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The Synagogue of Dura Europos: An Inclusive Narrative

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To Professor Dressler
For her endless support throughout this entire process
And for believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself.

Thank you.

Abstract

In 1932, the discovery of the Synagogue of Dura Europos in Syria presented a turning point in the study of art, architecture, and Art History in general. The reason behind the turning point was the fact that this discovery yielded the first ever examples of Jewish art and architecture. Within the Synagogue were fresco panels telling stories from the Hebrew bible. The report of this discovery was felt throughout the entire Art History world not only at this point in time, but in the modern day as well. In addition to the continued discussion surrounding the frescoes, their legitimacy as examples of Jewish art and architecture continue to be a relevant topic. Furthermore, the chronicle of Dura Europos is an important subject in relation to this study. The city's history up to the creation of the Synagogue, its destruction, and rediscovery are also important in understanding the overall discovery of Synagogue as well.

The city known as Dura Europos[i] was founded around the year 300 BCE.[ii] Its founding was a direct result of the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE. Upon his death, the countries that Alexander the Great had amassed into an empire were divided among the generals who had served in his army. This was done in order to continue to consolidate power and spread Hellenistic culture. One of these generals was Seleukos I who was given control of Syria and Mesopotamia. Isidoros of Charax, a geographer from the first century of the Common Era described in his report entitled Parthian Stations[iii] that Dura Europos was the city of Nikanor. He described it as such because after being given the territory of Syria, Seleukos I assigned its founding to a man working

underneath him, named Nikanor. In turn, Nikanor named the city Europos after Seleukos I's home city of the same name. At this time, it was a common Hellenistic practice to name a city after its founding general. Although Isidoros of Charax ascribed the city to Nikanor, Seleukos I was regarded as its true founder by the citizens of Europos because of the fact that he was an army general and therefore of a higher status than Nikanor. However, Nikanor was the governor Europos at some point in its history although the exact time frame is unknown.[iv] The city was called Europos until 180 CE. At this point, the word "Doura" began to appear in conjunction with "Europos" on papyrus documents. The word is of Semitic origin and means "fortress". Therefore, the name of the city can be translated as meaning "the fortress of Europos".[v] From approximately 200 CE on, the city was called Dura Europos.[vi]

The city was situated on a plateau above the Euphrates River[vii] between the modern-day locations of Damascus, Syria and Bagdad, Iraq[viii] This site[ix] was ideal for implementing control over military and commercial traffic that took place alongside the river.[x] The city was arranged on a grid system and surrounded a central marketplace.[xi] Originally founded as a military colony, the citizens of Dura Europos were Macedonian and Greek war veterans, as well as their wives and servants.[xii] The war veterans were given shares in the city in return for any necessary additional military service. After a certain period of time, Dura Europos achieved the status of a self-governing city.[xiii] Legal documents that were found by archaeologists during the excavation of Dura Europos suggest that this governing administration was modeled after the Grecian style of government.[xiv]

As shown by the scale of the city and the size of the surrounding walls, Dura Europos was clearly a large city and also of major strategic importance in relation to neighboring cities. In addition, there was the possibility that it was the intention to expand Dura Europos to a larger size. However, there is no legitimate evidence to support this possibility. Coupled along with continuous military struggles, any supposed expansion was kept from happening.[xv] For approximately two hundred years after its founding, the citizens of Dura Europos had lived under Seleucid rule. Around 113 BCE, the Parthian Empire occupying the area of modern day Iran invaded Dura Europos. Ultimately, the Parthians ended up taking control of the city. Although the transition was somewhat peaceful for the citizens of Dura Europos, the battle that had happened hindered their ability to expand the city to it proposed proportions. Although certain smaller expansions were able to prosper, such as the remodeling of buildings, future battles permanently prevented any expansion efforts that would dramatically increase the size of the city's territory.[xvi] Around 165 CE, the Roman army entered Dura Europos under the command of emperor Lucius Verus and expelled the Parthians from the city.[xvii] The Roman Empire controlled Dura Europos until 256 CE.[xviii]

As it has been clearly exemplified, the rule of Dura Europos changed consistently throughout its existence. Despite this however, the different communities that were present in the city continued to prosper and peacefully coexist. The community that stood out was the Jewish community. Although the exact date of the arrival of the Jewish people in Dura Europos is unknown[xix], it can be assumed that they were already present in the city by the late second century CE. This can be determined based on inscriptions found on their house of worship. More commonly referred to as the Synagogue, the

earliest date found on its exterior wall by the archaeologists that excavated it was 165 CE.[xx] Furthermore, it is impressive that this community stood out to begin with. Prior to their control within Dura Europos in 165 CE, the Romans did not have a favorable attitude towards the Jewish people in general, let alone those within in the city of their control. However the third century CE marked an improvement in Roman-Jewish relations. Due to crises within the Roman Empire, Emperor Lucius Verus, along with the other Romans in control of Dura Europos, did not pay such close attention to what was happening within the Jewish community. Therefore, without the threat of revolt against them, the Jews were able to prosper within Dura Europos. The most documented aspect of the prosperity of the Jewish people in this city is their Synagogue.[xxi]

