

The Zodiac at Beth Alpha Follows *1 Enoch* 82

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1. Introduction

Several zodiacs have been found during archaeological excavations in the land of Israel and they seem to differ from each other. On the zodiac found at Beth Alpha Sukenik (1932: 38) wrote:

In the four corners of the square enclosing the cycle of the Zodiac are shown the four seasons of the year. It is hard to understand the reason why the craftsmen did not show the seasons near their corresponding months. Spring is found near the summer months, Summer near the autumn months, and so on. We find the same in the Na'aran mosaic. There the symbol of Spring is shown near the Zodiac signs Libra and Virgo, and Autumn opposite Aries and Pisces, and so on.

Wiesenberg (1972: 50) wrote:

Convincing illustration of palpable ignorance in matters of calendar, on the part of people otherwise highly gifted, may be seen in the famous sixth-century mosaic floor of the zodiac with the *tekufah* of Nisan at the beginning of *Virgo*, that of Tammuz at the beginning of *Sagittarius*, that of Tishri at the beginning of *Pisces* and that Tevet at the beginning of *Gemini* (sic!). (Emphasis original)

In other words, the craftsmen and those who commissioned their work were ignorant. In this paper I endeavor to demonstrate that the zodiac found at Beth Alpha follows *1 Enoch* 82.

2. Ancient Zodiacs in the Land of Israel

The zodiac was first developed by the Chaldean astronomers and spread to the ancient world and was adopted as such by the Jews, hence the Jewish zodiac. It is not

mentioned in the Talmud and it first appears in *Sefer Yezirah* which was apparently written between the third and sixth centuries C.E. (Encyclopaedia Judaica [EJ], s.v. zodiac).

Table 1 illustrates the differences among four zodiacs found in different locations in the land of Israel.

the Jewish zodiac	Sepphoris	Hammath Tiberias	Na'aran	Beth Alpha
Nisan Aries - Taleh	Taleh	Taleh	Moznayim	Sartan
Iyar Taurus - Shor	Shor	Shor	Betula	Aryeh
Sivan Gemini – Te'omim	Teomim	Teomim	Aryeh	Betulah
Tammuz Cancer - Sartan	Sartan	Sartan	Sartan	Moznayim
Av Leo - Aryeh	Aryeh	Aryeh	Te'omim	Akrav
Elul Virgo - Betulah	Betula	Betulah	Shor	Keshet
Tishrei Libra - Moznayim	Moznayim	Moznayim	Taleh	Gedi
Cheshvan Scorpio - Akrav	Akrav	Akrav	Dagim	Deli
Kislev Sagittarius - Keshet	Keshet	Keshet		Dagim
Tevet Capricorn - Gedi	Gedi	Gedi		Taleh
Shevat Aquarius - Deli	Deli	Deli		Shor
Adar Pisces - Dagim	Dagim	Dagim	Akrav	Te'omim

Table 1. Various zodiacs found in the Land of Israel

The zodiacs at Sepphoris (Figure 1) and Hammath Tiberias (Figure 2) follow the Jewish zodiac. In The zodiac at Seppohris each sign includes the name of the sign and the name of the month, both in Hebrew. In both zodiacs there is a clear division of the seasons.

The arrangement of the signs in relation to the chariot of Sol Invictus is different in each of those zodiacs



