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 - [ELVI - ENGE](#)
 - [ENGE - EPIC](#)
 - [EPIG - ESTE](#)
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 - [EVIL - EZRA](#)
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 - [FARH - FELB](#)
 - [FELD - FEUE](#)

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- [FORG - FRAN](#)
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 - [GAMA - GEDA](#)
 - [GEDA - GERM](#)
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 - [GHIR - GLOG](#)
 - [GLOG - GOLD](#)
 - [GOLD - GORD](#)
 - [GORD - GRAZ](#)
 - [GRAZ - GUAR](#)
 - [GUAR - GYMN](#)
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 - [HAIR - HAMN](#)
 - [HAMN - HARA](#)
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 - [HAZZ - HEKS](#)
 - [HELA - HERR](#)
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 - [JEHO - JEWI](#)
 - [JEWI - JOD](#)
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 - [JONA - JOSE](#)
 - [JOSE - JOSE](#)
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 - [JUDA - JUDE](#)
 - [JUDE - JUWE](#)
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 - [KAB - KALI](#)
 - [KALI - KANA](#)
 - [KANI - KASA](#)
 - [KASH - KEMP](#)
 - [KEMP - KIEV](#)
 - [KIHA - KITE](#)
 - [KITT - KNOT](#)
 - [KNOX - KOKE](#)
 - [KOLB - KOSM](#)
 - [KOSS - KROC](#)
 - [KRON - KUTT](#)
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 - [LEMU - LEVI](#)
 - [LEVI - LEVI](#)
 - [LEVI - LEWI](#)
 - [LEWI - LILI](#)
 - [LILI - LIVE](#)
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 - [LONG - LOWY](#)
 - [LOWY - LYSI](#)
- [M](#)
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- [MONE - MOSE](#)
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- [N](#)
 - [NAAM - NAHU](#)
 - [NAHU - NASI](#)
 - [NASI - NATH](#)
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 - [NECH - NESE](#)
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 - [RAMI - RAUS](#)

- [RAVE - REGG](#)
- [REGG - REPT](#)
- [RESC - RIBA](#)
- [RIBA - RITT](#)
- [RITT - ROMI](#)
- [ROMI - ROSE](#)
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- [ROTH - RYSS](#)
- [S](#)
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 - [SAMB - SAND](#)
 - [SAND - SCHM](#)
 - [SCHM - SELA](#)
 - [SELA - SHAT](#)
 - [SHAV - SHUS](#)
 - [SHUS - SIMH](#)
 - [SIMH - SOLO](#)
 - [SOLO - SPIE](#)
 - [SPIE - STRA](#)
 - [STRA - SZOL](#)
- [T](#)
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 - [TALM - TARR](#)
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 - [TIBE - TOBI](#)
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 - [TORT - TREB](#)
 - [TREB - TRIW](#)
 - [TRIW - TROK](#)
 - [TROK - TYRO](#)
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 - [UBAL - UNGA](#)
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 - [URIB - UZZI](#)
- [V](#)
 - [VAEZ - VANS](#)
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 - [VEND - VERS](#)
 - [VERV - VINE](#)
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- [VOCΑ - VULT](#)
- [W](#)
 - [WAAD - WALL](#)
 - [WALL - WATE](#)
 - [WATE - WEIG](#)
 - [WEIL - WEIS](#)
 - [WEIS - WESS](#)
 - [WEST - WIEN](#)
 - [WIEN - WILL](#)
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 - [ZARF - ZEBI](#)
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 - [ZERA - ZIMM](#)
 - [ZIMR - ZODI](#)
 - [ZOHA - ZUKE](#)
 - [ZUKU - ZWEI](#)

SYNAGOGUE:

Table of Contents

- [Established During the Exile.](#)
- [Spread of Synagogues.](#)
- [Importance of the Institution.](#)
- [In Medieval Times.](#)
- [Synagogues in Spain.](#)

- [In Islam.](#)
- [Legendary Foundations.](#)
- [Special Synagogues.](#)
- [Wooden Synagogues.](#)
- [Object of Splendid Buildings.](#)
- [Position of Synagogue Building.](#)
- [—Legal Aspect:](#)
- [Honor Must Be Paid to Synagogue.](#)

Established During the Exile.

The origin of the synagogue, in which the congregation gathered to worship and to receive the religious instruction connected therewith, is wrapped in obscurity. By the time it had become the central institution of Judaism (no period of the history of Israel is conceivable without it), it was already regarded as of ancient origin, dating back to the time of Moses (see Yer. Targ., Ex. xviii. 20 and I Chron. xvi. 39; Pesik. 129b; Philo, "De Vita Mosis," iii. 27; Josephus, "Contra Ap." ii., § 17; Acts xv. 21). The "house of the people" (Jer. xxxix. 8 [Hebr.]) is interpreted, in a midrash cited by Rashi and Kimhi (*ad loc.*), as referring to the synagogue, and "bet 'amma," the Aramaic form of this phrase, was the popular designation in the second century for the synagogue (Simeon b. Eleazar, in Shab. 32a). The synagogue as a permanent institution originated probably in the period of the Babylonian captivity, when a place for common worship and instruction had become necessary. The great prophet, in the second part of the Book of Isaiah, in applying the phrase "house of prayer" to the Temple to be built at Jerusalem (Isa. lvi. 7 and, according to the very defensible reading of the LXX., also lx. 7), may have used a phrase which, in the time of the Exile, designated the place of united worship; this interpretation is possible, furthermore, in such passages as Isa. lviii. 4. The term was preserved by the Hellenistic Jews as the name for the synagogue (προσευχή = οἶκος προσευχῆς; comp. also the allusion to the "proseucha" in Juvenal, "Satires," iii. 296).

After the return from the Captivity, when the religious life was reorganized, especially under Ezra and his successors, congregational worship, consisting in prayer and the reading of sections from the Bible, developed side by side with the revival of the cult of the Temple at Jerusalem, and thus led to the building of synagogues. The place of meeting was called "bet ha-keneset," since an assembly of the people for worship was termed a "keneset"; the assembly described in Neh. ix.-x. was known in tradition as the "great assembly" ("keneset ha-gedolah"; [see Synagogue, The Great](#)). The synagogue continued to be known by this name, although it was called also, briefly, "keneset" (Aramaic, "kanishta"), and, in Greek, συναγωγή.

Spread of Synagogues.