The Synagogue was located to the south of the city's central marketplace. More specifically, it was situated along the southernmost wall of Dura Europos.[xxii] In addition, it was found to have been located in close proximity to other religious houses of worship.[xxiii] These houses were built in a similar manner to one another with high walls and flat roofs.[xxiv] The situation and similarities of religious buildings was a common feature of cities dating to this time period.[xxv] It was constructed from a preexisting private home

and was not a freestanding structure. This was due to the lack of available land and funds to aid in the building. The origin of this private home is undetermined although its original use was believed to have been as either a house of prayer[xxvi] or as a courthouse.[xxvii] Furthermore, the Synagogue, as well as the other religious structures in its proximity, was in a residential area. Therefore, it was initially indistinguishable from other nonreligious neighboring houses.[xxviii] This Synagogue was modest in size

suggesting a small worshipping congregation as well as a small Jewish community in Dura Europos in general.[xxix] The Synagogue currently being discussed is not the same Synagogue studied today. Although the Jewish community in Dura Europos was initially small, it grew large enough to warrant a larger Synagogue sometime between the second and third century of the Common Era. The newer, larger Synagogue was rebuilt from the existing structure. Therefore the Synagogue studied today is the second of its kind and was the third structure built on the same location.[xxx]

Before continuing to discuss the Synagogue that is currently studied, it is important to understand the layout of the one that existed before it. Therefore, with this knowledge it will be easier to compare and contrast the two Synagogues and highlight the changes made from the earliest to the later building. To begin with the earlier Synagogue, the date of its establishment in Dura Europos is unknown as previously stated. However, through written documents and archaeological excavations, there is information about layout of this Synagogue and how it was decorated. The main room in the building was the prayer hall.[xxxi] It was oriented in the western direction towards Jerusalem. This city was and continues to be the holiest city of the Jewish people and it is customary for prayers to be directed there during services of worship.[xxxii] Also situated as a part of the western wall was the Torah niche. This was a large compartment that stood from the floor to roughly halfway up the wall. Inside of it was the sacred bible of the Jewish people, the Torah for which the niche was named and designated for. Marble benches flanked the niche on the south and north sides. These served as seats for male worshippers. Directly across the Torah niche on the eastern wall was the entranceway into the prayer hall.[xxxiii] However, when a worshipper came through it, they were not coming into the Synagogue

from the outside. Rather, the entranceway was connected to a neighboring building to the north of the Synagogue as there was no way to enter or exit it from an outdoor area. The reason for a hidden entrance was initially thought to be because of an unpopularity and segregation of the Jews of Dura Europos from the rest of the city's citizens. However, as it will be seen with the situation of the entrance in the later Synagogue, this was not the case. The northern neighboring building through which the Synagogue was entered was a precinct.[xxxiv] To the south of the prayer hall, a House of Assembly was attached. Prior to being incorporated into the Synagogue it served as a place for meetings and discussion among the men in charge of running the city. For the purposes of this Synagogue's use, the House of Assembly became the place were women worshipped.[xxxv] Much like the rest of this Synagogue, the decoration for the women's prayer room was modest in decoration. It featured a dado and three registers above it. They were white in color and only the two lowest registers were sparsely decorated with floral patterns.[xxxvi] It allowed for their participation in the service, but kept the separated from male worshippers. The southeastern side of the building had three rooms reserved as dwelling for the Synagogue's caretaker and housing for individuals passing through Dura Europos.[xxxvii] This entire Synagogue was surrounded by an outdoor courtyard that was screened off from the street and therefore from public view.[xxxviii]

During the middle of the third century of the Common Era, the Synagogue was reconstructed. Although the actual year that this began is unspecified, the year of completion in known based on inscriptions carved into the refinished building. This year was 245 CE and it marked definitive changes within the Synagogue.[xxxix] It must first be noted that this reconstruction only made adjustments to the Synagogue. It did not change

the physical structure or the preexisting meaning at all. The first and most important part of the reconstruction was the relocation of the prayer hall to the women's worship room.[xl] The walls and ceiling of the room were transformed. The ceiling that had once been flat and composed of a series of square bricks was painted and decorated with depictions of vegetation, animals, astrological symbols, and two evil eyes. The once modestly decorated dado and registers were painted with biblically themed wall decorations. In addition, the Torah niche was placed on the western wall. It was the same size and in the same location as it had been in the previous room.[xli] The second part of the reconstruction was the expansion of the Synagogue into a private house to the east of the original prayer hall. The entrance was then moved to the easternmost part of this building.[xlii] The addition of this building and the placement of the entrance made the Synagogue accessible from the main street of Dura Europos and thus allowed the Synagogue to be less secluded. Furthermore, it made the Synagogue more important and prominent within the city as well.[xliii] Once within the doorway of the entrance, there was an antechamber that led to two larger rooms. Their uses were thought to be for offices, classrooms, or lodging for strangers or the Synagogue's caretaker.[xliv] In addition, the room for women to worship was set up amongst these rooms. However, a definitive usage for this room as well as the two larger rooms is unknown as they were not well preserved.[xlv] In total, the reconstruction of the Synagogue was in response to the growing number and needs of its congregants. Although this process took place over a significant period of time and with the aid of many donations, the effort was worth it. The reconstructed Synagogue served as a testament to the hard work that had been put into place until its destruction.[xlvi]

