their own walls, Hamath and Tiberias united in a single city wall probably in the first century C.E. The *Tosefta* records this: “Now the children of Tiberias and the children of Hamath again became one city.” (*Tosefta*, ‘*Eruv*. 7:2)³² The town once had a large alien Greek population, but after the First Revolt resulted in banishment from Jerusalem and the destruction of Jewish homes and even whole villages throughout Galilee, the demographics of the combined towns of Hamath and Tiberias shifted to primarily Jewish and would remain so for the next few centuries. Yet Hellenistic influence remained strong. The fourth century C.E. church father Epiphanius recorded that “...hitherto no one had been able to build churches. For they (the Jews) have among

³¹ Seager, “Building History,” 434.

³² Moshe Dothan, “Hamath-Tiberias” *NEAE* 2:573-577.

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them neither Hellene nor Samaritan nor Christian. This is a matter about which they are very particular, especially in Tiberias...desiring that no Gentile should be found there...” (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.11.8-10)³³ Earlier, priestly classes had settled in the smaller Hamath because Tiberias contained a cemetery which would have made living in it ritually unclean to the priestly class. The archaeological record indicates destruction in the mid second century C.E., possibly during the Bar Kochba Revolt or in the earthquake of 130 C.E. The towns were abandoned for several generations until around the beginning of the third century C.E., when Tiberias became the home of the Patriarchate and the Great Yeshiva, making it the center of Judaism.³⁴ Hamath, as part of the collective Hamath-Tiberias, rode to prominence also.

The Hamath Tiberias Synagogue and its Orientation

Like Sardis, a much larger public building once occupied the site that would later become the Hamath Tiberias synagogue. The public building is estimated to have been built around 20 to 130 C.E. If the structure was built in the earlier part of the estimation, it would have been built during the Greek phase of the town and would have presumably been more Greek in character. The similarity to the timeline of the Sardis synagogue in this respect is astounding. The building appears to have been quite large, but only a portion was able to be excavated due to the superimposed structures of the following layers and the debris from the second century destruction mentioned above.³⁵

³³ Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70-640 C.E.)* (trans. and ed. Gershon Levi. 2 vols.; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1980), 753.

³⁴ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 19.

³⁵ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 15.

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The synagogue structure of Stratum II which occupied only a portion of the earlier public building was built in the first half of the third century C.E. The walls of this structure remained virtually unchanged throughout its time as a synagogue except for the changing of the orientation of the entrances and the more elaborate decoration of the renovations.³⁶ This corresponds to the trend found in synagogues in the third and fourth centuries C.E. when the *amidah* sequence of prayers became the Judaic norm.

The reorientation corresponded to the creation of a permanent place for the Torah ark. The Torah scrolls were now stored in a separate room, the entrance of which lay on the southwestern wall of the sanctuary (the wall facing Jerusalem). This forced the workers to move the main entrance to the northeastern wall. When entering the synagogue, the congregants would already be facing in the appropriate direction and their eye would be captured by the imposing structure of the ark. By the end of the fourth century C.E. and the beginning of the fifth century C.E. these scroll repositories built separate from the main sanctuary became more common. Because the Hamath Tiberias repository was part of the third century renovations, it was among the first examples of this innovative design.³⁷ It is important to note just how revolutionary these changes were to this small building. One entered the first synagogue through the doorway in what became the back of the building traveled through the room marked number 34 in Illustration 1.3. While it was not completely uncommon to have the orientation of a synagogue back towards the doors through which one would enter. By putting the entrances in the opposite wall and installing an ark with a decorative façade, the workers

³⁶ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 19.

³⁷ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 31-32.

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emphasized southerly direction and the major attraction in that direction: Jerusalem. The new renovations completely eliminated any egress and ingress on the northwestern end of the building. The function of the southeastern wall changed from pragmatic to decorative. Jerusalem is technically south and west of Tiberias and a worshipper would be facing south and east when facing the ark. The ancient congregations lacked the precision of modern observance where the exact directional line to Jerusalem is shown on airplane video screens on El Al airliners heading towards and away from Israel. It only matters that the orientation of the building was changed from a general northern to a general southern orientation.³⁸ As discussed above, the timeline of these changes corresponds with the rise of the earliest directional prayer sequence, the *amidah*.

With the exception of the moving of the entrances, the change between Stratum IIb and Stratum IIa is so slight that it was difficult for excavators to distinguish between the two. It would appear that perhaps the congregation reused the old walls from Stratum IIb when they made the changes in Stratum IIa.³⁹ The main difference between the two levels of Stratum II lies in the redecoration of the floor with mosaics. The middle panel of the floor mosaics depicts the Greek god Helios surrounded by the zodiac and an anthropomorphic representation of the four seasons. The top panel depicts the Torah ark flanked by two menorahs and other Jewish artistic paradigms: a *shofar*, the *etrog* and *lulav* and an incense shovel. The bottom panel contained a dedicatory inscription flanked by two lions.

³⁸ Personal communication with Lee Levine, 21 November 2010.

³⁹ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 27.

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In Sardis one has to extrapolate from literary and architectural hints whether any connection between that congregation and the religious authorities in Israel existed. This is not so much an issue when considering Hamath Tiberias as the Patriarchate met practically on their doorstep. The issue then becomes what exactly was the nature of that relationship, especially given the choice of floor decoration mentioned above. According to the epigraphical material, a man named Severos was the main benefactor of the renovations that created Stratum IIa. The mosaic dedicatory inscription found in the central aisle under the zodiac identifies Servos as a “Disciple of the Most Illustrious Patriarchs”.⁴⁰ Two Patriarchs, Gamaliel IV and Judah III, governed in Tiberias during the time that Stratum IIa of the synagogue was in use. A second inscription found the upper part of the *tabula ansata* praising Severos and the supervisor Iouillos also identifies Severos as a disciple of the Patriarchs.

Conclusion

From the orientation of the two buildings and the architectural features of each, we can determine that some continuity existed between these markedly different fourth century C.E. congregations. We see in both synagogues the magnetic pull of Jerusalem as both seem to be drawn in that direction in the final decades of the third century C.E. through the beginning decades of the fourth century C.E. The connections between the congregations of each and the religious leadership in Palestine are explicit in Hamath Tiberias since the inscriptions found there indicate a close personal relationship between the congregation and its benefactor and the Elders, although this may not mean the

⁴⁰ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 55.

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Rabbis. In Sardis the relationship is more implied by the orientation including the striking resemblance to the description of the Alexandrian synagogue found in the *Tosefta*, a work compiled in Israel during the time period in which Edrei and Mendels claim that communication between Israel and the West had ceased.

Chapter 2: Decoration and Ritual Objects

What can the decoration of the internal space of the synagogue and the objects found *in situ* tell us about the continuity and discontinuity of the communities of Sardis and Hamath Tiberias? What does it tell us about the confidence of each community as part of the larger framework of its surrounding culture? Both Hamath Tiberias and Sardis used typical Jewish motifs *and* borrowed forms. This tells us that while these communities were confident of their Jewishness, they were also erudite and cosmopolitan, well aware of the larger Hellenistic world and freely communicating with and adopting from the surrounding Gentile culture. That this happened simultaneously in both places runs opposite to Edrei's and Mendels' claims of a split diaspora in which the western part assimilated into the surrounding culture because of this split.