The synagogues of Palestine are first mentioned in Ps. lxxiv., in which the words "mo'ade el" (verse 8) were interpreted as meaning "synagogue" as early as Aquila, although strictly it connotes merely a place of assembly (comp. "bet mo'ed," Job xxx. 23; "bet wa'ad," Ab. i. 4). Neither of the first two books of the Maccabees, however, mentions the burning of the synagogues of the country during the persecutions by Antiochus. The synagogue in the Temple at Jerusalem is mentioned in halakic tradition (see Yoma vii. 1; Soṭah vii. 7, 8; Tosef., Suk. iv.). According to one legend, there were 394 synagogues at Jerusalem when the city was destroyed by Titus (Ket. 105), while a second tradition gives the number as 480 (Yer. Meg. 73d *et al.*). Other passages give the additional information that the foreign Jews at Jerusalem had their own synagogues. Thus there was a synagogue of the Alexandrian Jews (Tosef., Meg. ii.; Yer. Meg. 73d); this synagogue is mentioned in Acts vi. 9 (comp. ix. 29), which refers also to the synagogues of the Cyrenians, Cilicians, and Asiatics. Josephus mentions both the synagogue built by Agrippa I. at Dora ("Ant." xix. 6, § 3) and the great synagogue at Tiberias, in which, during the war against Rome, political meetings were once held on the Sabbath and the following days ("Vita," § 54). The synagogue of Cæarea rose to importance during the inception of this uprising (Josephus, "B. J." ii. 14, §§ 4-5); it was called the "revolutionary synagogue" ("kenishta di-meradta") as late as the fourth century (see Grätz, "Gesch." 2d ed., iv. 313).

The evangelists refer to the synagogues of Nazareth (Matt. xiii. 54; Mark vi. 2; Luke iv. 16) and Capernaum (Mark i. 21; Luke vii. 5; John vi. 59) as places where Jesus taught. There are but few details given in traditional literature concerning the other synagogues of Palestine, although mention is made of those in Beth-shean (Scythopolis; Yer. Meg. 74a), Cæsarea (Yer. Bik. 65d; see above), Kefar Tiberias (Pesik. R. 196b), Kifra, or Kufra (Yer. Ta'an. 68b; Meg. 70a), Lydda (Yer. Shek. v., end), Maon (Shab. 139a; Zab. 118b), Sepphoris (Pesik. 136b [the great synagogue]; Yer. Ber. 9a; Yer. Shab. 8a [the Synagogue of the Babylonians]; Yer. Ber. 6a [the Synagogue of the Vine]), Tiberias (Ber. 8a, 30b [thirteen synagogues]; Yer. Ta'an. 64a [the Synagogue of the βουλή]; 'Er. x. 10), and Tib'er'in (Tosef., Meg. ii.).

Ruins of an Ancient Synagogue at Meron.(From a photograph by the Palestine Exploration Fund.) Ruins of an Ancient Synagogue at Kafr Bir'im, the Most Perfect Remains of a Synagogue in Palestine.(From a photograph by the Palestine Exploration Fund.)

The earliest document relating to the settlement of the Jews in Egypt and their adoption of Hellenic customs was discovered in 1902. This is a marble slab with the following inscription in Greek: "In honor of King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice, his sister and wife, and their children, the Jews [dedicate] this synagogue" (*προσενχή*). The stone was found in the ancient Schedia, 20 kilometers from Alexandria; the king mentioned on it is Ptolemy, according to Th. Reinach (in "R. E. J." xlvi. 164). Similar dedicatory inscriptions have been discovered in Lower Egypt, one of them declaring that the king had bestowed the rights of asylum (*άσυλον*) on the synagogue (*ib.* xlvi. 163). In III Macc. vii. 20 there is an account of the founding of a synagogue at Ptolemais (on the right bank of the Bah̄r Yusuf) during the reign of King Ptolemy IV. Philo expressly states ("De Legatione ad Caïum," § 20) that the large population of Alexandria had many synagogues in various quarters of the city, and he says also (*ib.*) that when the Alexandrian synagogues were destroyed the same fate was shared by the shields, golden wreaths, stelæ, and inscriptions which in honor of the emperors had been set up in the open halls (*περιβόλαι*) of the courts of the synagogues (Philo, "In Flaccum," § 7). The great synagogue of Alexandria, which was destroyed during the reign of Trajan, was especially famous, its size and splendor being made the subject of glowing descriptions in the schools of Palestine and Babylon (Suk. 51a; Tosef., *ib.* iv.; Yer. Suk. 55a).



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In Syria the great synagogue of Antioch was famous; to it, according to Josephus ("B. J." vii.

3, § 3), the successors of Antiochus Epiphanes presented the bronze votive offerings which had been taken from Jerusalem. Its site was occupied in the fourth century by a Christian basilica dedicated to the Maccabean martyrs (the seven brothers mentioned in II and IV Maccabees [see Cardinal Rampolla in "Rev. de l'Art Chrétien," 1899, p. 390]). The apostle Paul preached in various synagogues in Damascus (Acts ix. 20). In the account of his journeys through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece he mentions synagogues at Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Salamis (several synagogues; Acts xiii. 5, 14; xiv. 1; xvi. 13; xvii. 1, 10, 17; xviii. 4, 7).

Philo speaks of the synagogues of the capital of the Roman empire at the time of Augustus ("De Legatione ad Caïum," § 23); and the inscriptions show that Rome contained a synagogue named in honor of the emperor Augustus, another called after Agrippa, and a third after a certain Volumnus. One synagogue received its name from the Campus Martius, and one from the Subura, a populous quarter of Rome; while another was termed "the Synagogue of the Olive-Tree." The inscriptions refer even to a synagogue of "the Hebrews," which belonged probably to a community of Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. The synagogue of Severus at Rome is mentioned in an ancient literary document dealing with the variant readings in a copy of the Pentateuch (see Schürer, "Gesch." 3d ed., iii. 44 *et seq.*; Berliner, "Gesch. der Juden in Rom," i. 62 *et seq.*).

The ruins of a synagogue were discovered in 1883 at Hammam-Lif, near Carthage. A Latin inscription was found in the outer court, while a mosaic with an inscription, and picturing various animals and the seven-branched candle-stick, was set in the floor of the synagogue itself ("R. E. J." xiii. 45-61, 217-223). Remains of ancient synagogues, some of which date from the second or, perhaps, even from the first century of the common era, have been found in various localities of northern Galilee, in the vicinity of Lake Merom, and on the shores of Lake Gennesaret (see Renan, "Mission de Phénicie," pp. 761-783). The best preserved of these ruins are those of Kafr Bir'im; while those of Kaṣyūn contain a Greek inscription from the reign of the emperor Septimius Severus. These Galilean ruins are especially important as showing the architecture of the ancient Palestinian synagogues, which bears general traces of Greco-Roman influence, although it has not surrendered its individuality (see Schürer, *l.c.* ii. 462). It may be noted here that the great synagogue of Alexandria is designated as διτλῆ στοά in the description of it mentioned above, and that a haggadist of the fourth century applies the same term to the chief synagogue of Tiberias (see Midr. Teh. on Ps. xciii.; Bacher, "Ag. Pal. Amor." iii. 672).

Illuminated Representation of a Synagogue.(From the Sarajevo Haggadah of the fourteenth century.)