Figure 1. The zodiac at Sepporis

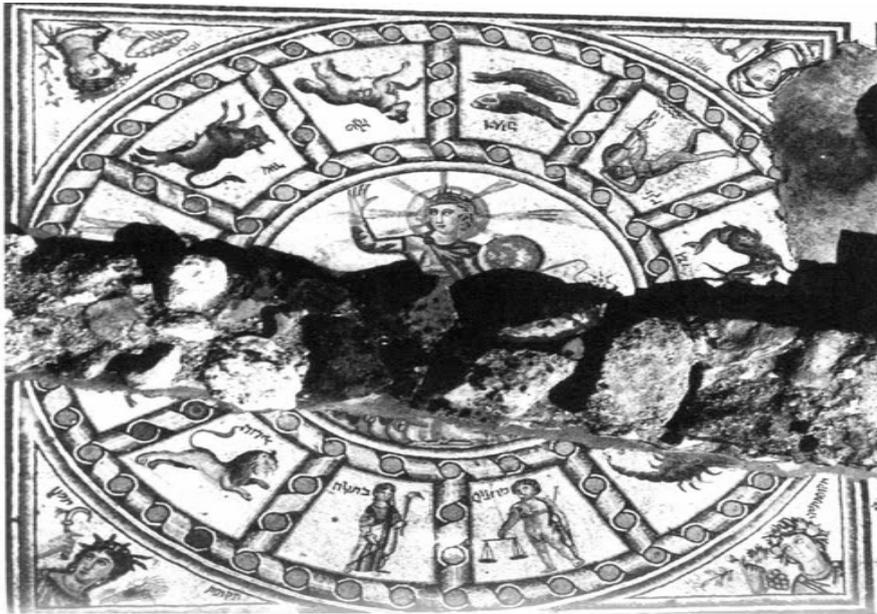


Figure 2. The zodiac at Hammath-Tiberias

The zodiac at Na'aran (Figure 3, Sukenik 1932: 54) differs substantially from those at Sepphoris and Hammath Tiberias. I suggest that it follows a different pattern. According to the *Yalkut Shimoni*, a midrashic anthology probably from the 13th century, the standards of the 12 tribes correspond to the signs of the zodiac: Judah, Isaachar, and Zebulun, corresponding to Aries, Taurus, and Gemini were stationed in the east; to the south Reuben, Simeon, and Gad correspond to Cancer, Leo, and Virgo; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin in the west with Libra, Scorpio, and Sagittarius, in the north Dan, Asher, and Naphtali with Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces (EJ, s.v. zodiac).

The zodiac at Na'aran is just the opposite: the tribes of the east are in the west side and those of the west are in the east; the signs of the north are in the south and vice versa. It seems as if someone had turned the blueprint 180 degrees. According to Smith (1983: 181) it is "increasingly recognized that mosaicists made use of books containing patterns, somewhat like wallpaper pattern books of today." So all the customer needed to do was to select a desired design from the samples. Assuming that the source of midrashic anthology mentioned above is much older, I suggest that the craftsmen who built the mosaic floor just followed the pattern in the wrong direction.

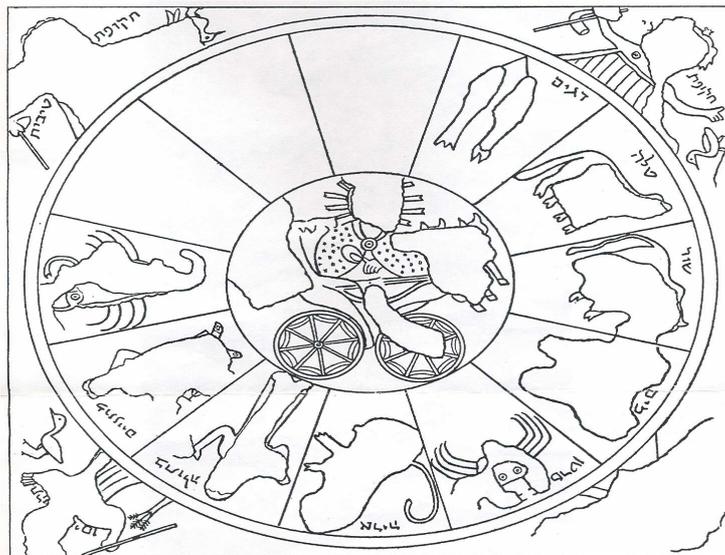


Figure 3. The zodiac at Na'aran

I suggest that the zodiac at Beth Alpha follows *I Enoch* Chapter 82 (see below)

3. *I Enoch* Chapter 82: Deciphering the Zodiac

After describing in details the structure of the heaven, Enoch sums up, in chapter 82, the astronomical-calendric visions to Methuselah, his son:

82:4...It (the sun) comes in through a door and rises for thirty days together with the chiefs of the thousands of the orders of the stars, together with the four which are added to determined the interval within (the year), that is, the interval between the four seasons of the year, those that lead them along come in on four days...9 These are the order of the stars which set their (respective) circuits. (trans. E. Isaac)

Milik (1976: 295), following his discovery of fragments of *I Enoch* in Aramaic in Cave 4 in Qumran, translated verse 82:9: לדגליהון לחדשיהון למעדיהון, in this way:

[...with regard] to their Zodiacal period, their new moons, their (daily) signs.

where למעדיהון 'in their festivals' is on the probable meaning of מעדין, namely 'sign of the Zodiac.' However, Neugebauer asserted that there was no relationship between the heavenly 'gates' in the Ethiopic *Book of Luminaries* and the movements of the sun and moon through the signs in the zodiac (Jacobus 2014: 340). Jacobus herself rejects Neugebauer's assertion:

Furthermore, Neugebauer died before 4Q318 was published and so he could not evaluate the comparative astronomical Aramaic text from Qumran. In any court of appeal one would say that the evidence was never properly evaluated and subsequently new evidence has come to light. Nonetheless, Neugebauer's declaration has been applied by modern scholars to the Aramaic fragments with the result that the Aramaic Astronomical Book has not been recognised as a zodiac calendar.

In her book Jacobus endeavors to demonstrate that Milik's interpretation is mostly correct.