Jewish Symbols Found at Both Hamath Tiberias and Sardis

Part of the continuity between Hamath Tiberias and Sardis with regard to decoration and ritual objects lies in the depiction of Jewish ritual objects at both places. *Menorot* are central to the decoration of both places and to the identification of the sites as Jewish sites. Lions also feature prominently, as they do in synagogues throughout the Jewish world. Lastly, incense shovels are found at a lot of Jewish sites even during the Second Temple Period. The mosaic artists at Hamath Tiberias depicted these shovels in the prominent top panel of the floor decoration. Incense shovels weren't depicted in Sardis, but excavators found bronze incense censors in the ruins of the Sardis synagogue. These examples cast doubt on Edrei's and Mendels' belief that by the time these two synagogues were built, their respective communities were cut off from one another.

The Menorah

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The most prevalent Jewish symbol in the ancient world and the one that ties the communities at Sardis and Hamath Tiberias to each other and to the land of Israel was the menorah. The term “menorah” can refer to any number of multiple branched lamps, but it is most frequently applied to a lamp of seven branches, the origin of which can be found in the Torah:

You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. (Exodus 25:31-33 ESV)

Exodus 37:17-33 recounts the fulfillment of this description. The Prophet Zechariah had a vision regarding the liturgical lamp recounted in Zechariah 4.

And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.” (v. 2 ESV)⁴¹

The earlier descriptions of the menorah are simply an *ekphrasis* of a physical object. The descriptions in the Torah focus on the artwork of the branches, the almond blossoms and flowers depicted in pure gold. As time progressed, the various elements of the menorah were imbued with mystical and increasing cosmological and astrological significance. This trend continued through to the fourth century when we find at Hamath Tiberias a depiction of the menorah flanking a zodiac. It began with Zechariah and continued into the Second Temple Period. For instance, in his *Questions and Answers in Exodus*, Philo Judaeus continued the metaphysical examination of Menorah. In Question

⁴¹ Steven Fine, *Art & Judaism in the Greco-Roman World, Toward a New Jewish Archaeology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 153.

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73 he wrote, “The lampstand is a symbol of the purest substance, of heaven.” He later identified the six branches of the menorah as representing Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus and the moon and the central arm represented the sun. (*Quest. Ex. 73, 75*)⁴²

While the descriptions of the menorah moved from the physical to the metaphysical, it also expanded beyond the liturgical realm during the time of the Hasmoneans and continued to do so through late antiquity as it morphed into a symbol of national and religious devotion. The lamp was inscribed on Hasmonean coins, and etchings of it were found on a sundial discovered at the foot of the southwest corner of the Temple Mount, as well as on a piece of plaster from a Second Temple Period house excavated in the Jewish Quarter.⁴³ The importance of the menorah as a symbol of the Jewish people can be seen by its prominence on the celebratory Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum, where its part in the triumphal procession symbolized to all who viewed the arch the fall of Jerusalem and the subjugation of the Jewish people to Rome. (See Illustration 2.1) Thus we see that the symbol was well known to Jews and Gentiles alike. The Gentile recognition of the menorah as a Jewish symbol is highlighted at Sardis where a Gentile dedicated the large freestanding menorah. Jews continued to use the seven-branched lampstand as a symbol of their religious identity even well after the events of 70 C.E. We find its form not only in places of worship, but also in funerary contexts, for instance the Jewish catacombs at the Villa Torlonia in Rome. (see Illustration 2.2)

As hopes of Jewish nationalism waned in the third and fourth centuries C.E., the menorah became more of a religious symbol, perhaps in response to the rise of the cross

⁴² Fine, *Art & Judaism*, 153.

⁴³ Fine, *Art & Judaism*, 151.

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as a Christian symbol during the same period. In many Late-Antique sites, it is the distinguishing symbol of a Jewish site. For example, archaeologists excavating third and fourth century C.E. catacombs in Israel and in Italy became aware of the Jewishness of the site solely on account of the presences of a plethora of *menorot* in various shapes, sizes and mediums. The uniqueness of its form lent itself well to the use of the symbol as a cultural/religious marker. It was common for a cult in the Roman world to be identified by some symbol from its religious practice or myth. However, it must be noted that there are instances of Christian use of the menorah in an effort to figuratively align the metaphysical church with the Temple of Solomon. There are only a few examples of a menorah alongside a cross, but these were found not in church buildings, but rather on tombstones.⁴⁴

In Sardis, the specifically Jewish iconography and the menorah, in particular plays an important role in our ability to identify the building as a synagogue. Each of the other elements, the orientation, the dedicatory inscriptions, etc., could just as easily be applied to any basilica in the late Roman world. Martin Goodman has suggested that the Sardis synagogue building was not a synagogue, but rather the site of a cult of polytheistic Gentiles worshipping the God of the Jews along with other deities. His claim centers on the uniqueness of the building in synagogue architecture as well as the seemingly Gentile nature of the various elements of the building, including the epigraphy. While Goodman doesn't address the use of the menorah directly, he points out in support of his claim regarding Gentile worship that Jewish iconography was quite possibly adopted by these Gentiles as a representation of the Jewish cult, a process quite common

⁴⁴ See Fine, *Art & Judaism*, 155-158.

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in Late Antiquity.⁴⁵ The mixture of Gentile and Jewish elements could just as easily be the result of acculturation of a Jewish community in a Gentile world. Whether or not one accepts that the building indeed functioned as a synagogue, the use of the menorah shows the universal acceptance of the candlestick as a patently Jewish symbol in the fourth century C.E. The common view sees the menorah as self-identification by a Jewish community while the minority view sees this symbol as an attempt by Gentiles to identify with the Jewish God.

The menorah-related objects discovered at Sardis include a menorah-shaped cutout made of a copper alloy sheet metal. (Find 611, See Illustration 2.3) The vertical arm extended extra long in comparison to the branches of the menorah and contained three attachment holes which led excavators to surmise that it may have been a furniture ornament.⁴⁶ An eight-centimeter fragment of a solid-cast copper alloy menorah was discovered in the main hall of the synagogue. (Find 610, see illustration 2.3) It contained a vertical shaft and parts of two branches with a stump of a third. A double-spiral support held the branches to the vertical shaft. This piece had a definite front and a back that was only perfunctorily worked.⁴⁷ This bronze menorah contained a dedication which reads, “Aurelios Hermogenes, citizen of Sardis, God-Fearer (*theosebēs*), from his gifts of providence, I made the seven-branch lampstand (*heptamuchion*).” (Text 66)⁴⁸ The name

⁴⁵ Martin Goodman, ed., *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays*. (Martin Goodman, ed., Vol. 66 of *AGJU*.vLeiden: Brill, 2007), 249-255.

⁴⁶ Jane Waldbaum, *Metalwork from Sardis: the Finds Through 1974*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 103.

⁴⁷ Waldbaum, *Metalwork*, 103.

⁴⁸ John Kroll, “The Greek Inscriptions of the Sardis Synagogue,” *HTR* 94.1 (2001): 42; see also Fine, “*Art & Judaism*,” 155-156 and Steven Fine and Leonard Rutgers, “New

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Aurelios Hermogenes is definitely not Jewish, but as the level of Hellenistic influence on Judaism increased, it was not uncommon for Jews to take on Greek names. The term “God-Fearer” usually refers to Gentiles who practice some of the legal prescriptions of the Torah but who do not wish to observe the Jewish law in its entirety.