With the layout of both Synagogues established, the study of the one completed in 245 CE can be discussed. The discussion of this Synagogue will center on its prayer hall, the most prominent and best-preserved feature.[xlvii] To start with the Torah niche, it was located in the center of the western wall as previously stated.[xlviii] It was made out of a marble arch and column featuring vegetal designs.[xlix] In addition to this, the facade above the arch was decorated with important Jewish symbols. Starting from the viewer's left there was a seven-branch candelabrum and the branches of a palm tree and a lemon known in Hebrew as a lulav and etrog. At the viewer's center was a building representing the Temple in Jerusalem, connecting it to the Dura Europos Synagogue. On the very right of the facade was a scene from the Torah known as the Sacrifice of Isaac. This scene is a test of one's faith as it depicts Isaac's father Abraham being instructed by G-d to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. It can be then understood that when a worshipper looked at this scene as well as the other symbols, these meanings were inherently understood. Rather than merely being symbols of Judaism, these decorations were exemplified the relationship between G-d and his people.[l]

When looking straight at the niche, there were animals symmetrically arranged on either side of it in order to serve as protection. In addition, there was a seat directly to the right of the niche. This was reserved for the man who led services, called the Rabbi or the elder. It also had a lion painted above it in order to protect the person sitting in it and to incorporate them with the niche.[li]

The complex historical background of Dura Europos was reflected in languages spoken in city. These languages in turn were used in synagogue inscriptions. The common language in the city was Aramaic. It was the lingua franca, the language used

for communication between citizens, in addition to languages they spoke personally. Within the Synagogue, Aramaic was eventually used in religious services to supplement Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people. In addition, it is also assumed that the Jews of Dura Europos were also fluent in Greek because versions of the Torah and other forms of literature were found in this language within the Synagogue. In addition to Greek and Aramaic, an Iranian language called Pehlevi was also found in writings within the Synagogue.[lii]

Aside from their usage in written documents, Aramaic, Greek, and Pehlevi were also inscribed on the walls of the prayer hall. Both Aramaic and Greek were used to identify the titles and legends of wall decorations while only Aramaic was inscribed on the ceiling. Pehlevi inscriptions did not refer to the subject matter of the paintings, but rather they were written expressions of gratitude to the donors who had made the Synagogue reconstruction possible. In addition, artist signatures were found in Pehlevi, not Aramaic or Greek. Also unlike these two languages, Pehlevi inscriptions interrupted the wall decorations without any regard for what was being depicted. In addition, there was a discrepancy with the dating of Pehlevi inscriptions in that they did not match up with the date of the Synagogue's founding in 245 CE. Finally, the lower registers also featured signatures. However, these were easily accessible to worshippers and guests of the Synagogue. Therefore it is believed that they were the writings of visitors to the synagogue. This belief is further supported by the fact that these signatures are in languages different from that of Aramaic, Greek, and Pehlevi.[liii]

With the knowledge of the languages present in the prayer hall properly identified and understood, the wall decorations can be discussed. They are hard to individually and

specifically date. However, based upon dedicatory inscriptions found throughout the Synagogue and the dedication year of 245 CE, the decorations had to have been created close to this date.[liv] First and foremost, these decorations are fresco panels. A fresco is created through the application of a liquid pigment onto a wet plaster surface. Once both the pigment and plaster dry, an image is left behind. Within the Synagogue, there were thirty frescoes in total. They illustrated various figural scenes from the Torah, most prominently the book of Exodus and the Nevi'im, the Jewish book of prophets. Furthermore, they are divided into three separate registers. Before discussing these registers, there was an ornamental band that ran below them that must first be highlighted. This ornamental band was known as a dado. In addition to being below the registers, it ran above the benches used for worship. The dados were painted to produce the effect of marble slabs. Some were decorated with animals such as lions and lionesses, others were decorated with masks, and the rest were left plain.[lv]

With the explanation of the dado taken care of, the discussion of the registers can take place. It must first be noted that the panels featured within them were not uniform in size. Rather some were larger than others, although this was unnoticeable because of the size of the Synagogue. The common themes depicted throughout the panels included divine intervention, help from G-d, and the triumphs of Jews over Gentiles, non-Jewish people.[lvi] To start, the first register to be discussed is the lower register. This register acted like a podium and gave the effect that it was carrying the other two registers above it. Furthermore, this drew the eye upward to the two other registers and thus elongated the prayer hall. This emphasis placed on the lower register implied that the sequence of events within the frescoes was meant to start from this register and upwards. Also, it

featured Pehlevi inscriptions and was read from right to left.[lvii] The first fresco in the lower register to be discussed is the panel that, according to scholars, depicted "Ahasuerus and Esther".[lviii] This panel was on the Synagogue's western wall and borders the Torah niche on the right. This story came from the prophet book of Esther and took place in Persia.[lix] It highlights the theme of the triumph of Jews over Gentiles.[lx] At the left of the fresco, Esther's cousin Mordecai is depicted on a white horse and is being led by a man named Haman. Haman is an advisor to the king, Ahasuerus, who is depicted at the right of the fresco along with his queen, Esther, who along with Mordecai are the Jewish people depicted in this fresco. Both the King and Queen are seated on separate thrones. Behind them are male and female attendants and approaching them is a scribe and a messenger. This messenger is either about to give to or receive a message from the King Ahasuerus. All figures presented within the panel are wearing Persian-style clothing. However, King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther are wearing nicer garments indicative of their royal status. In the center of this fresco, there are four figures that remain unidentifiable to the context of the story. Although the long garments they are wearing make them identifiable with Esther and Mordecai as Jewish people and thus connect them to the Synagogue, their gestures contradict this. Their arms are directed towards the left and more specifically towards Haman, thus calling into question their religious beliefs. This in turn forces the viewer of this fresco to decide whether or not this panel depicts a scene of a triumph of Jews over Gentiles.[lxi]

