Good and bad images from the synagogue of Dura Europos: Contexts, subtexts, intertexts[1]

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Historiography of Absence

In the case of certain icons, mechanical reproduction does not diminish effectivity.[2] The miraculous weeping image of Our Lady of Chicago in the St Nikolaos Albanian Orthodox Church has a number of equally lachrymose copies (plate 1). Photographs and postcards of the miraculous image are empowered to weep by being touched by swabs taken from the tears of the original Virgin in Chicago.[3] Reproductions of the Mona Lisa, in so far as they refer to The Great Artwork, are apparently effective whatever the quality of the copy. The Sony advertisement reproduced in plate 2, for example, deploys a great artwork to *refer* to quality, not to *exemplify* it. Certainly, most images lose their aura in reproduction. However, beautiful reproductions help ease the absence of the artefact; at least a nostalgia for originality clings to a wonderful copy. Equally, a terrible facsimile is likely to corrode the quality of the original and consequently to inhibit attendance to it. These are the familiar reasons why art historians take the reproduction of their objects of study very seriously.[4] Good plates are absent from this piece. The first part of my paper considers the politics and ideology of this lack.[5] The second section attempts to fill the gap between bad reproductions and interesting originals with some words.

The site of my subject is Dura Europos, an ancient city located in north-east Syria.[6] No single site provides more material evidence about the diversity of religious expression in late Antiquity than does Dura Europos. Among the large number of monuments unearthed there are several temples, a mithraeum, a large synagogue and the earliest known, securely dated Christian building, all retaining remarkable fresco decoration. Europos, a Hellenistic foundation of around 300 BCE, and known as Dura by the third century CE, occupied a strategic position on a bluff overlooking the alluvial plain of the middle Euphrates. From the late second century BCE to the early second century CE, the city was an important political centre of the Parthian Empire. The province of Parapotamia was probably governed by the *strategos* of Dura. With the expansion of the Roman Empire in the West, the city came within a zone of hostile contention. In 116–117, and again from 165 to 256 CE, the Romans occupied the city; during the Roman occupation a *dux*, described as the commander of the Euphrates limes and probably also the civil governor of the Middle Euphrates, resided in

A TALE OF TEARS

THE CLEAR liquid that ran from the Virgin Mary's eyes had started evaporating days earlier, but a glistening trail of droplets was still visible in the flickering candlelight of the Kazas family's makeshift shrine.

Unlike the icon, Maria Kazas could not stop weeping.

When she spoke of the simple paper portrait of the Mother of God that her youngest son, George, 21, brought home to her in Aliquippa, she was overcome. Unable to put her feelings into English, she lapsed into her native Greek, though she knew her visitors could not understand.

"I have seen with my eyes a miracle," she finally burst out in English.

To many people, the story of the 18 icons that reportedly wept at an Eastern Orthodox summer camp in Mercer County on July 22 and 23 was a flash-in-the-pan tale of magic, hoax or delusion.

But to those Orthodox Christians who say they saw tears welling in the eyes of the icons, the events at Camp Nazareth have become a life-transforming event, a deeply personal call from God to dedicate their lives to him. The tears also were a witness to the ancient teaching of the Orthodox church that God's grace works in special ways through the holy portraits known as icons.

Bishop Maximos of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh

Please see Icons, C2

"I have seen with my eyes a miracle," says Maria Kazas, right, of the icon her son, George, 21, brought home from Camp Nazareth. George says he first witnessed the icon weeping while working as a counselor at the camp. He has since set up a shrine in his bedroom. The "tears" are still visible, below, and smell like roses.

1   Pittsburgh Press, August 1, 1988.

the city.[7] In 256, after a siege that is remarkably well documented in the archaeological residue of Dura, the Sasanians conquered the city and apparently dispersed its populace.

Dura remained unmolested until March 1920, when British troops reported the discovery of well-preserved frescoes.[8] Shortly thereafter, on 3 May 1920, a one-day excavation was undertaken by James Henry Breasted, director of the newly founded Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. During the course of that day the frescoes of the Temple of Bel were completely unearthed and photographed. The 1,500-year-old paintings, left without adequate cover, were subsequently largely obliterated.[9] This act of historical sabotage was then published under the title *The Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Art*.[10] This book and the history of Dura's subsequent excavation, written by their overseer

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2   Sony television advertisement.