The author of 2 (*the Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch*), who was apparently influenced by 1 *Enoch*, wrote (30:5-6):

And I appointed the sun over the illumination of the days, but the moon and stars over the illumination of the night. And the sun goes in accordance with each animal, and the twelve animals are the successions of the months. And I assigned their names and the animals of their seasons, and their connection with the newborn, and their horoscopes, and how they resolve. (trans. F.I. Andersen)

Another evidence to the notion that chapter 82 indeed deals with the zodiac can be inferred from the writings of the third century historian Eusebius of Caesarea. In his *Ecclesiastical History* one subject which appears few times is the fixing of the date of Pascha ('Easter'). In book VII chapter 32 he quotes the Canons of Anatolius on the Pascha:

The sun is found on the aforesaid 26th of Phamenoth not only to have arrived at the first sign of the zodiac, but already to be passing through the fourth day within it...These writers, when they resolve the questions relative to the Exodus, say that all equally ought to sacrifice the Passover after the vernal equinox, at the middle of the first month; and that this is found to occur when the sun is passing through the first sign of the solar, or as some have named it, the zodiacal cycle... But that the first month with the Hebrews lies around the equinox is shown also by the teachings in the Book of Enoch. (14-19. Tran. J.E.L. Oulton)

4. The Mosaic at Bet Alpha

In 1928, foundations of an ancient synagogue were discovered near kibbutz Beth Alpha in the eastern Jezreel Valley at the foot of Mt. Gilboa. Two inscriptions were found at the entrance to the hall: one, in Aramaic, states that the mosaic was made during the time "of the king Justin"; the other, in Greek, gives the names of the mosaicists.

According to Sukenik (1932: 44) the work was done by a craftsman who was apparently ignorant of Hebrew script or was not skillful in fashioning it.

The entire floor of the structure is paved with mosaic. There are three mosaic panels: one shows Abraham pointing a draw knife at Isaac, who is bound near the altar; another panel describes the Ark of the synagogue flanked by the seven-branched Menorah, shofar, lulav, etrog, lion, etc.; in the center panel there are the signs of the zodiac, with the sun in the center in the form of a youth riding a chariot drawn by four horses (Figure 4).

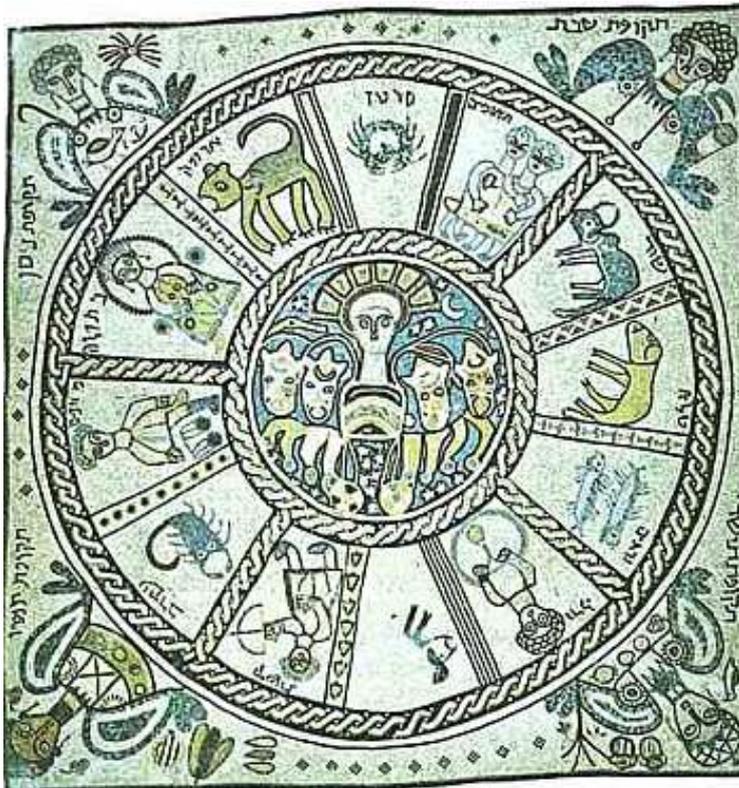


Figure 4. The zodiac at Beth Alpha

This zodiac indeed differs from the Jewish zodiac but I find it hard to believe that the artist who made the mosaic at Beth Alpha synagogue could have made such a gross mistake without anybody in the congregation noticing it. I would imagine that he was instructed as of what to do and at least some members of the community were following his work. A project of such magnitude takes at least some months to accomplish, a fact

which gives plenty of opportunities for everybody to notice mistakes. In short, I suggest that the zodiac was intentionally constructed in this manner.

In 1895 a mosaic, apparently from the second half of the third century CE, depicting Sol Invictus riding on a chariot drawn by four horses was found in Münster-Sarmsheim in Germany (Figure 5). The mosaic is on display at the Rheinisches LandesMuseum in Bonn. According to Parlasca (1959: 88) the composition of this mosaic is unique among the mosaics found in Germany. I maintain that, from the artistic point of view, the arrangement of the chariot and the signs is identical to the mosaic at Beth Alpha.