Only a few synagogues of the Babylonian diaspora are mentioned by name in the Talmud. Those situated in Shaf we-Yatib, near [Nehardea](#), and in Hużal (Meg. 29b) were believed to be the oldest on Babylonian soil and were said to have been founded at the time of the Captivity. In the third century there was a synagogue named in honor of Daniel ('Er. 21a), and in the following century there was a synagogue of "the Romans" at Maḥoza, which belonged probably to Jews from the Roman empire (Meg. 26b). In Babylonia the synagogues were frequently situated outside the cities, in many cases at a considerable distance from them (see *Kid.* 73b; *Shab.* 24b; comp. *Tan.*, ed. Buber, "Hayye Sarah," p. 7), this custom, apparently, being due to the fact that after the destruction of the synagogues by the Persians during the Sassanian period the Jews were forbidden to rebuild within the city limits (see Hastings, "Dict. Bible," iii. 638).

The synagogue and the academy were the two institutions which preserved the essence of the Judaism of the Diaspora and saved it from annihilation. As the place of public worship, the synagogue became the pivot of each community, just as the Sanctuary at Jerusalem had been the center for the entire people. Ezek. xi. 16, "Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary," was rightly interpreted, therefore, to mean that in its dispersion Israel would retain the synagogue as a sanctuary in miniature in compensation for the loss of the Temple (*Targ. ad loc.*), and the

community crystallized around the synagogue, the only possible organization for the Jews of the Diaspora. Synagogal worship, therefore, however much it might vary in detail in different countries, was the most important visible expression of Judaism, and the chief means of uniting the Jews scattered throughout the world; while the academy, in like manner, guaranteed the unity of the religious spirit which animated the synagogue. The synagogue, consequently, is the most important feature of the Jewish community, which is inconceivable without it.

Importance of the Institution.

A history of the synagogue is possible only in so far as Jewish history is considered from the point of view of this important institution. A distinction may be drawn, however, between its internal and its external history, the former dealing with the changes in the cult connected with the synagogue and with its different institutions, and the latter treating of the fortunes of the followers of Judaism and of their social and cultural status in so far as these influenced the synagogue.



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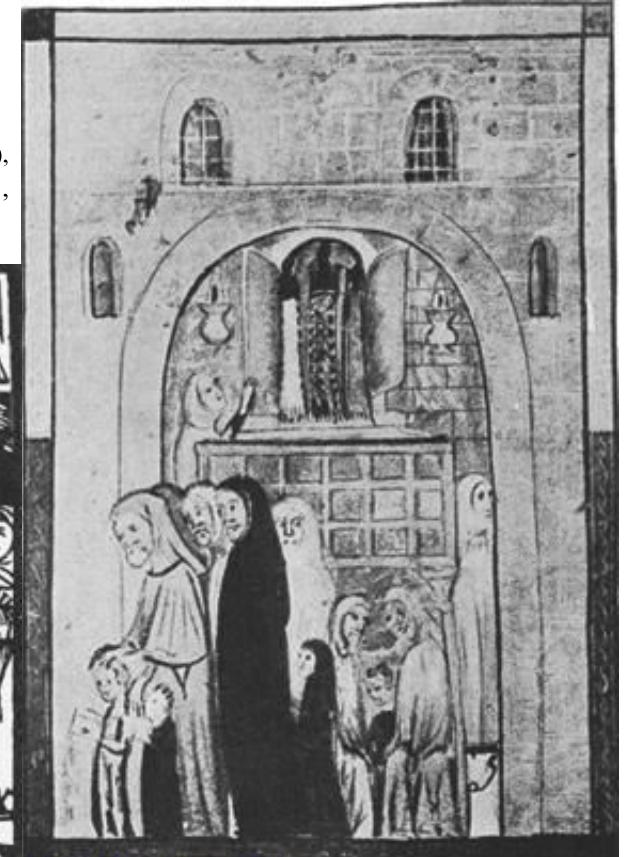
In sketching briefly the external history of the synagogue, it is, in a sense, ominous that the first allusion to it (in Ps. lxxiv.) should be to its destruction. For nearly fifteen hundred years razed synagogues typified the fortunes of the Jewish communities, especially in Christian countries. In the Roman empire, during the fourth century, Theodosius the Great was frequently obliged to check the excessive zeal of the Christians, who burned and plundered synagogues or transformed them into churches (Grätz, "Gesch." 2d ed., iv. 385). His son Arcadius likewise was compelled to take stringent measures against the proposed destruction of synagogues in Illyria in 397. Theodosius II. (408-450), however, expressly forbade the Jews to build new synagogues; and when the Christians of Antiochia seized certain Jewish places of worship, the emperor, although he at first commanded their restoration, was later persuaded by St. Simeon Stylites to revoke the edict.

In Medieval Times. Interior of a Sixteenth-Century Synagogue.(From a woodcut of 1530.)

Eight years before (415), the Christians of Alexandria, instigated by Bishop Cyril, had confiscated the synagogue there and forced the Jews to emigrate, while at Constantinople the great synagogue was dedicated as the Church of the Mother of God, probably during the reign of Theodosius II. When the victories of Belisarius subjugated northern Africa to the Byzantine empire, Justinian commanded (535) that the synagogues should be transformed into churches. During the reign of Theodoric the Great the Christian populace of Rome burned the synagogue; but although he commanded the Senate to punish those who had done so, and though he permitted the Jews of Genoa to repair theirs, he allowed neither the building nor the decoration of synagogues elsewhere. Pope Gregory the Great was noted for his justice toward the Jews; yet he was unable to restore the synagogues that had been taken from them at Palermo by Bishop Victor and dedicated as churches, although he obliged the bishop to pay for them. During the Merovingian period a synagogue at Orleans was destroyed by the mob, and the Jews were unable to induce King Guntram to permit it to be rebuilt (584). The epoch of the Crusades was initiated by "the liberation of Jerusalem," when the victorious crusaders drove the Jews into a synagogue and cremated them there (1099). In France, Philip Augustus commanded in his edict of expulsion, dated 1181, that the synagogues should be transformed into churches, and at the coronation of King Richard I. eight years



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Synagogues in Spain.

The following information regarding transformed synagogues still existing in Spain is given by Kayserling: In the Calle de la Sinagoga in Toledo there is, in addition to the former synagogue of Samuel Abulafia, the great synagogue built in the reign of Alfonso X., now the Church of Santa María la Blanca, a name given it by Vicente Ferrer in the early part of the fifteenth century, when it was dedicated. Both these buildings were restored in the last decade of the nineteenth century, after being closed as churches and declared to be national monuments. One of the large synagogues of Seville was transformed into the Church of S. Bartolomé in 1482, and is now one of the finest in the city; its Hebrew inscriptions were seen by Rodrigo Castro, the author of "Antiguedada de Sevilla," in 1630. The old synagogue at Segovia, burned in 1899, was dedicated as the Church of Corpus Christi (see "R. E. J." xxxix. 209-216). A church at the entrance to the ghetto of Saragossa is said to have been a

synagogue; but there are no documents to verify this statement, although the style of architecture supports it. On the synagogue discovered by Fidel Fita under the name of the Church of Santa Quiteria, at Cordova, see "R. E. J." ix. 157, x. 245.