Clark Hopkins, indicate how the frescoes of Dura were effaced by what has been named 'Orientalism'.[11]

The preface of *The Oriental Forerunners* offers as clear a demonstration of Orientalism as any found in Edward Said's various presentations of the subject.[12]

> The region to which the Oriental Institute proposes to devote its chief attention is commonly called the Near East, by which we mean the eastern Mediterranean world and the adjacent regions eastward, at least through Persia. It is now quite evident that civilization arose in this region and passed thence to Europe. In the broadest general terms, therefore, the task of the Oriental Institute is the study of the origins of

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civilization, the history of the earliest civilized societies, the transition of civilization to Europe, and the relations of the Orient to the great civilizations of Europe after the cultural leadership of the world had passed from the Orient to European peoples.[13]

The East is presented as important in so far as it was the originating source of the superior Western culture which superseded it. The Roman imperial past is re-read in terms of the Western colonial present. Hopkins writes:

> In ancient times *also* the foreigners came to rule, first Greeks, then Parthians, Romans, and Sasanians. The local people of Dura, then as now, came out of the desert with their primal desert ways and accepted the technical culture of the foreigners and wondered at it, much as the contemporary Arab views the extraordinary achievements of European cultures. . . . The modern Arab renaissance doubtless will derive tremendous advantages from the European impact, but the old conservative language, religion and tradition still will dominate.[14]

The political message encoded in such a construction of culture is repeated and amplified in the text's plates, which purvey a sense of hostility and remoteness (plate 3). The exotic East, which is static, immutable and primitive, is finally subject to the West, which introduces progress.

Breasted and Hopkins represented Dura as a remote desert frontier post.[15] 'Buried in the heart of the Syrian desert', writes Breasted on page one of his book. The agonistic isolation with which Dura was represented in these literary and visual images has framed subsequent scholarly and popular characterizations of Dura. The site is almost inevitably rendered as 'a small Roman garrison in Mesopotamia' or 'a Roman frontier station'.[16] Joseph Gutmann quite rightly states that it is 'shared opinion' that 'Dura was not an intellectual centre, but an undistinguished frontier town whose Roman garrison was posted there to stave off a Sasanian attack.'[17] But the image of Dura as a desert Roman outpost in antiquity is deceptive. Dura is not *in* the desert; it is sited directly above the luxuriant alluvial plain of the River Euphrates, a central trading position in the heart of one of the richest agricultural areas in the ancient world.[18] Nor, for most of its existence, was Dura either Roman or a frontier town. At least by some accounts it was a middle-sized city, similar in scale to Priene.[19] It was Roman for less than a century, during which time it was the residence of the *dux* of the limes; before that the Parthian governor of Mesopotamia was situated there. Dura's characterization as a frontier station continues the early twentieth century's reading of the present into the past. Although Dura was not marginal in antiquity, it was in the 1920s. After World War I this part of Mesopotamia lay between the French and English protectorates in an area still contested by the Arabs. In other words, the representation of the city as marginal is historiographically conditioned.