The second fresco panel to be discussed in the lower register is the "Finding of Moses" from the Torah book of Exodus, as stated in scholarly books and articles discussing the frescoes. It took place in Egypt and highlights the theme of divine

intervention.[lxii] To the right of the fresco is a building representing an Egyptian city. Within this building its ruler, the Pharaoh is seated on throne and is wearing royal garments with two of his attendants on either side. To the left of the panel are two women who are presumably related to Pharaoh as they are wearing royal garments as well. The woman closest to Pharaoh is bending over and gesturing toward him. She is directing his attention to the left side of the fresco. In this location, the Nile River is flowing parallel to the Pharaoh and the individuals that surround him. Standing naked in the Nile River surrounded by her maids is Pharaoh's daughter. She is holding the infant Moses in her left arm.[lxiii] This highlights the theme of divine intervention. Through the work of G-d, Moses who was initially a Jewish baby and thus subject to a life of slavery in Egypt, was saved from this fate by the Pharaoh's daughter and was raised as an Egyptian. Furthermore, this fresco can also be said to highlight the theme of the triumph of Jews over Gentiles. When he got older, Moses realized that he was in fact Jewish. He went on to save his people and led them out of Egypt to freedom.[lxiv]

The middle register in the Synagogue's prayer hall is the next register to be discussed. It is inscribed with Greek titles and should therefore be read by the viewer from left to right.[lxv] The first fresco being discussed also comes from the Torah book of Exodus and is entitled "Moses Giving the Law"[lxvi] and it also depicts a scene of divine intervention. In this panel there are twelve tents, with one figure in front of each depicting the twelve Jewish tribes, surrounding a central water basin. To the left of the basis, Moses is seated with the Ten Commandments, the laws of the Jewish people, on a tabernacle behind him. Moses had received the Commandments from G-d and had returned to impart them on the Jewish people. The process of imparting these laws is

exemplified through Moses issuing twelve streams of water to the twelve tribes surrounding him. According to an ancient scholar named Philo, this water acts as springs of learning for these tribes.[lxvii]

The next fresco panel in the middle register to be discussed is "Samuel and Eli at the Sanctuary of Shiloh". It comes form the prophet book of Samuel and divine intervention. Although slightly damaged, the depiction in the fresco can still be understood based on the story. In this fresco, a child and an adult are set beside a wall painted on a green background. Beside this wall is another figure dressed in religious garments, thus defining him as the Rabbi Eli and the wall as a part of a sanctuary. Above the heads of the three figures, the fresco is painted black. Therefore, this fresco is being depicted as a scene happening at night. Furthermore, it is depicting a scene preceding the actual meaning of the story within the prophet book of Samuel. In this fresco, Samuel's mother took him to the sanctuary within the city of Shiloh and left him in the care of the Rabbi. In the rest of the story, Samuel hears the voice of G-d while asleep inside the sanctuary. G-d told Samuel that the sanctuary he is in will perish because of the transgressions of the Rabbi's sons and because of the fact that the Rabbi ignored what they were doing. G-d concludes by telling Samuel to open the doors to the light of G-d and restore this sanctuary to its former glory.[lxviii]

Finally, the upper register and two of its frescoes will be discussed. The titles of this register are inscribed in Aramaic, thus implying that a Jewish artist created them. Therefore, these frescoes were read from right to left.[lxix] Unlike the two lower registers, a significant amount of these frescoes were damaged and only a few of them have survived intact. "The Judgment of Solomon" from the prophet book of Kings is the first fresco in

the upper register that will be discussed. Within it, two female figures in frontal positions are dressed in long draped dresses are standing next to each other. Next to them is a male figure, also in the same position, wearing white boots. Farther away from these figures to the viewer's left is a chair and a set of steps flanked with alternating lions and eagles. One of the steps has the name "Solomon" inscribed on it in Aramaic. According to this story in the prophet book of Kings, the man in the white boots is Solomon and the women in the long dresses are his judges. Their clothes reflect their social statuses, the women being of a higher rank than Solomon. The chair and the steps with the lion and eagles represent a mission that Solomon must go on. The women communicate this two him and will be judging him as to whether or not he completes it.[lxx]

The final fresco to be discussed from the upper register comes from the Torah book of Genesis. It is the story of "Jacob's Dream" and it highlights the theme of divine intervention.[lxxi] With the exception of the figures, the fresco is painted black, thus depicting a night scene. In the foreground of this fresco, Jacob is sleeping on a pile of stones, dressed in long white garments. He is doing so because he has fled his father's house due to the anger of his brother, Esau. In his quest to end up the land of his mother's people, he has the illustrated dream. Above his head, a ladder is visible with two legs ascending it. The man behind the two legs reveals himself to Jacob as G-d and promises him the land that he is resting his head upon. In addition, G-d promises the land to Jacob's descendants as well. The land being promised to Jacob is Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people.[lxxii]

In total, the frescoes previously discussed detail important stories in the history of the Jewish people. The rest of the frescoes present in the three registers within the

Synagogue are just as historically significant. Furthermore, there significance to the Jewish people reflects the significance of the reconstruction of the Dura Europos Synagogue as well.