A large fragment of a marble menorah was also found, the arms of which once spread over a meter wide. The marble menorah contained dedicatory plaques on both sides of the crosspiece connecting the tops of the branches, making it likely that the menorah was freestanding and would be approached from both sides. The dedication is fragmentary and found on both sides. The first face identifies the donor as one named Socrates and the other side identifies the workman who made the menorah or refers to the carving of the piece; it is hard to tell because of the fragmentary nature of the inscription.⁴⁹

As for Hamath Tiberias, excavators found a menorah fashioned from a single block of limestone. (See Illustration 2.4) The branches of this menorah contained a pattern of alternating fruit and flowering pomegranates in low relief and hollow receptacles graced the top of the menorah, perhaps for oil lamps.⁵⁰ Unlike the Sardis example, it contained no dedicatory inscription.

Two menorahs were also depicted on the top field of the nave floor surrounding a mosaic representation of the Torah ark and just below the actual synagogue ark. The

Light on Judaism in Asia Minor During Late Antiquity: Two Recently Identified Inscribed Menorahs.” *JSQ* 3.1 (1996): 2.

⁴⁹ Kroll, “Greek Inscriptions,” 44.

⁵⁰ Yigael Yadin and Ruth Jacoby, eds., *Archives of Ancient Jewish Art: Samples and Manual* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of the Sciences and Humanities, The Mastro Trust, Centre for Jewish Art, The Hebrew University, 1984), card 10.

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progression of mosaic artwork begins with the lions and dedicatory inscription (which we will discuss next chapter) at the door of the synagogue followed by the zodiac and Helios (discussed below) and culminating nearest the Torah scrolls in the top panel that contained solely Jewish motifs: the ark, two menorahs, two shofars, two incense shovels, and two *lulavim*, the closed fronds of date palm trees bound with the myrtle and willow, which is used in the *Sukkot* ritual. The mosaic artists formed branches of both menorahs out of alternating flowering pomegranates and an almond shaped fruit, much like the description found in Exodus. Interestingly, they portrayed the flames on the six outer branches of the Hamath Tiberias synagogue menorah facing towards the center (i.e. the three on the left facing right and vice-versa), while the center flame points straight upward. (See Illustration 2.3) This mirrors a description found in the Babylonian Talmud:

And why does not R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon derive it from the candlestick? — He maintains that even the candlestick stood [with its branches extending] towards north and south. But is it not written, Aaron and his sons shall order it . . . [before the Lord]? — They were all made to face [the middle lamp]. For it has been taught: The seven lamps shall give light in front of the candlestick; this teaches that they were made to face the middle lamp. R. Nathan said, This shows that the middle one is specially prized. (*B. Menahot* 98b)

Levine asserts that this doesn't necessarily mean that the one follows the other, but that perhaps both were following an older tradition.⁵¹

Incense Censors

The artists portrayed temple accoutrements in the topmost Hamath Tiberias floor mosaic, which included small shovels which would have functioned as receptacles for incense in the priestly ministrations of the Second Temple Period. No physical remains

⁵¹ Levine, *Synagogues*, 457.

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of such a shovel were found at Hamath Tiberias, but the symbol itself hearkened back to the temple cult. A finding in Sardis mirrors this: excavators found two metal incense censers on the Sardis synagogue site. The archaeologists found the first, identified as find 579, on a bench built against the eastern wall of the porch of the synagogue. It dates from the Early Byzantine Period and was manufactured from a copper alloy. The second censer, also manufactured of a copper alloy in the Early Byzantine Period, is identified as find 584. The excavators found it above the floor of the forecourt of the synagogue, possibly from a late use of that section of the site.⁵² (See Illustration 2.6) The excavator George Hanfmann tells us that the main hall continued to be used as a synagogue up to the Persian invasion under Chosroes II in 616 C.E., although shops had taken over the forecourt.⁵³ Both finds came from the periphery of the synagogue, one from the porch and the other from the forecourt. The second censer (584) may have come from a later occupant of the site. The physical manifestation in Sardis of a ritual object depicted at Hamath Tiberias is yet another example of continuity between the two sites. Scholars have not formed a consensus on the meaning of the depiction of incense tools in synagogue decoration or the discovery of incense paraphernalia at a synagogue site. One school believes that the use of these motifs directs the viewer to think of the Jerusalem temple, now destroyed, while the other school advocates that these instruments were used in synagogue worship.⁵⁴ Neither school is able to conclusively prove their hypothesis.

⁵² Waldbaum, *Metalwork*, 98-100.

⁵³ George Hanfmann, *Letters from Sardis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1972), 138.

⁵⁴ Levine, *Synagogues*, 215-216.

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The depiction or use of ritual objects sets these buildings apart in similar fashion and stresses that this site had a religious purpose.

The Use of Lions at Both Sites

One particular animal motif to appear at both sites is the lion. While not exclusive to Judaism, lions feature prominently in post-biblical Jewish art since the lion is often associated with Judah and Israel. The obvious strength and ferociousness of the animal led many ancient peoples to use lion motifs, but Dothan feels that the primary function of the synagogue lions was their ability to guard, as they do their kills in the wild.⁵⁵ On the bottom field of the nave floor of the Hamath Tiberias synagogue two lions rendered in mosaics flank the dedicatory inscription. (See Illustration 2.7) Dothan sees their presence as guarding the inscription and the benefactors named therein and by extension, the whole synagogue.⁵⁶

In Sardis, two freestanding lions flank the *bema* table. (See Illustration 2.8) If Dothan's theory regarding the function of the Hamath Tiberias lions is correct, it would seem that the freestanding Sardis examples had a similar function, guarding the table from which the Torah was read. At the time the Sardis Jewish community reused these lion statues they were over eight hundred years old.⁵⁷ The Sardis lions were most likely already on site, or perhaps nearby. The Jewish community recycled an existing symbol, imbuing it with a new meaning specifically applicable to Judaism. It could be argued that the Sardis lions signify something different than those in Hamath Tiberias. This would be unlikely. The lions in Hamath Tiberias appear on the axis of the building in line with

⁵⁵ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 50.

⁵⁶ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 50.

⁵⁷ Hanfmann, *Letters*, 135.

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the ark and the main wall of the synagogue. The prominent placement of the Sardis lions along the same axis flanking the *bema* in full view of the whole congregation belies the importance of these statues to the Sardis community. When taken in conjunction with the Jewish symbols found throughout the building, a Jewish adoption of the lions and a correlation of meaning between the two places can reasonably be surmised.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the continuity between Hamath Tiberias and Sardis with regard to decoration and ritual objects lies in the depiction of Jewish ritual objects at both places. *Menorot*, lions and ritual accoutrements such as incense shovels tie these two communities to each other and to historical Judaism rising out of the Second Temple Period. This evidence causes a questioning of Edrei's and Mendels' belief that by the time the synagogues at Hamath Tiberias and Sardis were built, their respective communities were cut off from one another.

The Use of Gentile Imagery in the Synagogue Setting

Perhaps even more important to the continuity of the decoration of Hamath Tiberias and Sardis is the fact that both congregations placed within their walls seemingly non-Jewish motifs. Edrei and Mendels, when comparing synagogues in Israel and the West, wrote that in the synagogues in the Land of Israel "there was a strong influence of the Rabbinic worldview, while the western diaspora was noticeably influenced by Hellenistic culture."⁵⁸ Since both congregations exhibit Hellenistic influence, this counters the oversimplified assertion of a split diaspora.