When the Jews of Ratisbon were expelled in 1519, their synagogue, which was built of freestone, was demolished by the citizens (even the nobles and the bishop taking part in the work of destruction), and a church was erected on the site. The intention of Ferdinand I. of Austria to transform the synagogues of Prague into churches (1557) was not executed, and it was reserved for Leopold I., another member of the house of Hapsburg, to issue the last general order to this effect recorded in history. When the Jews were expelled from Vienna, in 1670, a church was built on the site of their demolished synagogue.

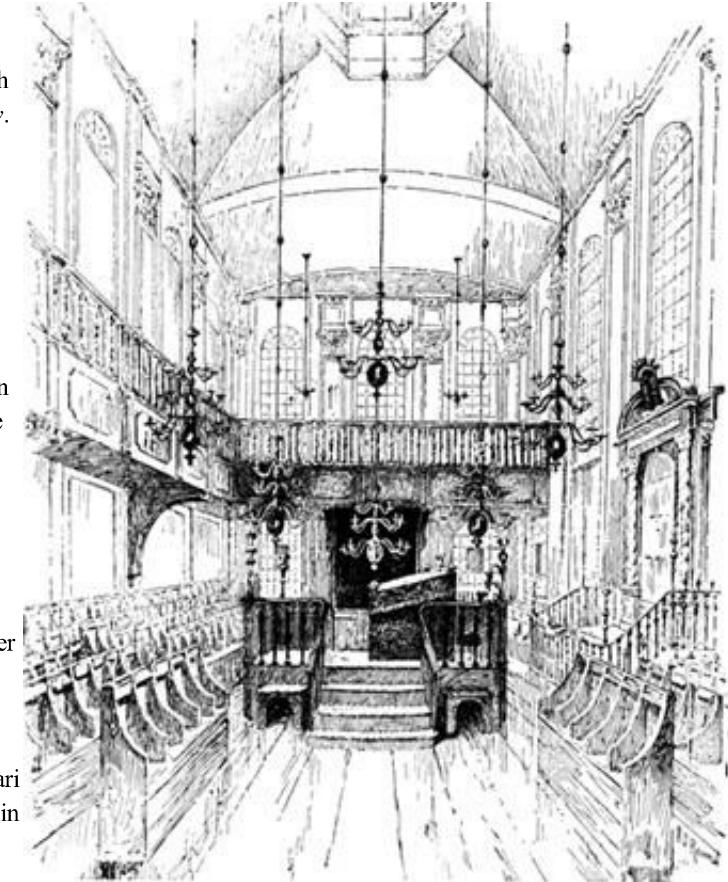
Interior of the Synagogue at Rotterdam.(From an old print.)In Islam.

These episodes in the history of the synagogue in Christian countries have had very few parallels in Mohammedan lands, although the rule of Islam also began with an edict against the synagogue. It was decreed in the "pact of Omar" (see Jew. Encyc. vi. 655, s.v. [Islam](#)) that in those countries which should be conquered no new synagogues might be built, nor old ones repaired. The calif Al-Mutawakkil confirmed this decree in the ninth century, and commanded all synagogues to be transformed into mosques. The Egyptian calif Al-Hakim (d. 1020) also destroyed synagogues, and many were razed in Africa and Spain by the fury of the Almohades (after 1140). The great synagogue of Jerusalem was destroyed in 1473, although the Jews were soon permitted to rebuild it. In eastern Mohammedan countries the names of Biblical personages or of representatives of tradition (e.g., a tanna or amora) were given to many synagogues. The following examples are taken from Benjamin of Tudela ("Itinerary"), from the list of tombs compiled for R. Jehiel of Paris (1240), and from a similar list entitled "Eleh ha-Massa'ot"; the two last-named sources are appended to Grünhut's edition of Benjamin of Tudela (pp. 140-160). Some examples are found also in Pethahiah's itinerary, and in Sambari's chronicle of the year 1682, printed in Neubauer, "M. J. C." i. In the following list the name "Sambari" precedes the page numbers of citations from this latter source; all other references are to the pages of Grünhut's edition of Benjamin of Tudela's "Itinerary."

Legendary Foundations. Interior of the Synagogue at Algiers.(From an old print.)

In the village of Jaujar, in Egypt, there was a synagogue named in honor of the prophet Elijah, since Phinehas b. Eleazar was born there (Sambari, p. 121; Phinehas = Elijah; see Jew. Encyc. v. 122). The synagogue of the Palestinians at Fostat was also called after Elijah; the prophet Jeremiah was said to have prayed there (Sambari, p. 118; p. 137); and there were other synagogues of Elijah at Damascus (p. 157, "between the gardens—a very splendid edifice"), Byblus (p. 158, "an extraordinarily splendid edifice"), Laodicea (p. 158), and Hama (p. 159), while Grätz believed ("Gesch." 1st ed., v. 53) that there was a synagogue of Elijah also in Sicily, at the time of Pope Gregory I. Benjamin found a "Keneset Mosheh" outside the city of Fostat (p. 94). According to Sambari (p. 119; comp. p. 137), the name of "Kanisat Musa" was given to the synagogue of Damwah (see Jew. Encyc. v. 64, s.v. [Egypt](#)), in which Moses himself was said to have prayed (comp. Ex. ix. 29), and in which, on the 7th of Adar, the Jews of all Egypt assembled, during the period of the Nagids, for fasting and prayer. One of the three synagogues of Aleppo was called after Moses (p. 158). Benjamin mentions synagogues named in honor of Ezra at Laodicea (= Kalneh; comp. Sambari, p. 158), Haran, and Jazirat ibn Omar, on the upper Tigris, the first one having been built, he was told, by Ezra himself (pp. 47 *et seq.*). Pethahiah mentions two synagogues built by Ezra at Nisibis. There was a synagogue at Ezra's tomb, and one near the grave of the prophet Ezekiel; the latter was said to have been built by King Jehoiachin ("Itinerary," ed. Benisch, pp. 61, 68). In the province of Mosul (Ashur), Benjamin (p. 48) saw the synagogues of the three prophets Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum. The tomb of Daniel at Susa and the graves of Mordecai and Esther (pp. 68, 75, Pethahiah) were placed in front of synagogues, and Benjamin (p. 41) mentions a synagogue near Tiberias named in honor of Caleb, the son of Jephunneh—apparently the synagogue built, according to Pethahiah's itinerary, by Joshua, the son of Nun.