Dura's artworks are seriously compromised by the Orientalist understanding of the site's location as liminal. Art historians of the later twentieth century who are not obviously implicated in colonialism have continued to treat Dura's
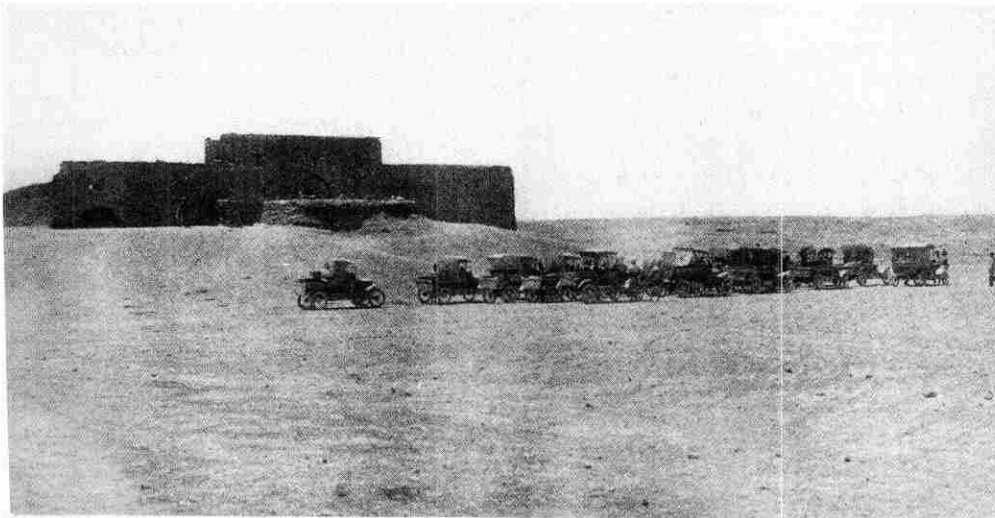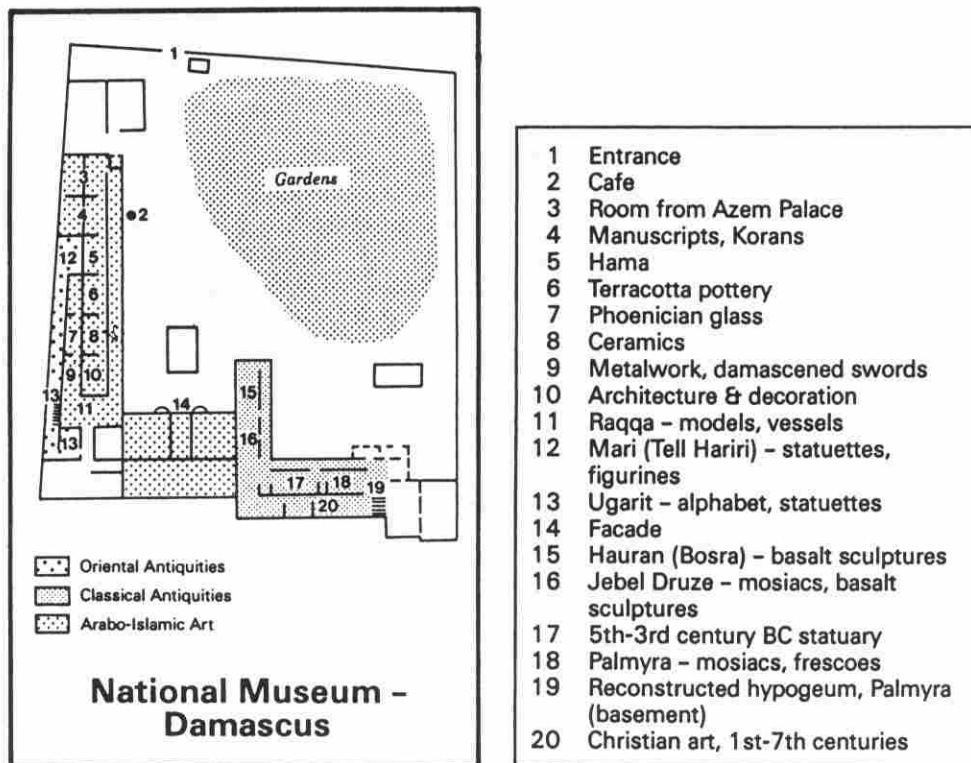
FIG. 34.—OUR BRITISH CONVOY HALTING AT NAHÎYAH JUST ABOVE ʿANAH

In this region between ʿAnah and Ṣâliḥîyah the hostile Arabs on the other (left) shore of the Euphrates were shooting across the river, and the protection of a military convoy was necessary.

3   Breasted, *Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Painting*, fig. 34.

paintings, *as a matter of habit*, as the unimaginative production of the periphery: traditionless, derivative, homogenized by their lack of quality. Or, as one scholar put it: 'As is to be expected in a garrison town located on a frontier, the paintings show both an eclecticism of subject and style, and a provincialism manifested in the generally mediocre level of execution.'[20] This point is important: the absence of good-quality reproductions of the frescoes of Dura is excused by the aesthetic unimportance of the original. Simultaneously, this lack of good reproductions makes negative assessments of the monuments of Dura apparently true. Each of the monuments of Dura has its own particular set of explanations — involving Orientalism and other academic practices — for an unavailability of adequate reproduction. In this piece I want to address in greater detail how politics erased one particular set of photographs: those of the Dura Synagogue.[21]