In Hamath Tiberias, the use of borrowed Gentile motifs is very explicit. We discussed above the Jewish ritual objects and emblems found at the top and bottom fields

⁵⁸ Edrei and Mendels, *Split Diaspora*, 102.

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of the central Hamath Tiberias floor mosaic, but the middle and most prominent field is found in the center. This field is square in shape with two circles inside of it, one inside the other. The outer circle stretches to the edge of the square and anthropomorphic representations of the four seasons fill the four corner spaces between the edge of the circle and square. Within the large circle is a smaller circle and spokes divide the field between the two circles into what is probably twelve fields. In its current state, a stone wall divides the central fields and conceals some of the figures. In the fields that remain, nine complete and two partial signs of the zodiac are depicted in mosaic and labeled with their Hebrew names. The stone wall mentioned above obliterates most of the bottom half of the smaller circle. Above the wall we see what is often identified as an image of the Greek god Helios. The figure has a youthful face. His eyes look to his right and a slight smile stretches between rosy cheeks. The grey clothed figure with a red tunic raises his right hand, his fingers extended seemingly in greeting. In his left hand he grasps a sphere and a whip (sometimes described as a staff). He appears to have some sort of crown on his head which is framed by a circle of light with rays extending out from it. A seven-pointed star appears to the figure's left. (See Illustration 2.10)

While Helios and the zodiac originate in the Gentile world, it shouldn't be too surprising that they appealed to a Jewish audience. Jewish religious life evolved to be based on a lunar calendar, so the use of heavenly imagery in synagogue architecture in the fourth century C.E. is an earlier manifestation of this trend. Indeed, it can be argued that the origins go back to the Torah itself. We find in the first book of the Torah that the Lord created the stars on the fourth day. "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and **let them be for signs**, and

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for seasons, and for days, and years:” (Genesis 1:14, emphasis mine) One reading of Genesis 1 could see the heavenly bodies as having been created for the purpose of astrology. In verse 16 it tells us that “...God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars.” (Genesis 1:16 ESV) Indeed, the Children of Israel themselves are likened to the stars. For instance God tells Abram, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” (Genesis 15:5) Because of this, Steven Fine asserts that Jews never had a problem with the use of the zodiac and other night sky imagery and used this imagery up through the Medieval period, but that nineteenth century German Protestant scholarship took offense at the use of pagan forms and forced this interpretation on early Judaic studies.⁵⁹

Indeed, the Zodiac was not a new innovation to Judaism in the fourth century C.E. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls was found a fragmentary document identified as 4Q318 in which the Aramaic text lists the moon’s path through the signs of the zodiac.⁶⁰ If one accepts the hypothesis that a conservative Essene sect inhabited Qumran, the presence of such a document poses an interesting quandary regarding the nature of mainstream Judaism at the time as well as in the following centuries. As stated above, during the Second Temple Period, Philo Judaeus likened the symmetry of the menorah to the cosmology of the zodiac. In the Late Antique Period, Hamath Tiberias was not the only synagogue to use the imagery of Helios and the zodiac. The usage of these symbols

⁵⁹ Steven Fine. “The Jewish Helios: A Crux in the History of Late Antique Judaism” (paper presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the SBL, Atlanta, Ga, 22 November 2010).

⁶⁰ Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, (New York: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1997), 361-362.

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seems to be prevalent in Palestine since a total of five synagogues have been found with zodiac floors.

Along with the zodiac, Hamath Tiberias also contained a depiction of a figure taken to be the Greek sun god Helios. In Greek mythology, Helios (Sol to the Romans), the son of the Titans Hyperion and Theia, drove a solar chariot across the sky each day from east to west and in the evening rode a golden boat back to the east where he would start over each morning.⁶¹ By the beginning of the fourth century C.E., Sol Invictus became the symbol of the protector and was associated with the emperor as seen in reliefs from the Arch of Constantine and coins from the year 309 C.E. Constantius II (353-361 C.E.) continued the trend and coins from his reign show the emperor in the same stance as the Hamath Tiberias Helios, riding in a chariot, with right hand raised and the left hand holding an orb.⁶² The main benefactor of the renovations of Stratum IIA identified himself in the inscriptions as a disciple of the Patriarchs. The Patriarchs, or *Nasi*, were the Jewish authorities recognized by the Romans as representatives of the people by the end of the fourth century C.E. They had a tenuous and sometimes openly hostile relationship with the Rabbis, who were very anti-Roman. The emperor Theodosius gave the *Nasi* full authority in religious matters and designated them *viri clarissimi et inlustres*. (*C. Th.* 16.8.8)⁶³ (This title literally means “most famous and illustrious men.” The title is an honorific expression restricted to those of senatorial rank.)⁶⁴ We cannot say that the central figure of the Hamath Tiberias floor mosaic is a figural representation of the

⁶¹ Jenny March, ed., “Helios” *CDCM* 366-369.

⁶² Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 41.

⁶³ Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World*, 94.

⁶⁴ P.G.W. Glare, ed., “*clarus*” *OLD* 332-333.

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emperor. Rather, it follows a paradigm set by the emperor himself of a deity to which that emperor was trying to align himself in contemporary figural art.

In Sardis, the congregation does not seem to have erected any specifically pagan symbols, but they did not take away some remnants of the original Gentile occupation of the site. For instance, Hanfmann's crew found the lower part of a sixth century B.C.E. statue of a female in a flowing garment, probably a goddess or priestess, built into the north wall of the synagogue. Also, an archaic marble shrine to the goddess Cybele bearing the image of the goddess also in Greek attire and clutching a young lion was found in the main hall of the synagogue. Reliefs stretch around the monument depicting scenes from nature and mythology. (See Illustration 2.9)⁶⁵ As stated earlier, the Jewish community used the main hall of the synagogue building up to the seventh century C.E. Persian invasion, so these ruined pagan figures must have remained in the building while the Sardis Jewish community occupied the space. They evidently were not bothered by the presence of a goddess in a setting devoted to the Jewish God. Lions were sacred to Cybele and it is very likely that the eight hundred year old lion statues flanking the *bema* originally functioned as part of the Cybele cult. The Sardis community adopted these statues as their own and imbued them with new Judaic meaning.

This reworking of pagan forms has an equivalent in Hamath Tiberias. Hannah Wortzman believes that one can see Rabbinic influence on the Hamath Tiberias synagogue floor mosaics. She pointed out that in most of the synagogue zodiacs, the women are portrayed in a manner inconsistent with Rabbinic standards, revealing body parts unsanctioned by the Sages. However, two exceptions to this practice exist: in the

⁶⁵ Hanfmann 1972, 135-138.

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sixth century synagogue at Naaran and the fourth century synagogue at Hamath Tiberias. In Hamath Tiberias, Virgo is portrayed fully clothed, as are the feminine anthropomorphized four seasons. The women have their heads covered either with a veil or with a diadem.⁶⁶ In this way, the Jewish communities in both places took motifs, perhaps foreign to Judaism, and by subtly modifying them, made them their own.