At Ramlah (Rama) the Christians found the tomb of Samuel beside the synagogue (p. 39, Benjamin), while at Kafr Jubur, near Damascus, there was a synagogue built, according to legend, by Elisha (Sambari, p. 152). Among the Tannaim the name of Simeon b. Yoḥai was given to two synagogues, one at Meron (pp. 141, 154) and the other at Kafr Bir'im (p. 154, "a very splendid edifice, built of



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large stones with great pillars"; see above). At Damascus, according to Benjamin, there was a synagogue of Eleazar b. 'Arak (Pethahiah says Eleazar b. Azariah), and at Nisibis one of Judah b. Bathyra. Several Babylonian synagogues mentioned by Benjamin were named in honor of amoraim: the synagogues of Rab, Samuel, Isaac, Nappaha, Rabba, Mar Kashisha, Ze'era b. Hama, Mari, Meir (at Hillah), Papa, Huna, Joseph, and Joseph b. Hama (pp. 60, 61, 63, 65). All these synagogues stood at the graves of the amoraim whose names they bore.

These examples show that the synagogues bearing the names of Biblical or Talmudic celebrities were often similar in character to the "kubbah" (vault; Hebr. קְבֻבָּה) regularly built over the grave of a Mohammedan saint, and serving as an oratory for the pilgrims to the tomb. Similar kubbahs were erected, according to Benjamin (p. 63), over the graves of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the three friends of Daniel, near the tomb of Ezekiel. In his commentary on Job xxi. 32 Ibn Ezra states that Hai Gaon explained the word "gadish" as the "kubbah over the grave, according to the custom in Mohammedan countries."

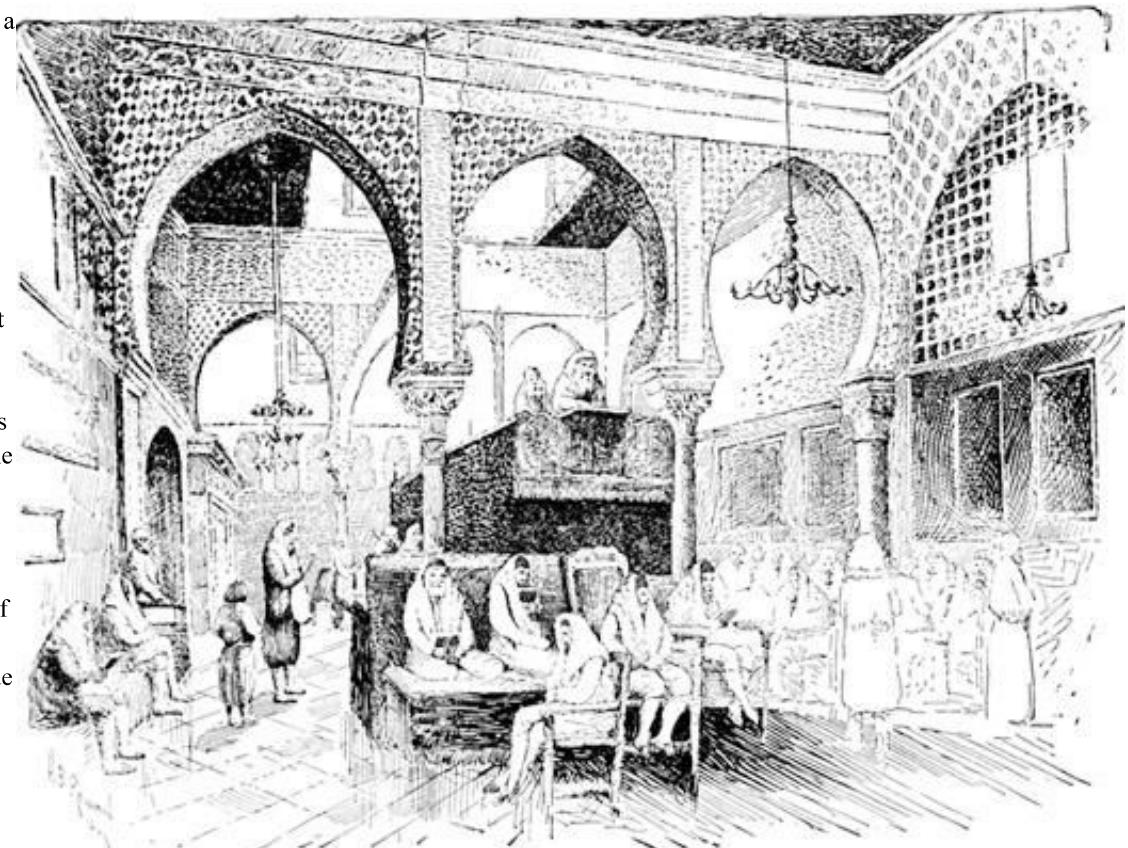
Special Synagogues.

Some of the synagogues mentioned in the sources quoted above are described as buildings of exceptional beauty, although statements to that effect are rarely found elsewhere. It is also quite noteworthy that Benjamin of Tudela does not praise the architecture of any synagogue in the European countries through which he traveled; but it must be borne in mind that the cities of Spain were not included in his descriptions. According to Judah al-Harizi, there were several magnificent synagogues at Toledo, second to none, among them being the splendid edifice built by Joseph b. Solomon ibn Shoshan (Grätz, "Gesch." 3d ed., vi. 189).

The synagogue of Samuel Abulafia at Toledo and other Spanish synagogues still standing have been mentioned above. Bagdad contained twenty-eight, according to Benjamin of

Tudela (Pethahiah says thirty), in addition to the synagogue of the exilarch, which is described by Benjamin as a "building resting on marble columns of various colors and inlaid with gold and silver, with verses from the Psalms inscribed in golden letters upon the pillars. The approach to the Ark was formed by ten steps, and on the upper one sat the exilarch together with the princes of the house of David." The anonymous itinerary mentioned above, in referring to the synagogue which the author saw at Tyre, describes it as "a large and very fine building" (Benjamin of Tudela, ed. Grünhut, p. 158).

The synagogue of Worms, built in the eleventh century (see A. Epstein, "Jüdische Alterthümer in Worms und Speier," Breslau, 1896), and the Altneue Synagogue of Prague are the two oldest structures of their kind which still exist in Europe, and are of interest both historically and architecturally. The five Roman synagogues built under one roof formed until recently a venerable architectural curiosity. The great synagogue of Amsterdam, dedicated in 1675, is a monument both to the faith of the Hispano-Portuguese Maranos and to the religious freedom which Holland was the first to grant to the modern Jews; a similar monument is the Bevis Marks Synagogue, London, which was dedicated in 1701 (see Gaster, "History of the Ancient Synagogue," London, 1901).



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Interior of an Old Synagogue at Jerusalem(From a photograph by E. N. Adler.)Wooden Synagogues. Interior of the Shearith Israel Synagogue, New York.(From the original drawing in the possession of the architect Arnold W. Brunner.)Main Entrance to Temple Beth-El, New York.(From the original drawing in the possession of the architect Arnold W. Brunner.)