In the middle of the third century of the Common Era, Sassanian king Shapur I succeeded the Parthian dynasty as ruler of Iran and challenged Roman power in Syria. Shapur I and his army invaded Syria and marched up the Euphrates River, captured everything along route including Dura Europos. The war veterans and the Roman soldiers of the city went into action and did not surrender to the Sassanians without a fight. In addition to fighting, they constructed defensive embankments of gravel and debris and placed them along the western city wall. The veterans and soldiers also filled buildings along the main street with rubble in hopes of preserving them during battle.[lxxiii] Once these defenses were broken down, the citizens surrendered since there was no evidence of fighting in any city beyond Dura Europos.[lxxiv]

The final attack and eventual fall of Dura Europos can be dated back to 256 CE. This is the assumption made about the year because when the city was being excavated a tunnel was discovered with the skeletons of soldiers who had been caught in its collapse. Their bodies were found with Roman coins, the latest date of which was 256 CE. They provide firm evidence that fall of Dura Europos occurred as part of Shapur I's invasion of Syrian territory at this time.[lxxv] After collapsing in on itself, Dura Europos remained abandoned in the desert. An engineer named Josef Cernik was the first to mention the city in his 1872 survey of upper Mesopotamia and Syria. However, he called it Salihiyeh, the modern name assigned before the city's eventual discovery. In 1889, an American archaeologist briefly visited the site. Finally, Friedrich Sarre briefly investigated it again

in a survey expedition in 1898.[lxxvi] Of all these expeditions, no legitimate discoveries were ever made.[lxxvii] In truth, there were two factors that did not allow for prior examination of Dura Europos. The first reason centered on the fact that the ruins were along the west bank of the Euphrates River and were therefore hidden from view by the east bank. The second reason had to do with the categorization of Dura Europos prior to its discovery. It had been generally categorized in the Arab period of art and architecture and was therefore not of interest to Classical and Ancient Oriental archaeologists who had prominently studied the area.[lxxviii]

In March 30, 1920, the British army had been fighting in Mesopotamia, more specifically in the desert northwest of Baghdad.[lxxix] The army had a weak hold on the area and had been instructed by their captain, M.C. Murphy, to set up a temporary camp in the desert.[lxxx] The army took to occupying the ruins of a walled fortress on the Euphrates River when they discovered well-preserved wall paintings showing a group of life-size figures performing a sacrifice.[lxxxi] Although these paintings did not belong to the Dura Europos Synagogue, they were important nonetheless. The discovery was communicated to army superior Lieutenant Colonel G. Leachman, who was located nearby in British headquarters in the town of Abou Kemal. Leachman communicated with the Civil Commissioner, Colonel A.T. Wilson in Baghdad.[lxxxii] At Wilson's suggestion, Professor James Henry Breasted, the Director of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago was called to examine the paintings and the site as well.[lxxxiii] Breasted was already in Baghdad and received Wilson's letter on April 23 and was hastily dispatched to the site along with a small excavation team five days later.[lxxxiv] While Breasted and his team were traveling to the site, it came to be of interest to the French-Syrian Protectorate and they

incorporated it under the Treaty of San Remo on April 29.[lxxxv] Breasted and his team arrived on May 3. They immediately began preliminary examinations after they received permission to have East Indian troops clear the foundation of the building where the paintings had been discovered. This was done in order to better expose the paintings for a better look at them. One painting discovered had a depiction, as it had been labeled, of the Good Fortune of Dura. This gave Breasted the ancient and proper name of the city. As the East Indian troops dug the site out as apart of this initial excavation, Breasted took photographs and notes of the paintings and a basic sketch of the plan of the location was taken as well.[lxxxvi]

In total, it took an entire week to navigate through the site of the initially discovered wall paintings. Once this was finished, the troops refilled the room and headed to Beirut in order to compile notes. During this process, Breasted identified the city based from the chronicle of the Euphrates area by Isidoros of Chara as "Dura, the city of Nikanor, a Macedonian foundation which the Greeks call Europos". In the summer of 1922, Breasted reported on the paintings to the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters in summer of 1922. After reading the findings, the Academy authorized an excavation in the fall of 1922. Eventually in 1924, Breasted published a book titled Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Painting based on the findings.[lxxxvii]

In October of 1922, excavation of Dura Europos began under the led of Belgian scholar Franz Cumont. Between November seventh and eighth, Cumont and his team had cleared the Temple of the Palmyrene G-ds, the Tower of the Archers, the Temple of Artemis-Nanaia, and some tombs. It was during this time that the name "Europos" was discovered to identify the city of Dura. By 1926, the news of Dura Europos had reached

the United States. This was due in large part to widespread attention of the excavation results that Cumont had published. They attracted the attention of Cumont's colleague, Michael Rostovtzeff, a professor of Ancient History and Archaeology at Yale University. He persuaded Yale to enter on a joint expedition with the French Academy.[lxxxviii] The Syrian government granted permission for this in 1927 and Rostovtzeff joined the team already in place in Dura Europos on what was now a joint Yale-French Academy excavation. Throughout the seasons of excavation, Clark Hopkins joined the excavation team from American and Le Comte Robert du Mesnil du Buisson from France. Eventually, Hopkins took charge of the excavations.[lxxxix]