Conclusion

An examination of the artifacts and sites of Hamath Tiberias and Sardis reveals a concurrent religious expression rooted in its past through the use of symbols unique to Judaism yet open to new ideas. Hellenistic influence would be expected of the supposedly cut off West, but the fact that it happened in Galilee as well poses a problem for Edrei and Mendels. A closer reading of the material culture left by the communities that worshipped at both sites shows a continuity in Judaic symbols identical at both sights and an incorporation of outside symbols, often with a subtle “Judaization” of these foreign influences.

⁶⁶ Hannah Wortzman, “Jewish Women in Ancient Synagogues: Archeological Reality v. Rabbinical Legislation.” n.p. [cited 10 September 2010]. Online: <http://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/wjudaism/article/viewArticle/3537/1595>.

Chapter 3: Epigraphy

As stated earlier, Edrei and Mendels claim that after the destruction of the temple, cultural and religious differences between East and West caused a fissure that resulted in two separate Judaisms. What does the epigraphy tell us about the continuity of the religiosity and culture of the congregations who worshipped at Sardis and Hamath Tiberias? A review of the inscriptions found at both sites reveals that as Edrei and Mendels noted, cultural differences did exist between the two congregations as evidenced by the use of Aramaic in Hamath Tiberias and its absence in Sardis, by the more personal wording of the dedicatory inscriptions in Greek Sardis as opposed to the formulaic inscriptions at Hamath Tiberias and by the presence of an Aramaic and Hebrew origin of some of the names found at Hamath Tiberias, which we do not find as much in Sardis. These minor cultural differences do not support Edrei's and Mendels' claim of a split diaspora. Indeed more similarities than dissimilarities exist between the two sites. The similarity in the function of the inscriptions and the description of the use of religious space shows continuity in practice spanning both places. Further, a review of the names of the donors show more continuities between the two communities with the exception of only slight differences, as Jews bearing similar names were found at both sites.

It is important to note that at both sites, we are working with only partial evidence so the conclusions we draw do not take into account the mystery of the evidence that is not there. In Hamath Tiberias, all the inscriptions are executed in mosaic on the floor. This is not to say that inscriptions did not appear elsewhere, but merely that the floor was the only part of the synagogue in its fourth century C.E. form that remained as the fourth century walls did not survive. In general, the mosaics remain in good condition and they

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are executed in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. In the Sardis synagogue, the majority of the surviving inscriptions are in Greek, although fragments of Hebrew inscriptions were also found, including one fascinating Hebrew inscription found outside the synagogue. A total of over eighty inscriptions were found in the main hall of the synagogue, but Kroll believes that quite a number more than that may have existed in the fourth century C.E. synagogue. While many of the mosaics were destroyed in the seventh century C.E. invasion, the inscribed plaques on the marble revetments suffered even greater destruction. At least two-dozen survived only in scraps of only a few letters each.⁶⁷

Non Dedicatory Inscriptions

The vast majority of the inscriptions found both at Hamath Tiberias and at Sardis is dedicatory in nature, but a significant minority of labeling inscriptions exists. These labeling inscriptions clearly delineate the religious function of the space and show that both congregations viewed their respective synagogues as a place set aside from the mundane. In Hamath Tiberias, the building is labeled as a “holy place” while in Sardis, inscriptions mark the building as a place for prayer and the reading of the law.

Visitors to the Hamath Tiberias could be in no disillusion as to the purpose of the space. If one mistook the architectural motifs, such as the Torah ark mentioned in the first chapter, a floor inscription is quite informative. Executed in three rows of pink, red and black tesserae, it reads as follows in Aramaic:

May peace be upon anyone who has offered charity in this holy place and anyone who will offer charity may he be blessed. Amen, Amen, Selah, and for myself Amen. (See Illustration 3.1)

⁶⁷ Kroll, “Greek Inscriptions,” 7.

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The Aramaic term for “holy place,” *m'kom k'dosh* is mirrored elsewhere on the synagogue floor with the Greek *agios topos* of the same meaning, taken here to refer the synagogue itself, although there are dissenting theories as to the meaning of the phrase.⁶⁸ The blessing portion of this inscription is general and along with the use of words Amen and *Selah*, formulaic. The importance of the inscription with regard to the use of religious space lies in its strong description of the place. We see here a distinct intention regarding both the building and the liturgy that occurred there. What is interesting is that the designer of the synagogue decided to make this statement in separate places both in Aramaic, the language of the region and in Greek, the language of the Gentiles in the region and of the larger world.

In Sardis the only complete inscription not part of the floor mosaics was a rectangular marble plaque that was associated with the Torah shrine and most likely came from the eastern end of the synagogue, the location of the aedicula that functioned as a Torah ark. It reads in Greek: “Having found, having opened, read, observe.” (Text 65) It reminds the beholder of the function of the whole religious space and of the ark in particular. Further, two marble decorative medallions of undetermined function were also found which contained pleas for Divine protection of the building. The first medallion ended with the words in Greek: “Lord, help this house.” (Text 76) The other simply reads, “Lord, help.” (Text 77)⁶⁹ These were the three non-dedicatory inscriptions found in Sardis and it is significant that all three stress the function of the religious space: prayer and the reading of the law.

⁶⁸ Dothan, *Hamath Tiberias*, 53-54.

⁶⁹ Kroll, “Greek Inscriptions,” 7.

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Also applicable to our review of the function of the Sardis synagogue is one dedicatory inscription of note. Excavators found an inscription in which the donor is identified as *didaskalos* (“wise teacher”).⁷⁰ This somewhat enigmatic reference may give us a clue to the structure of the leadership of the Sardis synagogue. It can be translated as a “teacher of wisdom” or “rabbi,” but the evidence is far from conclusive.

It would appear that the congregations at both Sardis and Hamath Tiberias thought of their respective synagogue buildings in a similar fashion. The label inscriptions at Hamath Tiberias explicitly identify the building as a “holy place.” In Sardis, the inscriptions are less explicit, but they give some indication of the structure of the religious practice by referring to prayers and the reading of scripture. A common theme runs through both sites. The labels set aside both spaces for religious practice.

The Use of Language

The use of Aramaic in Galilee and not in Sardis supports Edrei’s and Mendels’ sweeping generalization regarding a disjointed and fragmented post-Revolt Judaism. However, the use of Hebrew at Sardis and the extensive use of Greek at Hamath Tiberias fall outside the lines of their rigid interpretation of supposed linguistic barriers from the first century C.E. onward.⁷¹ Mendels, in a later article written alone, contends that the popular formulaic use of such Hebrew words as *shalom* (peace), *shalom al Yisrael* (peace on Israel) and *shalom al menuhato* (rest in peace) are evidence of a non-vernacular use of

⁷⁰ Alf Kraabel, “The Diaspora Synagogue: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence Since Sukenik.” in *Ancient Synagogues Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*. (ed. D. Urman et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1995 and 1998), 104.

⁷¹ Edrei and Mendels, “Split Diaspora” 93-95.