The most immediate reason why good reproductions of the Dura Synagogue are not present in this article is that I was not allowed to photograph them. The frescoes are presently installed in a full-scale reconstruction of the Synagogue in the National Museum in Damascus. Last Spring I was given permission to photograph anything in the Museum, except the Synagogue frescoes. Such a denial could, of course, be ascribed to the micropolitics of institutions with which all art historians are familiar. However, I think that this instance of veiled images is more likely attributable to the macropolitics of the state. Though accessible upon request, the presence of the Synagogue frescoes in the museum is nowhere announced. Even in foreign guide books, the Synagogue itself is censored in the plans of the museum's galleries (plate 4). There are good reasons for this. The

1	Entrance
2	Cafe
3	Room from Azem Palace
4	Manuscripts, Korans
5	Hama
6	Terracotta pottery
7	Phoenician glass
8	Ceramics
9	Metalwork, damascened swords
10	Architecture & decoration
11	Raqqa – models, vessels
12	Mari (Tell Hariri) – statuettes, figurines
13	Ugarit – alphabet, statuettes
14	Facade
15	Hauran (Bosra) – basalt sculptures
16	Jebel Druze – mosiacs, basalt sculptures
17	5th-3rd century BC statuary
18	Palmyra – mosiacs, frescoes
19	Reconstructed hypogeum, Palmyra (basement)
20	Christian art, 1st-7th centuries

Oriental Antiquities

Classical Antiquities

Arabo-Islamic Art

National Museum – Damascus

4 Plan of the Damascus Museum from a popular guidebook to Syria.

Israelis and Syrians have been in a state of war since Israel was introduced in the East by the West in 1948. Consequently, Jewish production is not celebrated in Syria. The frescoes' lack of presence might even be said to protect them from assault. After all, they can be seen, if not photographed. It should be pointed out that these images have been maintained in Damascus in a way that the frescoes of the Christian building, shipped by the excavators to Yale, have not. Those works, in contrast to the paintings of the Synagogue, can be photographed but not seen; like the frescoes of the Temple of Bel, they are virtually destroyed.[22]

There are more subtle (though no less political) reasons for the unavailability of good reproductions of the Synagogue paintings. The elaborate narrative programme of decoration of the Synagogue was painted probably in 244–45 CE, buried in 256, excavated in 1932 and published in 1933 (an inauspicious moment for things Jewish). The Synagogue programme — one of the most extensive painting cycles salvaged from antiquity — disturbed received Western wisdom in a way few other archaeological discoveries have: the paintings protest the construction of Jews as aniconic and non-visual. These images threaten the neat, nineteenth-century formulation, still very much with us, of the Jews (the East) as verbal and abstract and the Greeks (the West) as visual and figural.[23] The Synagogue paintings unsettle traditional notions central to the ordering of

the 'Judeo-Christian tradition'. This familiar construction is ideologically loaded, as Daniel Boyarin's criticism of the term suggests:

> The liberal term 'Judaeo-Christian' (*sic*) masks a suppression of that which is distinctly Jewish. It means 'Christian', and by not even acknowledging that much, renders the suppression of Jewish discourse even more complete. It is as if the classical Christian ideology — according to which Judaism went out of existence with the coming of Christ, and the Jews are doomed to anachronism by their refusal to accept the truth — were recast in secular, anthropological terminology.[24]

Another cultural supersession may be identified in a deconstruction of 'Judeo-Christian': not only does one religion absorb another, but also the West purges the East. 'Judeo-Christian tradition' is an alternative identification of 'Western tradition', not only spiritualizing the notion, but also construing its Eastern component as alien or at least residual. The threat posed by the frescoes of the Dura Synagogue to the conventional understanding of the Western or Judeo-Christian tradition has been countered in at least two ways. Particularly in the earlier literature dealing with the frescoes, the community which produced them was often treated as aberrant and/or unorthodox. The most powerful of such interpretations was that of Erwin Goodenough, who posited a non-normative (non-rabbinic), mystic Judaism at Dura.[25] More insidiously, the frescoes of the Dura Synagogue have been discreetly (unconsciously) dislocated, on an Orientalist model, either by Western images or by texts.