By the fifth season of the excavation in 1932, the excavation team had uncovered a good amount of the city of Dura Europos. On February twelfth, they discovered the Synagogue in the form of bits of wall painting to the north of the city's largest gate. The frescoes within the Synagogue's prayer hall continued to be uncovered in the following November during the sixth season of the excavation. Although there was slight rain damage to the Synagogue during the seventh excavation season in February of 1934, the eighth of the excavation proved to be the most important to the Synagogue's discovery. During this season, Clark Hopkins led the excavation team in a complete clearing out of the prayer hall in order to get a better look at the frescoes.(Hopkins xxiii) Of all the excavators, Hopkins and Michael Rostovtzeff were the most grateful for the Synagogue's discovery. Hopkins wanted to make an important discovery during the Great Depression, which had spread to Syria by this point, in order to boost morale. Rostovtzeff reported that Jewish people were more interested in learning about their history than other religious groups and that the Synagogue's discovery would reflect this.[xc]

A large group was set up to work around November of 1932 in order to clear out Synagogue and make a better discovery and view paintings in an easier manner. One hundred workers set out on this mission. Within their first days of work, they had set up a railway tracks so that the dirt in the Synagogue could be taken out on small cars. In clearing away this dirt, the excavation group had to be careful not to cut away debris on the walls because they were not sure what was underneath it. They could do further damage to walls or could be do significant damage to well preserved walls. Therefore, instead of digging away all of the dirt, a thin layer was left in order to prevent damage. As the group came closer to the back wall of the Synagogue, they realized that they were in one large room, which was in fact the prayer hall. The western wall with the Torah niche was the first to be uncovered and the entire team was impressed with how well preserved the frescoes were.[xci]

Interestingly enough, based on the inscriptions present on the frescoes, the team was not initially sure what type of building they were in. It was Du Mesnil who read an Aramaic inscription and identified a scene from the Torah and thus idenitify the room they were in as apart of Synagogue. Although the team was still not sure that Du Mesnil's assumption was correct, they discovered he was during the remaining weeks of the eighth and final excavation season.[xcii] By the time it was over, the team had uncovered the entire Synagogue and eventually published the findings in a series of reports.[xciii]

Despite the impressive discovery of the Synagogue at Dura Europos, the finding was not without critics. The criticism came from scholars who invoked the Second Commandment from Jewish law. This commandment states that Jews should not create images in likeness of G-d or a created being. In using this, scholars argued that the

frescoes in the Synagogue's prayer hall could not be Jewish in nature since the religion simply prohibited creating such works. However, Jewish scholars and text have refuted this. According to Rabbah, a Babylonian teacher from the third century of the Common Era, images meant for decorative purposes were not to be taken as offensive or as a violation of the Second Commandment. Although the frescoes in the Dura Europos Synagogue did have meaning behind them, there overall purpose was a decorative one. Furthermore, the Talmud, the Jewish book of oral law made a point of discussing rabbis who had paintings on the walls of their Synagogue and didn't hinder their creation. Instead, theses paintings, as well as the Dura Europos frescoes, exemplified a growing sense of freedom and expression within the Jewish world.[xciv]

As the first ever example of Jewish Art, the frescoes at the Synagogue of Dura Europos are an important part of the study of Art History. Furthermore, without the history that had happened in the city of Dura Europos, there not have been frescoes to studied in the first place. Therefore, a fluid understanding of this city, its Synagogue, and even what happened after there destruction is necessary from beginning to end in order for all aspects to be understood.

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[i] The city will be referred to as Dura Europos throughout this thesis for continuity.
[ii] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 1.
[iii] Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979), 4.
[iv] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 4.
[v] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 1.
[vi] In literature, the name of the city is often compounded as "Dura-Europos". However, this is a modern day creation and is not found on any documents dating back to the city's time period.[3]

[3]Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 1.
[vii] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 6-7.
[viii] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1.
[ix] See Figure 1.
[x] Ibid., 3.
[xi] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 6.

[xii] Ibid., 7.
[xiii] Ibid., 1.
[xiv] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 4.
[xv] Ibid., 4-5.
[xvi] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 7-9.
[xvii] Ibid., 9.
[xviii] Ibid., 35.
[xix] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 4.
[xx] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 25.
[xxi] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-4.
[xxii] See Figure 2.
[xxiii] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 7.
[xxiv] Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (Leiden; Boston; Koln: Brill, 1998), 39.
[xxv] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 7.
[xxvi] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2-4.
[xxvii] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 24.
[xxviii] Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (Leiden; Boston; Koln: Brill, 1998), 39.
[xxix] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 24.
[xxx] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2.
[xxxi] See Figure 3.
[xxxii] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 26.
[xxxiii] Ibid., 24.
[xxxiv] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1.
[xxxv] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 24.
[xxxvi] Ibid., 56.
[xxxvii] Ibid., 24.
[xxxviii] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2.
[xxxix] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 30.
[xl] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2.
[xli] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 56.
[xlii] Ibid., 29.
[xliii] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3.
[xliv] Ibid., 3.
[xlv] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 29.
[xlvi] Ibid., 56.
[xlvii] Ibid., 55.
[xlviii] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 26.