Figure 5. The zodiac of Münster-Sarmsheim (Parlasca 1959: Tafel 84)

The zodiac of Beth Alpha, is indeed in error if we compare it to the Jewish zodiac but is possibly compatible with *1 Enoch* 82. These are my observations:

a) The Jubilees calendar is a solar one. In *1 Enoch* 72:4-5 we read:

First there goes out the great light whose name is the sun... The chariot on which it ascend is (driven by) the blowing wind.

The description fits well with *2 Enoch* 15: 3:

...the sun (turn his chariot around) and goes back under the earth on wheels...

In the center of the zodiac at Beth Alpha the "sun" is riding on a chariot.

Indeed, all the zodiacs I deal with in this paper have a chariot with a sun god in them. As the Jewish calendar follows the movement of the moon, I suggest that this feature is a non-Jewish element.

b) In *1 Enoch*, 82: 13 we read:

And these are the names of the leaders which divide the four seasons of the years which are fixed: Malki'el, Hela'emmelek, Milay'ul, and Narel.

The name *Malki'el* appears in the Tanakh three times, for example Gen. 46: 17 as the name of Jacob's grandchild, son of Asher. The ending of the second name is the word *melek* which denotes 'king'. It also appears in names, for example *Elimelek* (Ruth, 1: 2). The morpheme *el* means 'God' and also appears in names of human beings and angels. I suggest that the 'leaders' are angels and their images, as seen by the artist, appear in the mosaic of these synagogues. Again, these elements are shared by the other zodiacs.

c) The division of the signs of the mosaic may have followed the description in *1 Enoch* 82.

The craftsman who made the mosaics was apparently not skillful also in constructing a zodiac. While the season of Tamuz is more or less in its place, the rest of the seasons are not properly situated.

As it is clear from the zodiac at Sepphoris, the season is called after its first month. One example is the season of Tishrei (figure 6).



Figure 5. Tekufat Tishrei in the Sepphris zodiac

In the Beth Alpha zodiac starting to count from the month of Tamuz – Moznayim, the sign of the month of Adar is Te'omim. In *1 Enoch* 82: 15-17 we read:

At the very beginning, Malkiyal, whose name is called Tam'ayen – and the sun – rises and rules; and all the days of his authority – during which he reigns – are ninety-one days. 16 And these are the signs of the days which become manifest during the period of his authority: sweat, heat, and dryness; all the trees bear fruits (and) leaves grow on all trees; (there will be) good harvest, rose flowers, and all the flowers which grow in the field; but the winter tree shall wither. 17 And these are the names of the leaders which are their subordinates: Berka'el, Zalebsa'el, and another additional one, a captain of a thousand, named Heluyasaf – the days of the authority of this one have been completed.

In verse 15 the name of the first period is *Tam'ayen*. I suggest that *Tam'ayen* stand for תומיין (tomain), 'Gemini' in Aramaic, as *1 Enoch* was written in Aramaic. Sokoloff (1992, s.v. תומיין) gives also other versions of the word: תאומיין, תומאים, תומאיין, תומאין.

Knibb (1978: 199), following Dillmann, suggested תימני שמש ‘the southern sun’ in Hebrew. However, *I Enoch* was written in Aramaic and, moreover, during the day the sun is always in the south.

In the zodiac of Beth Alpha Gemini is at the sign of the month of Adar. From the description in verses 16 and 17, the season described is spring. As the season is named after its first month, I suggest that the spring season in *I Enoch* is called after the first sign. Adar and Second Adar are the months when the vernal equinox usually occurs. As quoted above, in his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that “the first month with the Hebrews lies around the equinox is shown also by the teachings in the Book of Enoch.”

In 2010 CE, the month of Adar started at the 15th of February and ends at 15th of March. For that year, the place of Gemini at Beth Alpha Zodiac is quite correct.

Since *I Enoch* is a literary polemic book, I suggest that the author described the position of the constellations the way he imagined or calculated the pseudepigraphical Enoch saw them during his heavenly journey, that is, 3000 year before the time the book was written. The constellations move the sky and hence the difference in the Beth Alpha zodiac in comparison to other contemporary zodiacs.

d) On the four epagomenal days “which are added to determine the interval within (the year, that is, the intervals) between the four seasons of the year” (verse 4) the author of *I Enoch* wrote (verse 6):

Truly, they are recorded forever: one in the first gate, one in the third, one in the fourth, and one in the sixth. The year is completed in three hundred and sixty-four days.