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the language by those in the Greek-speaking West, identifying themselves as Jews.⁷² Here again, Sardis runs against Mendel's hypothesis or at least provides a gaping exception to the rule. The Hebrew formula words he mentions do appear in Sardis, but they were discovered in fragments, some only a few letters and parts of letters, and their context cannot be stated with any certainty. The word *shalom* appears only once. To be fair, *shalom* could have appeared many times, but only one fragmentary example survived. Slightly less formulaic is the use of the Hebrew word for "vow" (*neder*), found on two fragments. Two names were also found, one definitely Hebrew (Yohanan) and the other a borrowed name which we will discuss further below (Severos).⁷³ The most irreconcilable example was found outside the synagogue proper in a fill north of the expedition camp. Workers pulled out a flat worked stone measuring 54 cm by 78 cm by 24.25 cm, perhaps a funeral stele. On the face of the stone the following was written in Hebrew: "I, Shemarya son of (E)lijah - I wrote this." (See Illustration 3.2) While not conclusive, this is a non-religious, most likely vernacular use of Hebrew. A problem arises with the letter *lamed* in the name Elijah. It appears to be reversed, a possible indication that the inscription was the work of a non-Hebrew speaker. The name itself is most definitely Hebrew; it appears in Ezra 10:32, Ezra 10:41 and 2 Chronicles 11:19. The form *Shumaryahu* (the same name) also occurs in 1 Chronicles 12:6. The evidence for or against the identity of the person carving the inscription simply is not conclusive. The closed form of the letter *Heh* (i.e. the left arm of the letter is attached to the

⁷² Doron Mendels, "Why Paul Went West, The Differences Between the Jewish Diasporas." *BAR* 37.1 (2011): 50.

⁷³ See Frank Cross, "The Hebrew Inscriptions from Sardis." *HTR* 95.1 (2002): 3-19.

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horizontal line), led Cross to date the inscription from the third to fourth century C.E., the time of the prominence of the synagogue.⁷⁴

Thus, we see that the use of Aramaic in Hamath Tiberias and not at Sardis gives some credence to the claim of Edrei and Mendels regarding cultural differences between East and West. However, the discovery of a vernacular Hebrew inscription at Sardis and the extensive use of Greek in Hamath Tiberias points to a continuity arising out of the mixing of languages at both sites. The reality is not so easily compartmentalized.

Dedicatory Inscriptions

Overwhelmingly, the majority of the inscriptions found at both locations are dedicatory in nature. By reviewing the specific wording of these inscriptions, it can be determined that a cultural difference existed between Sardis and Hamath Tiberias within an overall consistent religious identity. Edrei and Mendels claim that inscriptions in Israel reflect a Rabbinic norm focusing on the community while Western inscriptions focus on the original donor.⁷⁵ Hamath Tiberias and Sardis add a level of credence to their claim, since the Hamath Tiberias inscriptions don't deviate from a formulaic pattern, although they do focus on Severos and his fellow donors.

In Hamath Tiberias, the donation texts found on the floor of the nave are very specific in their wording. A rectangle divided into nine fields by three horizontal and three vertical lines lies at the entrance of the synagogue, just under the field containing the zodiac and Helios. The nine smaller fields contain four lines of text each. Five of these face north and a person entering the synagogue could read them; the other four face

⁷⁴ Cross, "Hebrew Inscriptions," 15-16.

⁷⁵ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 101.

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the opposite direction and could be read when exiting the synagogue. The mosaic is somewhat crudely executed with some of the words made smaller in order to fit them.⁷⁶ The top left field starts, “Maximos vowing, fulfilled (it). Long may he live!” followed (to the right) by “Aboudemos vowing, fulfilled (it).” The top right block reads, “Zoilos vowing, fulfilled (it). Long may he live!” and just under that, “Kalinikos vowing, fulfilled (it). Long may he live!” Lastly, the second inscription of the left column reads, “Ioullos the supervisor completed the whole work.” These five inscriptions greet the person entering the synagogue. All are executed in Greek and a set formula is used for all except for the inscription that pertains to Ioullos. Three of the five north-facing inscriptions bear the extra phrase, “Long may he live!” The use of this phrase is not symmetrical since it appears in top left and right blocks, but also in the second block on the right column. Perhaps Aboudemos didn’t donate enough to warrant the extra phrase. Ioullos’ inscription breaks this formulaic pattern as he is being recognized for his more concrete part in the construction, as an overseer. A blessing for him was found elsewhere in the synagogue. (See Illustration 3.3 and 3.4)

The more prominent dedications can be seen when exiting the building. While two of the four inscriptions facing this direction follow the formula, “vowing fulfilled (it).”, the right inscription for Profutouros has the customary “Long may he live!”, but the left inscription, for Siortasis says instead, “May he be saved!”⁷⁷ The main inscription is found in the center and extends through two panels. It reads, “Severos, Disciple of the Most Illustrious Patriarchs fulfilled (it). Blessings upon him. Amen.” Perhaps one reason

⁷⁶ Dothan, “Hamath Tiberias,” 54-55.

⁷⁷ Dothan, “Hamath Tiberias,” 57.

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for the placement of the more prominent inscription at the exit of the building rather than its entrance has to do with the nature of the middle panel. The use of Helios and the zodiac in the synagogue may have elicited shock or displeasure given that other nearby synagogues seem to follow a more Rabbinic normality and are sparsely decorated.

The name Severos is significant, as we will discuss below – it is a popular name adopted by Jews after the Severan dynasty. Even more significant is the description of this Severos as a disciple of the Patriarchs. Beginning in the second century C.E., the Romans recognized the Patriarchs as representatives of the Jewish people throughout the Roman empire (this would not have covered the Babylonian Jewish community which was in the Parthian empire). The position was hereditary in the Hillel family and the office was at times at odds with the Sages who would develop what would become Rabbinic Judaism. The senatorial rank of the Patriarchs was still preserved throughout the fourth century C.E. and Patriarchate survived until the death of Gamaliel VI in 429 C.E. The specific Patriarchs to whom the Hamath Tiberias inscriptions refer was either Gamaliel IV or Judah III.⁷⁸ Due to Patriarchate's connections with the Roman authorities, it is not surprising that Greek was the chosen language of an inscription referring to one of their followers. The synagogue designers gave Severos double the space allotted to the other donors in the prominent entranceway mosaic. Not much can be said with certainty about the position of Severos. He may have held a public position or he may have just been sufficiently wealthy to finance the refurbishments of the fourth century synagogue. We know he was the chief founder or main donor because of a second floor mosaic which formed the rectangular *tabula ansata* to the Aramaic

⁷⁸ Dothan, "Hamath Tiberias," 58-59.

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inscription we reviewed above. It reads, “Severos, disciple of the most illustrious Patriarchs completed (it). Blessings on him and on Ioullos the supervisor.”⁷⁹ It makes sense that regardless of Severos’ position in the larger community, he was the primary donor of the synagogue because none of the other donors mentioned in the Hamath Tiberias inscriptions are given as much space.

Severos was not the only donor to be mentioned in connection with a specific part of the synagogue. A fourth inscription graced the easternmost aisle of the Hamath Tiberias synagogue. It consists of five lines with a decorative ivy leaf framed by a rectangle of two rows of black *tesserae*. The script is much finer than the other dedicatory inscriptions. It reads, “May he be remembered for good and for blessing. Profoturos the elder constructed this aisle of the synagogue. Blessing upon him. Amen. *Shalom*.” (see Illustration 3.5) The entire inscription is in Greek except for the formulaic *Shalom*, which is rendered in Hebrew letters. The first line is similar to tomb and synagogue remembrance inscriptions. The Greek term for the synagogue used here is the genitive “*tou agiou topou*” (holy place) mentioned above. The use of Hebrew word *shalom* was common in Greek inscriptions throughout the diaspora.⁸⁰

In Sardis, donation texts have been found throughout the main hall and forecourt of the synagogue building. A portion of them are as formulaic as those found at Hamath Tiberias, simply reading “Vow of so-and-so,” but the majority have a more personal element reflected in the diversity of the donors and gifts. We generally find the more generic inscriptions in less conspicuous spots, such as on the subsidiary mosaic border

⁷⁹ Dothan, “Hamath Tiberias,” 60.