[xlix] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 56.
[l] Ibid., 56-57.
[li] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19.
[lii] Ibid., 5-6.
[liii] Ibid., 7-8.
[liv] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 30.
[lv] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 17-18.
[lvi] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 57-58.
[lvii] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 17-18.
[lviii] See Figure 4.
[lix] Ibid., 29.
[lx] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 58.
[lxi] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 29-31.
[lxii] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 58.
[lxiii] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 46-47.
[lxiv] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 59.
[lxv] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 18.
[lxvi] See Figure 5.
[lxvii] Ibid., 55-56.
[lxviii] Ibid., 61-62.
[lxix] Ibid., 18.
[lxx] Ibid., 72-73.
[lxxi] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 59.
[lxxii] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Synagogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 73.
[lxxiii] Susan B. Matheson, *Dura Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 35.
[lxxiv] Ibid., 38.
[lxxv] Ibid., 36.
[lxxvi] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1.
[lxxvii] Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979), xxi.
[lxxviii] Ibid., 4.
[lxxix] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1.
[lxxx] Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979), 1.
[lxxxi] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1.
[lxxxii] Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979), 1.
[lxxxiii] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1.
[lxxxiv] Ibid., 1.

[lxxxv] Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979), xxi.
[lxxxvi] Ibid., 3-4.
[lxxxvii] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2-3.
[lxxxviii] Ibid., 2.
[lxxxix] Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979), xxi-xxiii.
[xc] Ibid., 121.
[xci] Ibid., 129.
[xcii] Ibid., 133.
[xciii] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2.
[xciv] Bernard Goldman, "The Question of a Judaic Aesthetic in Ancient Synagogue Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 19 (1961): 298-301.

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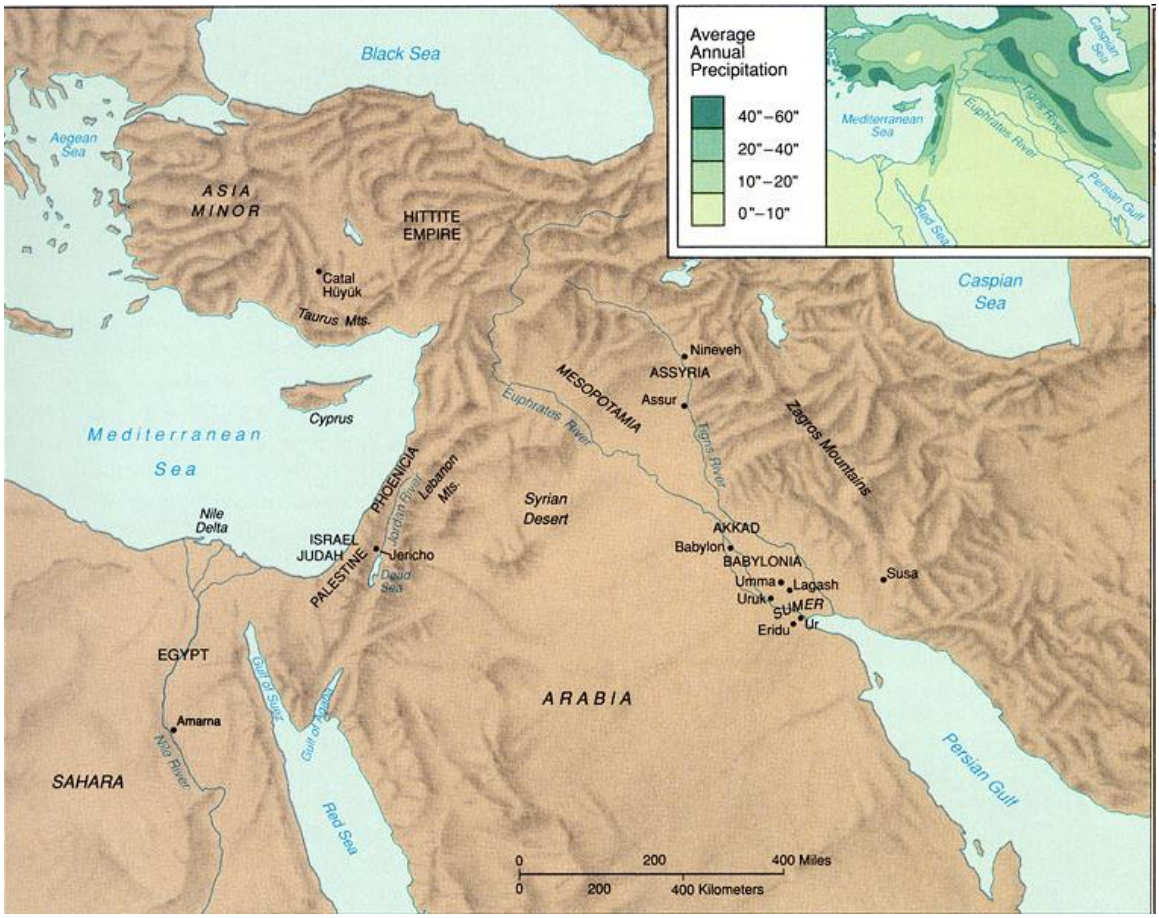
Average Annual Precipitation
40"–60"
20"–40"
10"–20"
0"–10"
Caspian Sea
Mediterranean Sea
Euphrates River
Tigris River
Persian Gulf
Red Sea
Black Sea
Aegean Sea
ASIA MINOR
HITTITE EMPIRE
Catal Hüyük
Taurus Mts.
Caspian Sea
Nineveh
ASSYRIA
Assur
MESOPOTAMIA
Euphrates River
Tigris River
Zagros Mountains
Cyprus
Mediterranean Sea
PHOENICIA
Lebanon Mts.
Jordan River
Syrian Desert
Nile Delta
ISRAEL
JUDAH
PALESTINE
Jericho
Dead Sea
AKKAD
Babylon
BABYLONIA
Umma
Lagash
Uruk
SUMER
Eridu
Ur
Susa
EGYPT
Gulf of Suez
Gulf of Aqaba
ARABIA
Amarna
Nile River
SAHARA
Red Sea
Persian Gulf
0 200 400 Miles
0 200 400 Kilometers