Examining the zodiac at Beth Alpha and assuming that each gate composes of two months, one for rising, and the second for the setting of the sun (*I Enoch* 71:4), there are four similar decorated lines of division before the signs of Teomim, Moznayim,

Keshet, and Dagim. I suggest that these lines indicate the unsymmetrical distribution of the epagomenal days. So, instead of adding a day at the first or last month of each three month of a season, the extra day is added to the first, fifth, seventh, and tenth months. In this manner each period of three months still consists of 91 days. I maintain that the unsymmetrical distribution was intended to adapt this 364-day calendar to Jewish customs. For example, in the Jewish calendar Rosh Hashana can never fall on a Wednesday or a Friday so that Yom Kippur would never fall on a Friday or a Sunday. My guess is that the author of *I Enoch* took this consideration and others into account while designing his calendar.¹

e) In *I Enoch* 82, 14 we read:

The names of those who lead them are 'Adnr'ul, 'Iyasus- 'el, 'Elum'el - these three follow the leaders of the orders, as well as the four which follow after the three leaders of the order, which follow after those leaders of the stations that divide the four seasons of the year.

I suggest that the "three leaders of the orders" are turtledove, swift, and crane (tor, sis, agur -) following Jeremiah 8: 7:

Even the stork in the sky knows her seasons
And the turtledove, swift and crane
keep the time of their coming;

I suggest that *Iyasus* stands for 'sis'. In the zodiac of Beth Alpha there are two birds: one under the figure head of *tekufat Nisan* (spring) and another one left of the head in *tekufat tevet* (fall). The turtledove indeed appears in the Land of Israel in the spring and the swift in the fall.

There are three birds in the panel of the Ark of Covenant (figure 7) which may well represent *agurim*. Sukenik (1932: 22) wrote that they were apparently ostriches. According to *Even Shoshan Hebrew Dictionary*, *agur* is also a name of a group of stars called *Grus*, which appears in the south (seen from the Land of Israel) in the fall. There

are also two birds in the same headers in the zodiac of Na'aran and another one in the header of the season of Tevet (Figure 3).

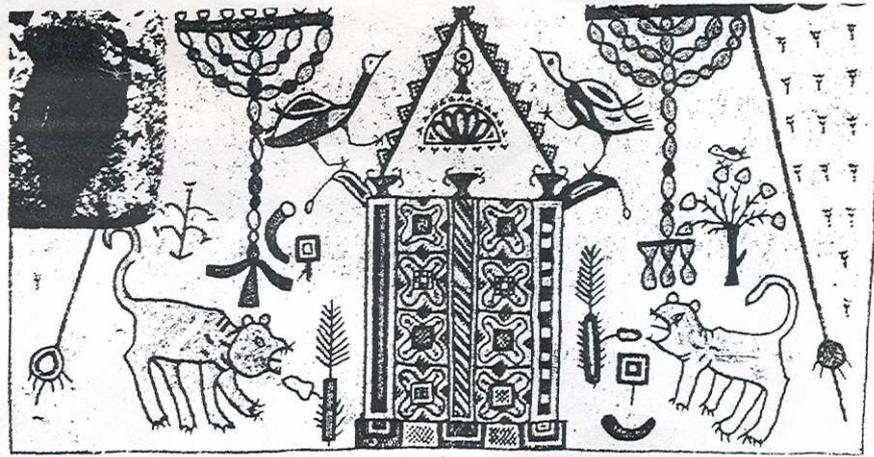


Figure 7. The Ark of Covenant

If indeed the signs of the Beth Alpha synagogue follow the zodiac of *1 Enoch*, the author of this book, who was not a great astronomer (see Neugebauer 1964) seemed to deviate from the generally accepted order of signs. I suggest that he moved the circle counter-clockwise few months so it would fit what he calculated or thought to be the positions of the stars in the sky when God created the world. Another possibility is that he followed an existing different arrangement of signs. The zodiac of Münster-Sarmsheim might have belonged to the same category.

If the zodiac at Beth Alpha follows *1 Enoch*, I have no explanation as for why the figures at the corners of the zodiac carry the names of the seasons based on the name months of the Jewish calendar, except for the artistic freedom of the designers; the four zodiacs I examine here have the same pattern. In *1 Enoch* the seasons have different names.

In *1 Enoch* 82 the description of the summer season comes next (verse 18):

The next leader after him is Hela'emmemeeek, whose name they call the bright sun and all the days of his light are ninety-one days.

Missing is the name of the season. In the *Ethiopic Enoch* the description of the year ends with the summer season and the description of the fall and winter seasons is missing. In Qumran a description of the winter season was found (Milik (1976: 296), however it lack the names of the season and the months.