⁸⁰ Dothan, “Hamath Tiberias,” 61-62; Mendels, “Paul Went West,” 50.

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(texts 5 and 7) and on segments of the balustrade railing in the synagogue forecourt (texts 54 and 57). The generic donations may have also been for specific objects (recall the level of destruction discussed above) or they may have been placed in the synagogue in recognition of non-specified monetary donations that were used for the general upkeep of the entire building.⁸¹ These were the exceptions to the rule. More typically, dedication inscriptions listed the object or area of the synagogue being financed by the donor. Sometimes, in the case of ritual objects, this appeared on the object itself: in the previous chapter, we discussed the menorah fragment that contained the dedication on the crosspiece of the candelabra.

The Sardis donors always refrain from expressions of personal wealth. They made donations because of “the gifts of Providence” (Texts 16, 17, 20-23 and 66). In text 59, to “the gifts of Providence” the donor added “and the labors of our parents.” Another donor more explicitly gave “from the gifts of Almighty God.” (Text 29) Donors specified that their gifts were from their whole families. Several of the male donors listed their wives and in three occasions her name is listed as well (Texts 13, 15 and 29). Inscriptions often also list the children as part of the donating family. An aunt is also mentioned once (Text 33) and another mentions a son-in-law, although the wording is somewhat unclear. (Text 73)⁸² While much of the financial support was given as the fulfillment of a vow (not unlike the Hamath Tiberias dedications), on one occasion, the donor included a more specific reason for his donation to the synagogue: the marble

⁸¹ Kroll, “Greek Inscriptions,” 8.

⁸² Kroll, “Greek Inscriptions,” 8.

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decoration of the Torah shrine (the nomophylakion or “protector of the law”) was given “because of the good health.” (Text 63)⁸³

This follows a pattern suggested by Edrei and Mendels when they noted a difference between Eastern and Western Diaspora epigraphy, possibly due to Gentile influence or perhaps more a lack of Rabbinical influence, flip-sides of the same coin.⁸⁴ The one example from Sardis listed above scarcely provides enough of a pattern to prove the contention of Edrei and Mendels, at least at Sardis. However, at Hamath Tiberias the dedicatory inscriptions don’t deviate from the pattern suggested by Edrei and Mendels.

The reasons for these differences in tone may be regional, as suggested by Edrei and Mendels, but it is also just as likely that they reflect the circumstances of the individual synagogues in question. The Hamath Tiberias synagogue, located a stone’s cast from the yeshiva of the Patriarchs, existed under the largess of one, possibly two, major donors, although other elders of the synagogue are mentioned in the inscriptions. Those donors themselves experienced the patronage of the local Jewish leadership. The size of the building and of the congregation that met there made it ideal for this type of patronage. In Sardis the synagogue is so large that no single donor could have shouldered the fiscal responsibility as Severos did at Hamath Tiberias. The large congregation drew its members from sectors of Sardis society, including the upper tiers. The size of the physical space as well as the size of the congregation made it easy to more elaborately finance a small portion of the overall space and receive recognition

⁸³ Kroll, “Greek Inscriptions,” 8.

⁸⁴ Edrei and Mendels, “Split Diaspora,” 101.

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accordingly. It also makes it more likely that a donor would make a donation for a specific reason, such as the “for good health” inscription mentioned above.

What do the names of the donors tell us about the congregations at Sardis and Hamath Tiberias?

The names of the donors give us evidence of the cultural, if not ethnic makeup of the congregations meeting at our two target sites. Edrei and Mendels claim that a cultural and language barrier existed beginning just after the destruction of the temple. It would logically follow that if this were the case, some difference would be detected between the names that appear in the Galilean synagogue and the Anatolian synagogue. Yet we will find that this is not the case. Similar names appear at both sites. Several of the Hamath Tiberias names are Hellenized versions of Aramaic and Hebrew names, which belies a cultural difference between the Galilean synagogue and Sardis. However, not all the names are of Aramaic and Hebrew origin and all are found elsewhere in the Jewish world, including the West. The names listed in the inscriptions found at both sites are overall ethnically and culturally diverse which once again illustrates continuity between Galilee and the West.

More than thirty names appear in the Sardis synagogue inscriptions, only two of which appear to be Hebrew. (A third, Shemarya, is mentioned above, but it was found outside the synagogue.) The name Samoe appears in text 4 and the name Samuel appears twice: in texts 34 and 56. These two appearances do not seem to refer to the same person however, since the first text cited refers to a Samuel Julianos. This Jew with a traditional Hebrew name appears to have taken a second Greek name. As stressed in the previous chapter, Jews inside Palestine and in the Diaspora commonly took Greek names from the time of the Maccabees or perhaps even before. In fact, some of these Greek names seem

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to have had some uniquely Jewish significance. The name Heilasios carries with it connotations of Yom Kippur since *ilasimos* means atonement in Greek and *Eulogios* may carry connotations of the synagogue liturgy since *eulogia* means benediction in Greek. The name Heilasios appears in text 7 and *Eulogios* in text 9. Even more significant to Judaism is the Greek name *Leontios*, often taken to refer to the "lion of Judah," the significance was discussed in the previous chapter. *Leontios* appears in four of the Sardis inscriptions, in texts 22, 23, 39 and 48.⁸⁵

The Hebrew letters Bet, Yod, Resh, Vav and Mem appear on a polished marble plaque in the Sardis synagogue main hall. Light incisions showing the left margin reveal that this fragment came from a larger plaque that extended to the right. Only the first letter, *Samech* is missing, making the name *Severos*. The Severans, particularly Alexander Severus (208-235 C.E.), displayed a positive attitude towards the Jews in their empire. Jews exhibited special affection for the Severans in the following century, naming their children after them – both masculine and feminine versions have been found – and even naming a synagogue for them in Rome. The name has been found in Jewish inscriptions across the empire, including Hamath Tiberias.⁸⁶

Many of the names found at Sardis are of Greek extraction, but whether or not the people bearing those names were of Jewish or Gentile ancestry cannot be known with any certainty. The use of the term *theosebēs* may give us one clue. Six of the Sardis dedicatory inscriptions identify the donor as a *theosebeis* or "Godfearer". This Greek term usually refers to Gentiles who worshiped in a synagogue setting and followed some,

⁸⁵ Kroll, "Greek Inscriptions," 8.

⁸⁶ Cross, "Hebrew Inscriptions," 3-8; Dothan, "Hamath Tiberias," 57.