Figure 1

Map of the Location of Dura Europos

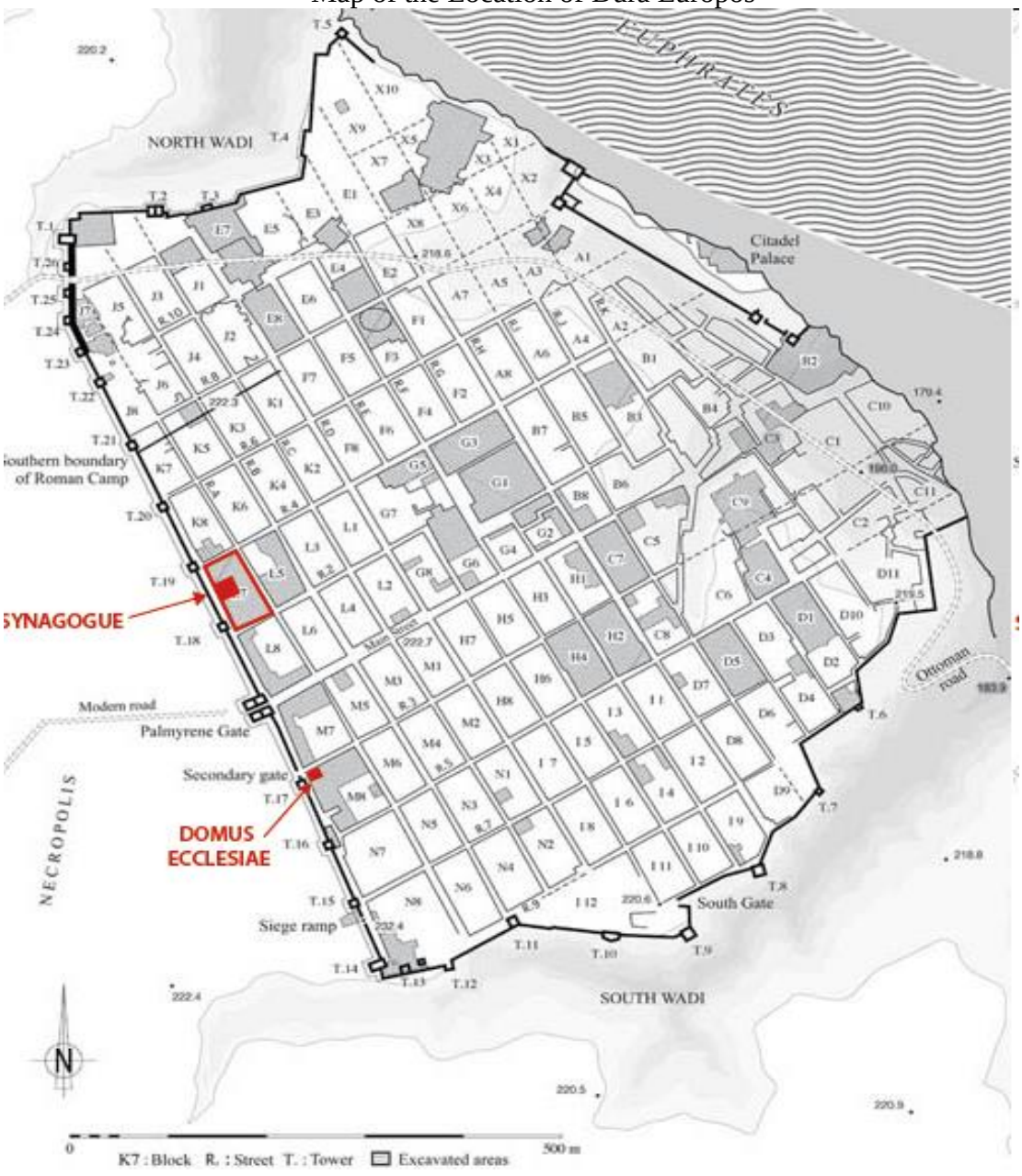

Figure 2

Map of Location of Synagogue within Dura Europos

Figure 3

Prayer Hall of Synagogue

Figure 4

Dado and Fresco Panel of Ahasuerus and Esther, from the Book of Esther, Lower Register

Figure 5

Fresco Panel of Moses Giving Law from the Book of Exodus in the Torah, Middle Register