6. Other peculiarities at the Beth Alpha structure

In addition to the 'erroneous' zodiac, there are other peculiarities in the so-called synagogues at Beth Alpha.

a) In the four corners of panel appear the four seasons of the year, the *tekufot* of Tishrei, Tevet, Nisan, Tammuz, each in the form of the bust of a winged woman. This practice is clearly inconsistent with the second commandment.

b) In the center of the zodiac there is the sun in a form of a youth riding a chariot drawn by four horses. I suggest that the existence of the sun in the center is an indication that this is a solar calendar. Jews have been using lunar-solar calendar, not a solar one. Sukenik (1932: 35) suggested that the mosaic depicted the sun rising out of the darkness of night and the motif was based on the traditional picture of Helios in Greek art. Again, we are encountered with a non-Jewish motif.

c) In one panel of the mosaic (Figure 7) there is a four-sided object, decorated with round or square holes and having a projecting rod. Sukenik (p. 28) wrote that Orfali explained such an object as a spice-box but he, Sukenik, found this explanation unacceptable, since a spice-box held no place whatever among the ritual objects of the synagogue. That leaves us also with the possibility that the building at Beth Alpha was not a Jewish synagogue.

d) Sukenik (1932: 9) maintained that there was no historic or literary memory which bound up the site of Beth Alpha with the early days of the Hebrew people.

e) The excavators at Beth Alpha found in the center of the platform a small cavity about 80 cm. deep, one meter long and 80 cm. wide and rounded on the south side (Figure 8). The cavity was walled in and its sides plastered. It was covered above with flagstones, one of which was still in place. Among the rubbish they found thirty-six Byzantine bronze coins which led them to assume that the cavity served as the treasury of the synagogue (Sukenik 1932: 13).

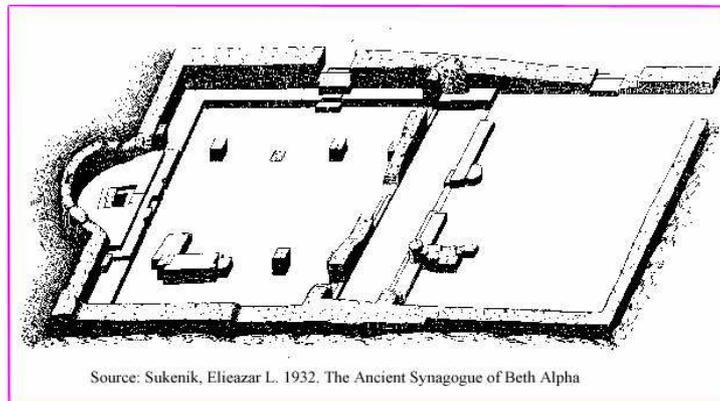


Figure 8. The cavity in the floor

I find it hard to accept this conclusion. Why did they need such a big treasury? Why would they place the money in the center of the synagogue and, moreover, in a place known to every local thief? If it was covered with heavy stones, how did they take money from it every day? Since it was too small for an adult to bend in, the gabbai would have needed to go inside with his head first while one person was holding his feet and another holding a lamp so he could search for the right coins. I suggest that the cavity was a baptizing pond, which explains the plastering of its walls and the coins that were found.



Figure 9. The cavity, nowadays partially filled with sand

I suggest that fully cleared and in its full size, a grownup person could have stood there, and if there were water inside, they would have possibly reached his or her waist.