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if not all, the Torah prescriptions. We find this particularly in the Western Diaspora and less so after the rise of Rabbinic Judaism. Five of the six *theosebeis* inscriptions also give the name of the donor. The Leontios and Eulogios referred to above are among them.⁸⁷ The use of these accepted Jewish names causes one to question whether these donors at least were Gentile or Jewish. Jews have on occasion used this term when describing themselves.⁸⁸ Robert believed that the term could better be translated as "devout" or "pious" and Kraabel has agreed with him in the case of the Sardis examples. Yet a grouping of three of the forecourt inscriptions may pose a problem to this hypothesis. Two of the forecourt donors identified themselves as Godfearers and the third donor identified himself as a member of the "Tribe of the Leontii" which L. Robert took to mean that he was Jewish. If this is the case, the use of wording designating an ethnic Jew found in the inscription flanked by two inscriptions whose donors are identified as *theosebeis* can be read as an attempt to stress the difference between a Jewish donor and two Gentile Godfearers.⁸⁹ We cannot state the ethnic makeup of the Sardis congregation with any certainty, but the names found in the inscriptions run the gamut from undoubtedly Hebrew to squarely Greek. From this, we can surmise that the cultural influences of this congregation were diverse.

In Hamath Tiberias as well, the names listed in the dedications are quite diverse, although all are found elsewhere in the Jewish world. The first name, Maximos is Latin and we find it in other Greek Jewish inscriptions in Rome as well as a feminine example

⁸⁷ Kroll, "Greek Inscriptions," 9.

⁸⁸ See also Paul Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), 146.

⁸⁹ Kroll, "Greek Inscriptions," 9.

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in another Palestinian synagogue. The name Aboudemos is the Greek version of an Aramaic name that appears several times in Talmudic literature as well as in Palestinian inscriptions extending all the way into the sixth century C.E. Zoilos is the Greek version of a popular name that appears in both Hebrew and Aramaic, but Kalinikos is purely Greek, although we do find a Palestinian Aramaic inscription containing a similar name. Siortasis is the Greek version of a Hebrew name found in the Jewish catacombs of Rome, as well as in Egypt.⁹⁰ Profoturos is the Greek version of a Latin name meaning “he who will help,” probably a transliteration of a Hebrew name.⁹¹ Severos, the name of the main donor at Hamath Tiberias, ties the congregation there quite neatly with the congregation at Sardis. As discussed above, this name was popular throughout the Jewish world due to the benefaction of the Severan dynasty. It provides a nice bookend to the study of the names at these two locations. In Sardis the name was found in Hebrew when most of the inscriptions there are in Greek, while the Hamath Tiberias Severos is listed on more than one location on the synagogue floor in Greek.

The Caracallan citizenship law required Jews to take on Roman names and many Jews did so. Greek and Latin names seem to have risen in popularity during the third and fourth centuries C.E., but this changed by the fifth century when the epigraphical evidence leads us to believe that the Jews largely returned to their native Aramaic and Hebrew for inspiration.⁹² In fourth century Hamath Tiberias, the names, if not the people themselves, came from diverse backgrounds, but all were undoubtedly Jewish. Although we have at least one name that is purely Greek, the majority of the foreign names are

⁹⁰ Dothan, “Hamath Tiberias,” 57-58.

⁹¹ Dothan, “Hamath Tiberias,” 61.

⁹² Dothan, “Hamath Tiberias,” 56.

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Latin and Greek versions of Hebrew and Aramaic names. Hamath Tiberias, despite its Greek posturing, betrays its Hebrew and Aramaic foundations in these crossover names. The concentration of names with Hebrew and particularly Aramaic roots culturally places Hamath Tiberias squarely in Palestine. While this fact would seem to agree with Edrei and Mendels, Hamath Tiberias is also largely at odds with them regarding the existence of a concrete language barrier: the same names found in Hamath Tiberias also appear elsewhere in Palestine and in the western Diaspora.

Conclusion

From the diversity of both congregations arises a continuity based on a shared identity forged from diverse origins. Edrie and Mendels would lead us to believe that this was true of the West, but that the East and Palestine were more homogeneous in makeup and outlook. In the case of Sardis and Hamath Tiberias, this is simply not the case. As stated earlier, a closer reading of the actual inscriptions both supports and casts doubt on Edrie's and Mendels' claims of a split diaspora. The similarity in the function of the inscriptions and the description of the use of religious space shows continuity in practice spanning both places. Yet it also reveals nuances that tell us a little about the differences between the two communities. The language used and the difference in the wording of the dedicatory inscriptions show that minor cultural differences existed between East and West, but not necessarily to the extent that Edrei and Mendels claim. Further, a review of the names of the donors shows further continuities between the two communities, as Jews bearing similar names were found at both sites. Even here, only slight differences set the two apart.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, this case study is but one test of Edrei and Mendels. Further comparisons of other synagogue sites throughout Israel and the western diaspora need to be carried out before one can conclusively accept or reject the premise of a split diaspora. We can conclusively state in the case of our sample consisting of Hamath Tiberias in Galilee and Sardis in Anatolia, that the material culture and physical remains of the two synagogues do not support Edrei's and Mendels' claim that the western diaspora was cut off from Israel. Cultural differences did exist, but they were not as severe as Edrei and Mendels would lead one to believe.

Both buildings were renovated to face Jerusalem around the third century C.E, around the same time as the formation and implementation of the *amidah* prayer sequence in Israel. Edrei and Mendels claim that the West was cut off from Israel by this time. They also point out that there is no evidence of the *amidah* prayer sequence reaching the West because it is never specifically mentioned in western Judaic literature.⁹³ While the literary record might support the idea of a split diaspora, the physical remains of Hamath Tiberias and Sardis would seem to indicate otherwise.

Judaic symbols, particularly the menorah, lions and temple ritual accoutrements pervade the material culture and decoration found at both Hamath Tiberias and Sardis. This indicates that both congregations exhibited a common Jewish identity, even while they also followed Hellenistic forms. Edrei and Mendels believe that this Hellenistic

⁹³ Edrei and Mendels, "Split Diaspora," 126.

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influence pervaded western synagogues while Palestinian synagogues followed rabbinic norms.⁹⁴ This study sample challenges this presupposition.

The label inscriptions reveal that both communities set aside their synagogue space as a place of religious devotion. Hamath Tiberias does this by using the term “holy place” in both Aramaic and Greek. The Sardis label inscriptions indicate that their synagogue was a place for prayer and reading of the law. Both communities exhibited their shared Jewish identity through the way in which they referred to their synagogues. These buildings were more than just community centers.

The dedicatory inscriptions reveal a cultural difference between Hamath Tiberias and Sardis. Edrei and Mendels claim that inscriptions coming from synagogues in the Land of Israel are formulaic and emphasize the importance of the community as opposed to western Hellenistic inscriptions which stress the importance of the individual donor.⁹⁵ Generally, the dedicatory inscriptions of Hamath Tiberias and Sardis follow this pattern, although the Hamath Tiberias inscriptions, while following a specific formula, also praise an individual donor. Another indication of cultural difference between Galilee and Anatolia is revealed by a review of the names listed in the dedicatory inscriptions. The prevalence of the Hebrew and Aramaic origins to the Hamath Tiberias Greek names places that synagogue squarely in Galilee. Yet enough of a continuity exists because some of the same names were found at both places. While the dedicatory pattern and name evidence suggests a cultural difference, it does not follow that the two communities were completely cut off from one another.

⁹⁴ Edrei and Mendels, “Split Diaspora,” 102.

⁹⁵ Edrei and Mendels, “Split Diaspora,” 101.

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The evidence listed above reveals that although cultural differences between the two communities can be seen, Hamath Tiberias and Sardis are overwhelmingly similar to one another. This casts doubt on the theory of a split diaspora as advocated by Edrei and Mendels.

Illustrations

Illustrations

Illustrations have been removed, but may be found in the original.

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