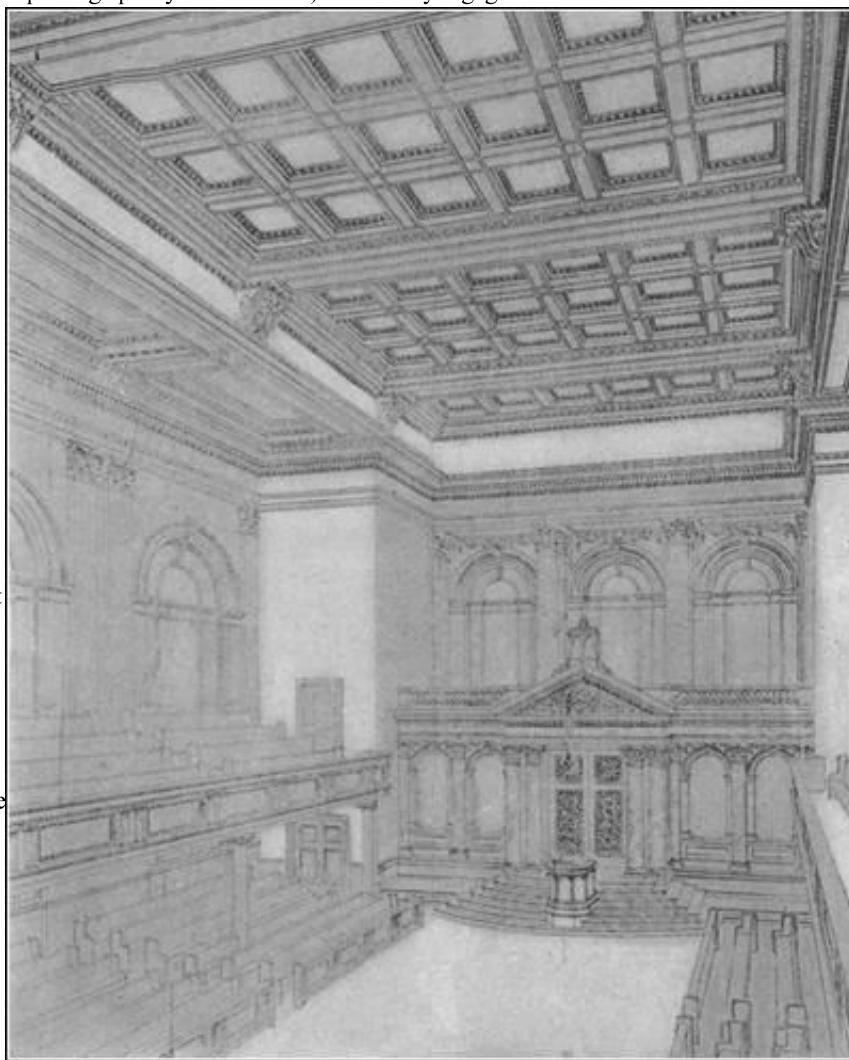
Special reference must be made to the wooden synagogues built in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in some Polish cities, many of them being markedly original in style. They also attest the wealth and culture of the Polish Jews before the year 1548 (see M.

Bersohn, "Einiges über die Alten Holzsynagogen in Polen," in "Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volkskunde," 1901, viii. 159-183; 1904, xiv. 1-20). Bodenschatz, in the middle of the eighteenth century, stated that "rather handsome and large synagogues are found in Germany, especially in Hamburg, and also among the Portuguese, as well as in Prague, particularly in the Polish quarter, besides Fürth and Bayersdorf; but the Dutch synagogues are more splendid than all the rest" ("Die Kirchliche Verfassung der Juden," ii. 35).

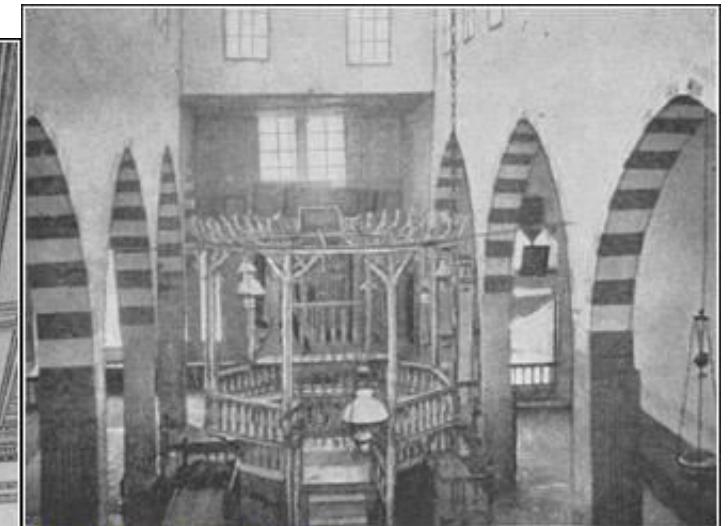
Object of Splendid Buildings.

In the nineteenth century the great changes which ushered in a new epoch in the history of the civic and intellectual status of the European Jews affected also the style and the internal life of the synagogue, especially as religious reform

proceeds primarily from that institution, and is chiefly concerned with synagogal worship. A private synagogue at Berlin (1817) became the first "seminary for young Jewish preachers" (Grätz, "Gesch." xi. 415); while the synagogue of the Reform-Tempel-Verein at Hamburg (1818) was the first to introduce radical innovations in the ritual of public worship, thereby causing a permanent schism in Judaism, both in Germany and elsewhere. These reforms likewise influenced the arrangement of the synagogue itself. The introduction of the organ, the shifting of the almehmar from the center of the building to a position just in front of the Ark, the substitution of stationary benches for movable desks, and the abolition of the high lattices for women, were important from an architectural point of view. The chief factors which promoted and determined the construction of new synagogues were the emancipation of the Jews from the seclusion of the ghetto, their increasing refinement of taste, and their participation in all the necessities and luxuries of culture. Internal causes, however, which were not always unmixed blessings, were the prime agents in the increased importance of the synagogue. As the external observances of religion and the sanctity of tradition lost in meaning and often disappeared entirely within the family and in the life of the individual, the synagogue grew in importance as a center for the preservation of Judaism. It thus becomes explicable why the religious attitude of both large and small communities in Europe and America appears most of all in the



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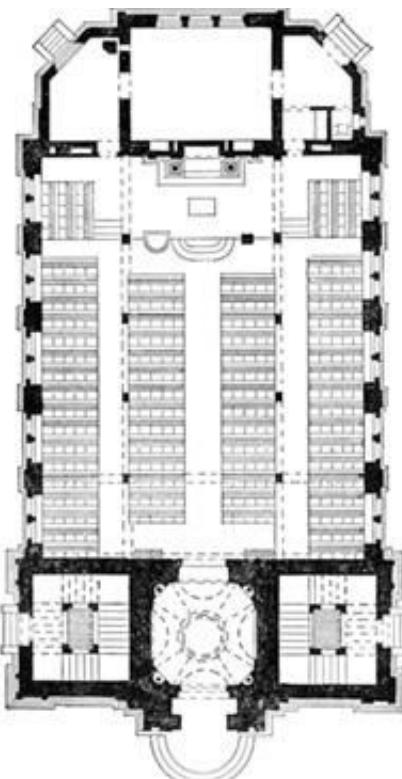
arrangement and the care of the synagogues; and it is not mere vanity and ostentation, which lead communities on both sides of the Atlantic to make sacrifices in order to build splendid edifices for religious purposes, such as are found in many cities.