Figure 10. The cavity in the center of the bema

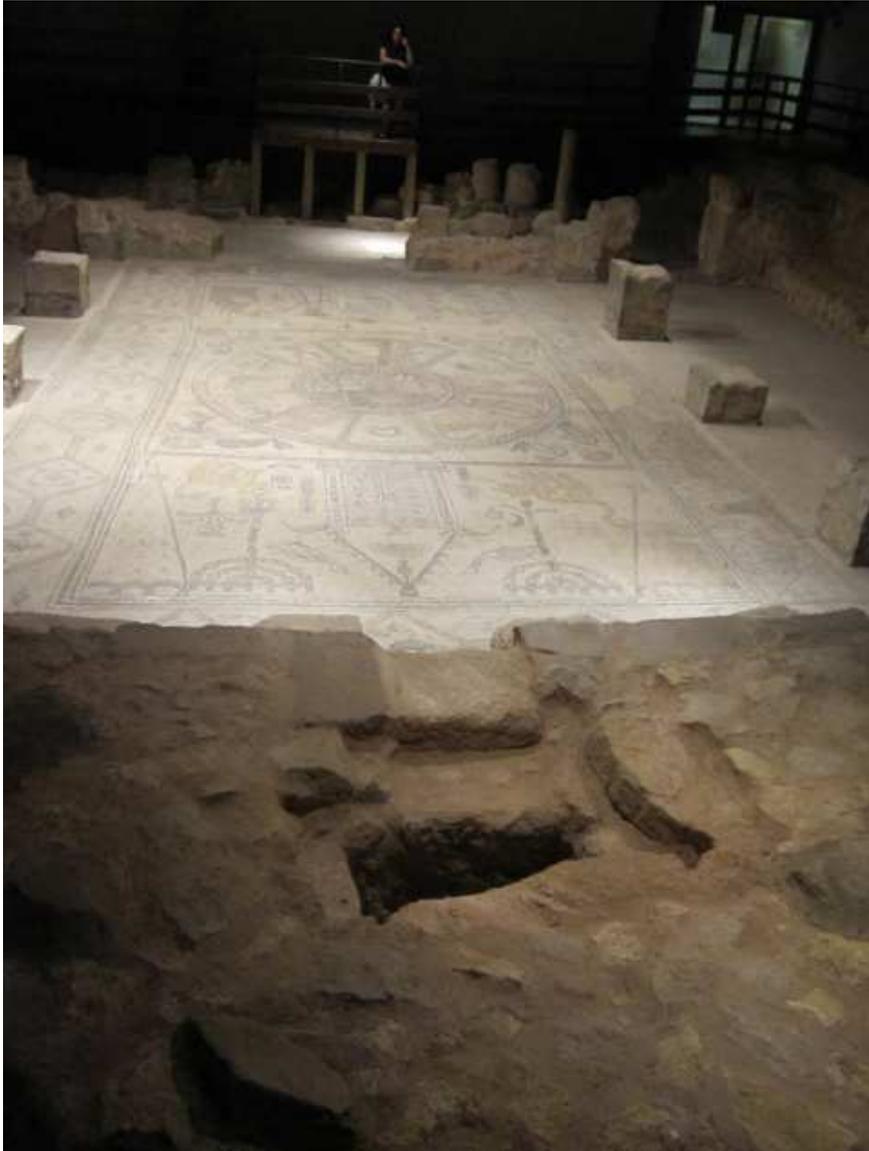


Figure 11. The cavity in respect to the hall

Avi-Yona (EJ) suggested that the depression in the apse served as a *geniza* (a place for storing worn-out or damaged sacred texts). That does not explain why the cavity was placed under the *aron ha'qodesh* (the Ark of the Law) and where coins did come from.²

f) Sukenik (1932: 11) wrote:

Like most of the synagogues north of Jerusalem and west of the Jordan, the building is oriented in an approximately southerly direction. A divergence to the

west from this general direction (27 degrees S.W. by compass), which is actually justified in that Jerusalem is S.W. of Beth Alpha, is most probably accidental and due perhaps to the lie of the terrain.

It seems that too many 'mistakes' are connected with the site. Being curious to know where 27 degrees S.W. (minus 2 degrees due to compass deviation) leads, I used a protractor and a tourist map of Israel to discover that the line runs directly to Mt. Gerizim. I am very sorry but the Beth Alpha building was not at all a Jewish synagogue. By definition it must have been a Samaritan one.

The conclusion to be drawn here is that the Beth Alpha building indeed served the Samaritans, but anyone who is familiar with Samaritan tradition would, no doubt, object. According to Pummer (1989: 156):

As far as we can see presently, the material culture of the Samaritans was little different from that of the Jews. There is, however, one important difference that emerges from the evidence as available and interpreted at the present time, and this is the absence of any figurative representations among the Samaritans.

But the Samaritans ornamentation that use their script, have never attained the beauty of Muslims arabesques. This situation has remained the same up to our time. At least in religious context, there are no representations of humans or animals to be found among the Samaritans of today (p. 162).

I maintain that neither were such figurative representations ever found in Jewish remains. The source of the assumption that there was sometimes a tradition which permitted such a practice is based upon a portion of the Talmud Yerushalmi preserved in Leningrad and published by J.N. Epstein (as related by Sukenik 1932: 53). It states that "in the days of R. Abun they began to depict figures on mosaic and none protested." Sukenik commented:

From this it is to be inferred that it was not until the time of R. Abun (the first half of the 4th century) that it became permissible to make pictures on mosaics pavements, the reference obviously being to pictures of animals and the like. Apparently the reference here is to pictures on mosaic pavements in private houses but not in synagogues. It is conceivable that an individual allowed himself to depict figures on mosaics in his private dwelling against the will of the Rabbis. But it is inconceivable that the synagogues should have been adorned with pictures before the contemporary religious leaders acquiesced in.

Sukenik (1932: 56) wrote:

Specially important for the history of Jewish culture of the period are the pictures of the signs of the Zodiac repeated in their entirety in both the Beth Alpha and the Na'aran mosaic. We see here pictorial expression of belief in the influence of the planets on the affairs of this world. Even Judaism could not withstand this universal influence which permeated all religions and peoples in the ancient world, and in spite of the saying *אין מזל לישראל* we find the belief prevalent in the life of the people; and not the common folk only but even the sages of Israel were addicted to it.

One would expect such a major change in Jewish tradition to be discussed extensively in the Talmud but all we got is an obscure reference in one manuscript on which archaeologists have made such an immense inference. The idea of human figures in a synagogue, and moreover in the form of Greek gods, is absurd. Modern archaeologists have turned the sages of the Mishna, Gemra and Talmud into *עובדי כוכבים ומזלות* 'star-and-constellation worshippers.'