It is this second move which interests me. Here I limit my analysis to the most recent monograph on the Synagogue *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* by Kurt Weitzmann and Herb Kessler.[26] This keeps criticism, in a sense, within the family: Kessler studied with Weitzmann at Princeton; my first graduate course in Art History was a seminar on Dura Europos with Herb Kessler at Chicago. The volume is composed of two discrete parts. In the shorter, final section, Kessler deals with the programme of the Synagogue paintings. He describes the selection and arrangement of images. The pictorial complex centres on a messianic theme of deliverance, represented symbolically with the temple and elements closely associated with the temple (prophets, ritual implements, an abstracted rendering of the sacrifice of Isaac). This focal theme, in Kessler's construction, is complemented by the biblical narratives of the lateral walls of the assembly hall. Having fashioned the Synagogue's decoration in a form familiar from medieval church programming, the author points to the structural resemblance between this arrangement and the decorations of San Paolo Fuori le Mura and Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. He concludes that there are 'ties binding the Dura Synagogue to later Christian buildings', despite the fact that the Dura frescoes were buried in the rubble of the city many generations before the Christian buildings in far away Rome were conceived.[27] Kessler's text, like Breasted's, situates the interest and importance of the Synagogue frescoes in their function as forerunners of Christian art, though here Dura is presented as a programmatic rather than stylistic herald. Further, Kessler postulates that the

Synagogue programme was developed in response to the Christian threat to Judaism in the third century. Here, it would seem, the generally privileged place of the 'cause' in an assessment of an Eastern, Jewish work is accorded to Western Christianity. Thus, in Kessler's construction, Christianity not only provides the Synagogue with its ultimate legitimacy, but also with its originating impulse.

Weitzmann's first and longer section of the volume is devoted to what preceded rather than succeeded the Synagogue. He claims that the narrative images found in the Dura Synagogue were copied from densely illustrated texts purportedly produced in the Greek/Hellenistic (Western) ambiance of Antioch. As no such early illustrated text survives, even in a fragmentary form, Weitzmann presents the Dura frescoes as evidence for their missing archetypes. He suggests that, 'the agreements of the Dura Synagogue iconography with that of miniatures in various Byzantine manuscripts' proves 'the dependence of both Jews and Christians on a common Greek/Hellenistic tradition . . .'.[28] Cogent arguments against this thesis have been offered elsewhere.[29] Here it is enough to point out that the Dura frescoes seem to be important to the author only in so far as they allow him to reconstruct an otherwise non-existent Western, Greek/Hellenistic model. This exercise is founded on the unstated assumption that Western, Greek/Hellenistic artists were enormously original and creative while Eastern, Durene and later Byzantine artists were unoriginal and slavishly dependent on their earlier Western models.[30] Deviations from the Greek/Hellenistic narrative mode were due to incompetence or to the 'intrusion' of Orientalizing figures, characterized as standardized, static and hieratic. The volume's plates offer the visualization of Weitzmann's interpretive strategies and reveal their historiographic origins (plate 5). These reproductions of the photographs taken during the Yale Expedition in the 1930s are arranged according to the biblical texts that their hypothetical archetypes reportedly illustrated.

The volume is symmetrical. For Kessler the paintings are a premonition of the rational programmes of later Christian buildings. For Weitzmann, they are a corrupt reflection of lost Hellenistic models. Kessler displaces the Dura frescoes by later Western works with which they are fictively linked; Weitzmann displaces them by fictive Western archetypes. The Weitzmann–Kessler book illustrates the displacement of the Synagogue frescoes by alternative Western artworks through fictive genealogies.[31] In the end, what seem to be missing in the latest monograph on the Synagogue frescoes of Dura Europos are the Synagogue frescoes of Dura Europos.