Main Entrance to Shearith Israel Synagogue, New York.(From the drawing in the possession of the architect Arnold W. Brunner.)

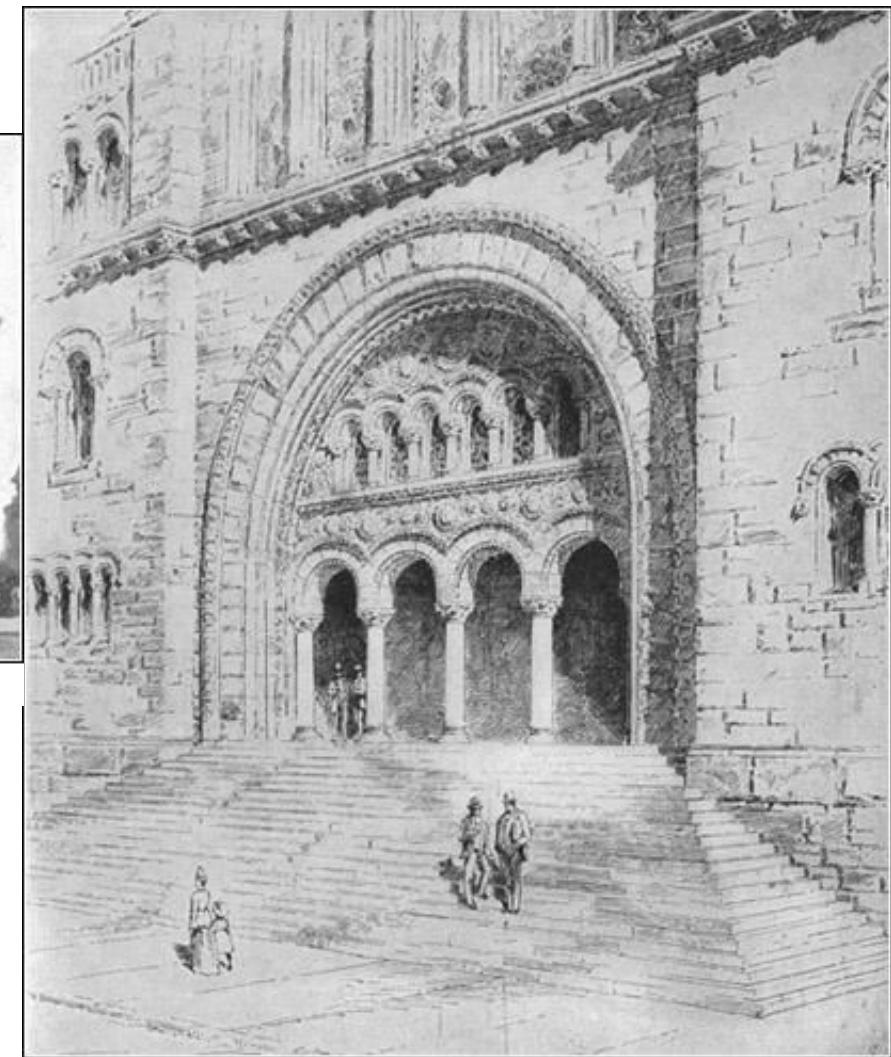
The increasing importance which the synagogue has thus acquired in modern Jewish life is, consequently, justified from a historical point of view, both because it is a development of the earliest institution of the Diaspora—one which it has preserved for two thousand years—and because it is the function of the synagogue to maintain the religious life and stimulate the concept of Judaism within the congregation. The synagogue has in the future, as it has had in the past, a distinct mission to fulfil for the Jews.

Ground-Plan of the
Synagogue at
Reichenberg, Bohemia.
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- L. Palszky, Zsidó @JewishEncyclopedia.com Tempelmosk Európában, in *Jahrb. der Ungarisch-Israelitischen Litteraturgesellschaft*, 1898, pp. 1-44.



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W. B. Position of Synagogue Building.—Legal Aspect: Interior of the Mikvé Israel Synagogue, Philadelphia.(From a photograph.)Interior of the Synagogue of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews at Montreal, Canada.(From a photograph.)

No mention is made in the Talmud of any tax for the building of synagogues; but the Tosefta to B. B. i. 6, as reported by Alfasi, says: "The men of a city urge one another to build a synagogue [בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת] and to buy a book of the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa" (see "Yad," Tefillah, xi.; Shulḥan 'Aruk, Orah Ḥayyim, 150, 151). The codes teach, further, on the strength of a saying ascribed to Rab (Shab. 11a), that the building should stand in the highest part of the town (comp. Prov. i. 21) and rise above all surrounding edifices. Of course, this rule can not always be carried out where the Jews live as a small minority in a town of Gentiles; but a synagogue should never occupy the lower part of a house which contains bedrooms in an upper story. According to a tosefta, the doors of the synagogue should be in the east; but the opinion has prevailed that they should be opposite the Ark and in that part of the room toward which the worshipers face in prayer. The Ark is built to receive the scrolls of the Law. "They put a platform in the middle of the house," says Maimonides, "so that he who reads from the Law, or he who speaks words of exhortation to the people, may stand upon it, and all may hear him" ([see Almemar](#)). According to the same author, the elders sit facing the people, who are seated in rows one behind the other, all with their eyes turned toward the elders and toward the Holy Place (neither code speaks in this connection of the women's gallery). When the "messenger of the congregation" arises in prayer he stands on the floor before the Ark (this, however, is not the custom among the Sephardim of the present time). In the Holy Land, in Syria, Babylonia, and North Africa, etc., the floor is spread with matting, on which the worshipers sit; but in the countries of Christendom they occupy chairs or benches.

Honor Must Be Paid to Synagogue.

Honor should be paid to synagogues and houses of study. People must not conduct themselves lightly nor laugh, mock, discuss trifles, or walk about therein; in summer they must not resort to it for shelter from the heat, nor in winter should they make it serve as a retreat from the rain. Neither should they eat or drink therein, although the learned and their disciples may do so in case of an emergency. Every one before entering should wipe the mud from his shoes; and no one should come in with soiled body or garments. Accounts must not be cast in the synagogue or house of study, except those pertaining to public charity or to religious matters. Nor should funeral speeches be delivered therein, except at a public mourning for one of the great men of the time. A synagogue or house of study which has two entrances should not be used as a thoroughfare; this rule was made in analogy with that in the Mishnah (Ber. ix. 5) forbidding the use of the Temple mount as a thoroughfare.