The building at Beth Alpha could not have been a Jewish synagogue because no Jewish synagogue was ever constructed in the direction of Mt. Gerizim. It could not have been a Samaritan synagogue because Samaritans have never depicted human figures on religious articles. However it could have been a church.

One group that might have converted such place into its own needs was a sect of gentile Christians which adopted Jewish customs and was known as the Ebionites. That may explain the abundance of Jewish symbols in this building, a fact that led archaeologists to define it as an ancient synagogue.

It is usually assumed that the mosaic of Beth Alpha was done during the rein of the Emperor Justin I (518-527). This interpretation follows the Aramaic inscription found there. Another so-called synagogue from that period is the so-called Leontis house found in Beth Shean. Safrai (2003: 245) wrote:

The house of Leontis at Beth Shean (ancient Scythopolis), from the fourth and the fifth centuries, was excavated in 1964 and published in brief in 1973, and the inscriptions it contains were gathered in a collection of synagogue inscriptions. The mosaic is described in the collections of mosaics as belonging to a synagogue in every sense. The present article suggests the probable identification of this structure as a Judeo-Christian house of prayer. At first glance this proposal would seem to be overly audacious, but as we shall see, such a premise is not without basis.

In the article Safrai endeavors to demonstrate that the owner of the house belonged to a sect known as the Ebionites and the prayer place was a dedicated room in a private house.

7. The Enochite literature in Early Christianity

By the third century CE, Jews already dismissed the Enochite literature, apparently because it was zealously adopted by early Christians. According to Milik (1976: 7) there was a full-blown renaissance of Enochic literature in the early Christian communities and it came about through the medium of Greek translations. Some authors of the New Testament were familiar with *Jubilees* (Charles 1913: 10) and *I Enoch* (Isaac 1983: 10); Jude quotes *Jubilees* directly.

There was an early Christian sect that employed the Jubilee calendar. In his *Ecclesiastical History* the 5th century church historian Sozomenus wrote (Book VII, chapter 19):

The Montanists, who are called Pepuzits and Phrygians, celebrate the Passover according to a strange fashion which they introduced. They blame those who regulate the time of observing the feast according to the course of the moon, and affirm that it is right to attend exclusively to the cycles of the sun. They reckon each month to consist of thirty days, and account the day after the vernal equinox as the first day of the year, which, according to the Roman method of computation, would be called the ninth day before the calends of April.

The Montanist movement was founded by Montanus in the second part of the 2nd century in Phrygia which is in central Asia Minor. By its own members, the movement was called the New Prophecy. Pepuzia was a small town in Phrygia. Epiphanius mentioned the sect under the name Cataphrygians ['In Phrygia'] in his book on heretics (Panarion, chapter 48):

These people who are called Cataphryrians also accept all the Old and New Testament, and acknowledge likewise the resurrection of the dead, but they boast of having as a prophet one Montanus, and Priscilla and Maximilla as prophetesses, in adhering to whom they have turned from the truth. They believe what the Holy Catholic church does concerning the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, but they have separated themselves, "adhering to spirits of errors and doctrines of demons," and saying, "It is the charisms too that we must receive."

For more information see Ford (1966) and Landau (2006, 2010).

6. Conclusions

The zodiac at Beth Alpha does not follow the Jewish zodiac. In this article I argue that the zodiac follows *1 Enoch* 82 and that the building was not a synagogue, neither Jewish nor Samaritan.

Notes

1. Following this logic, the New Year day could have never fallen on a Wednesday or a Friday. One may argue that the sectarians of Qumran lived on dried fruit and cold water and could thus have easily observed the Yom Kippur and the Sabbath in succession, but with this kind of arrangement they could have never gained wide acceptance, which they obviously sought.

2. In a video describing a visit at Horvat Kur, posted in YouTube on January 1, 2013:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ufut3fi9Lw>

Dr. Byron R. McCane, one of the excavators, presents a cavity (Figure 12) under the supposedly bema, and suggests it served as a geniza and a treasury, as several coins were found there.



Figure 12. The cavity at Horvat Kur

In a report published later that year, the excavators wrote that “a large threshold stone on the east side of the *bemah* shows that the space beneath the platform was used for some kind of storage even though it still requires further study to see how high the platform originally was” (Zangenberg et al. 2013: 571). A more definite description of

the content of the storage space appears in the abstract at the beginning of the article (p. 557): “The most important finds include an elevated platform (i. e., a *bemah*) that supported a chest holding Torah scrolls...” I assume they do not mean an underground aron hakodesh.

As I see it, steps are leading down and there is enough room for a person to stand and possibly sit. I suggest that this cavity, like the one at Beth Alpha, served as a baptizing pond. Adjacent the structure a big cistern was discovered, as well as remains of three pools. One ancient sect that practiced intensely baptism was the Elcesaites, Elkasaites, Elkesaites, or Elchasaites. I suggest the possibility that the structure at Horvat Kur was one of their praying halls.

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