Weitzmann's systematic reconstruction of densely illuminated books of the Bible is an extreme formulation of a widely held assumption of the priority of text to image. Like the reproductions in his own volume, Weitzmann treats the paintings of the Synagogue as *illustrations* of a text. The assumption of a hegemonic text which forms the basis of Weitzmann's construction is symptomatic of most interpretive work done on the Synagogue frescoes. The hegemonic text takes a variety of forms in the literature on Dura. In most cases, it is scripture. For example, Kraeling concludes his volume on Dura with the observation that 'the bulk of the pictures was first conceived for and rendered in illustrated manuscripts of parts of the Bible . . . . From the manuscripts they passed into mural decoration'.[32] Others have argued for illustrated versions of rabbinic
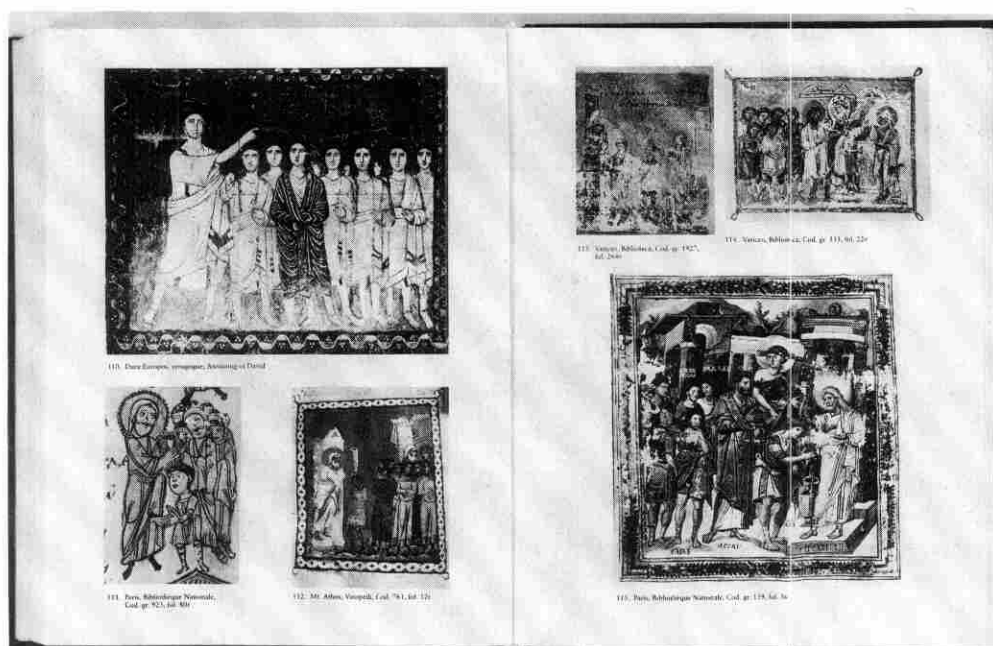
5   Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, figs. 161–165.

midrash (homiletic interpretations of scripture often involving narrative elements such as parables and folklore).[33] The paintings have even been suggested as a means of dating (reifying) texts upon which they, as illustrations, are assumed to depend.[34]

The inevitable result of promoting the text is the effacement of the image. In other words, by identifying the text — not the image — as the locus of meaning, signification is literally moved *outside* the visual representation. Indeed, the privileging of the text in most assessments of the Synagogue frescoes might be interpreted as another form of resistance to the pressure exerted by the paintings of the Synagogue to revise stereotypes of Semitic non-visuality. I want to offer here a brief critique of the primacy of the text in the interpretation of the Synagogue's images, and begin to suggest how meaning might be relocated *in* the image.

An excess of image

The Jews of Dura are regularly presented as ghettoized, on the model of early modern Europe.[35] On the contrary, the Synagogue was located near the main gate of Dura in a neighbourhood that seems to have been a largely domestic, 'middle-class' section of the city; there is no evidence for its common identity as 'a quarter of the poor'.[36] Several conventional houses were remodelled to form a community centre (plate 6). A number of other cult centres in the city had been realized in the same way: both those recently introduced like the

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HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