Synagogue at Zaragorod, Russia.(From a woodcut.)

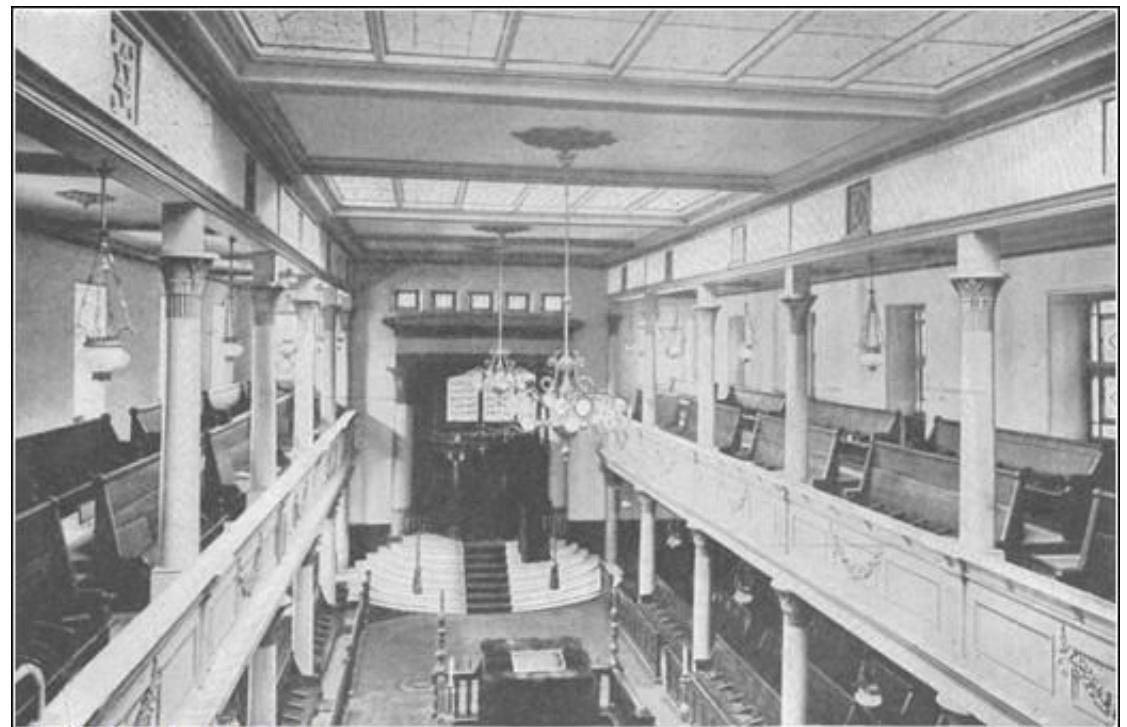
Some honor is to be paid even to the ruins of a synagogue or house of study. It is not proper to demolish a synagogue and then to build a new one either on the same spot or elsewhere; but the new one should be built first (B. B. 3b), unless the walls of the old one show signs of falling. A synagogue may be turned into a house of study, but not viceversa; for the holiness of the latter is higher than that of the former, and the rule is (Meg. iii. 1): "They raise up in holiness, but do not lower in holiness."

The synagogue of a village, being built only for the people around it, may be sold on a proper occasion; but a synagogue in a great city, which is really built for all Israelites who may come and worship in it, ought not to be sold at all. When a small community sells its synagogue, it ought to impose on the purchaser the condition that the place must not be turned into a bath-house, laundry, cleansing-house (for vessels), or tannery, though a council of seven of the leading men in the community may waive even this condition (*ib.* 27b).



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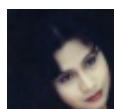


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Interesting account of the history of the synagogue around the Mediterranean. While it most likely came to its central influence during and after the Babylonian exile, citations are noted as early as in Psalm 8 and 1 Chronicles 16. Thinking about the importance of a "neighborhood gathering place" for the people of faith and its relationship to a much larger and more central place of worship. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14160-synagogue>

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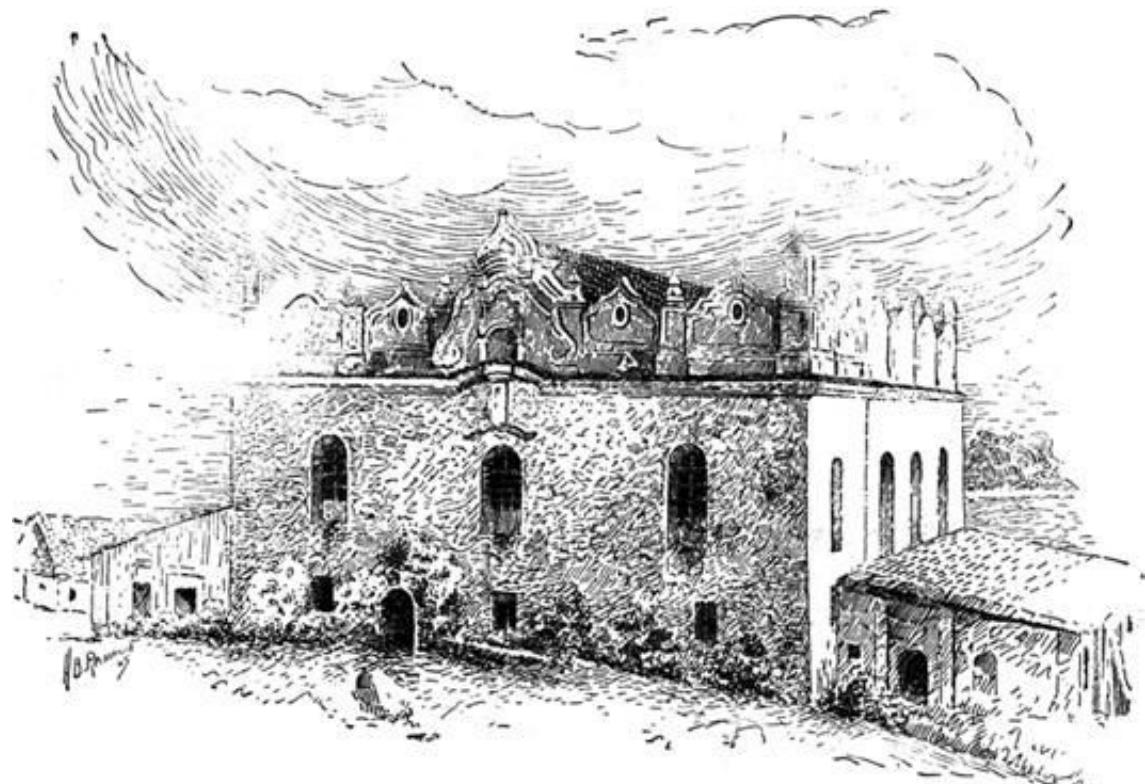
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