Temple in Miniature? On Seeking the Origins of the Synagogue



1) A Locus Classicus & Its Discontents

Ezekiel 11:16 (6th century BCE)

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Bavli, Megillah 29a (ca. 6 th century CE)		
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R. David Kimhi (Radak, 1160–1235 CE), commentary to Ezek 11:16		
In the sanctuary in the lands to which them came. In other words, if they were far from the Temple of God, which is the large Temple of God, which is the large Temple there in the inland, I will be for them a little temple. That is to say in the far their voices and save them from their enemies so that they should not be destroyed. And moreover I will in the future gather them in as the subsequent verse says		

2) Earliest Sources

Inscription, Hadra cemetery, Alexandria (ca. 2 nd century BCE)	
[] [θε]ῶι ὑψίστωι [τ]ὀν ἰερὸν [περίβολον (?) καὶ] τὴν προσ [ευχὴν καὶ τὰ συγ]κύροντα.	To God the Highestthe holy enclosure and the <i>proseuche</i> and its appurtenances
CPJ 129 (Complaint, May 11 th 218 BCE)	CPJ 24 (Dedication of <i>proseuche</i> , ca. 2 nd c. BCE)
When I saw him (he fled) to the Jewish synagogue (holding) the cloak, (while I called for help). Lezelmis, a holder of 100 <i>arourai</i> , came up to help (and gave) the cloak to Nikomachos the synagogue attendant ($\nu\alpha\kappa\delta\rho\sigma\sigma$) to keep till the case was tried.	On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Cleopatra the sister and queen Cleopatra the wife, the Jews of Xenephyris [dedicated] the gateway ($\pi \upsilon \lambda \tilde{\omega} \upsilon \alpha$) of the <i>proseuche</i> when Theodore and Achillion were presiding.

3) What Happened in the Synagogue?

Philo, On Dreams 2.127 (turn of the era)	Theodotus Inscription (1 st century CE)
And would you still sit down in your synagogues, collecting your ordinary assemblies, and reading your sacred volumes in security, and explaining whatever is not quite clear, and devoting all your time and leisure with long discussions to the philosophy of your ancestors?	Theodotus, son of Vettenos the priest and archisynagogue, son of an archisynagogue and grandson of an archisynagogue, built the synagogue for the reading the Law and studying of the commandments, and the guest chambers, the rooms and the water installations to provide as an inn for those in need from foreign lands, which his fathers founded together with the elders and the Simonides.

4) Synagogue Archaeology

Philo, Every Good Man is Free 81-2

(81) Now these laws they are taught at other times, indeed, but most especially on the seventh day, for the seventh day is accounted sacred, on which they abstain from all other employments, and frequent the sacred places which are called synagogues, *and there they sit according to their age in rows, the younger sitting under the elder*, and listening with eager attention in becoming order. (82) Then one, indeed, takes up the holy volume and reads it, and another of the men of the greatest experience comes forward and explains what is not very intelligible, for a great many precepts are delivered in enigmatical modes of expression, and allegorically, as the old fashion was...

Masada Synagogue, Aerial View (ca. 1st century CE)