FORE COURT

M7 M6 M5 M4

M8 M9 M3

M2 M1

N.C. ANDREWS 1941
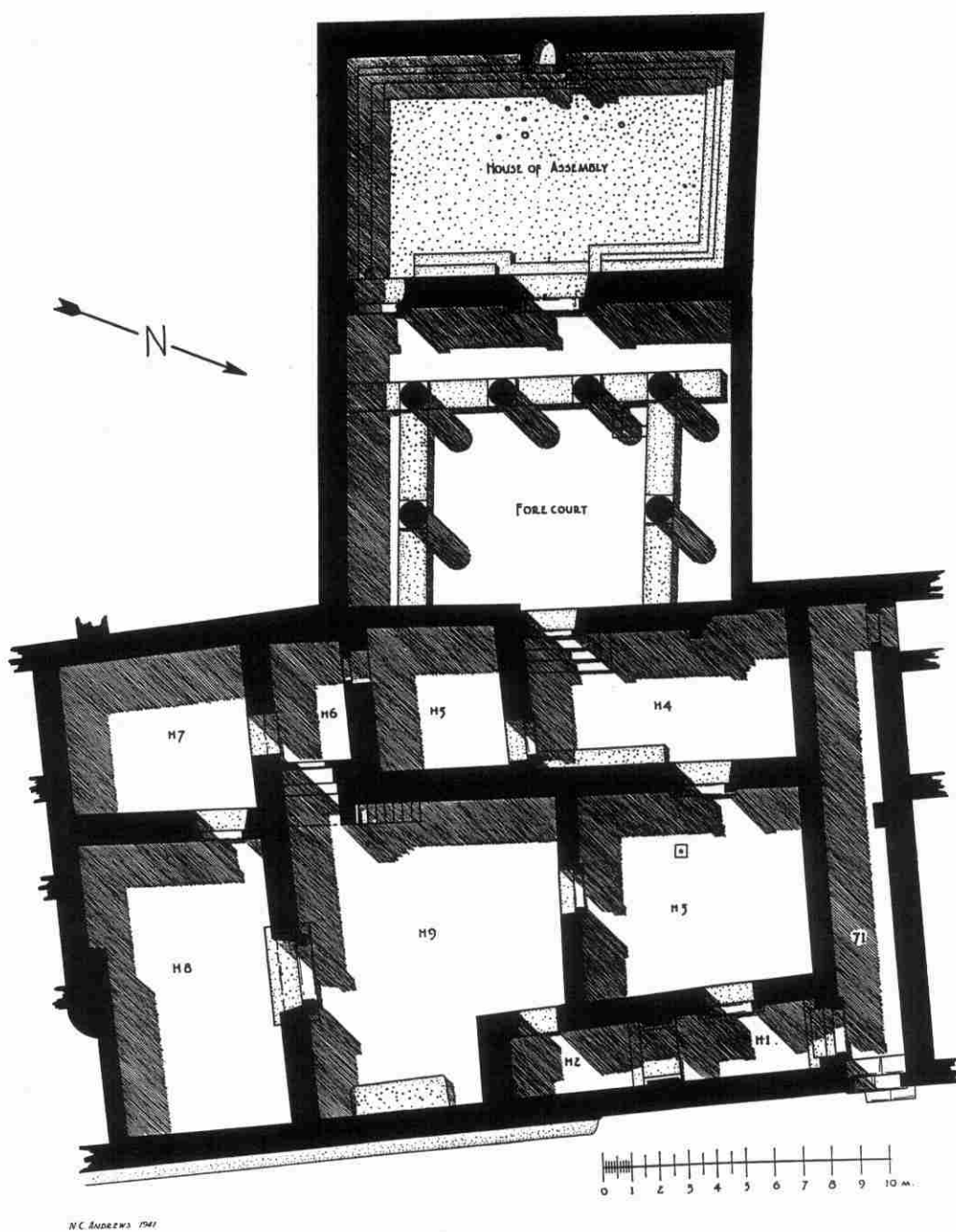
6 Dura Europos, plan of the Synagogue (Yale University Museum of Art)

Christian building and the Mithraeum, but also well-established local cults like the Temple of the Gaddé, one of the larger sacred precincts in the city.[37] Dipinti, graffiti and inscriptions in the Synagogue in Aramaic, Greek and Middle Iranian suggest a cosmopolitan, polyglot Jewish community.[38] The single most important space in the complex was the Assembly Hall, a very large room, approximately 7.5 × 14 × 5 metres, lavishly decorated with frescoes. On the west wall, off-centre but on axis with the great door to the east, was an aedicula for the display of the Torah (plates 7 and 8). The face of the arch of the aedicula was ornamented with representations of cult objects, a temple facade and an emblematic rendering of the sacrifice of Isaac.[39] Over the niche were heraldic images, perhaps relating to the genealogy of kingship, flanked by individual prophets.[40] The remainder of the interior was filled with figurated fresco panels of different lengths arranged in three registers above a painted dado.

Scholars have sought the meaning for the various images in this complex programme as well as for the programme as a whole in texts. Joseph Gutmann provides a useful survey of this activity, compiling a list of the panels, each with the various texts assigned to it and their scholarly attributers. This inventory makes it clear that even where there is agreement on a general text, inconsistencies between the image and the master text require either the suppression of alternative texts or the increment of texts in an attempt to circumscribe the meaning of the image. For example, the panel in the lowest register to the right of the torah aedicula is identified as Samuel anointing David (I Samuel 16) (plate 9). However, the appearance of six rather than the canonical seven brothers in the image requires a second explanatory text, I Chronicles 2:13–15, supported by a third, Josephus *Antiquitates* VI, 8, I, 158–163.[41] To resolve the contradiction between Samuel and Chronicles, Gutmann introduces a fourth, Christian text, the ninth-century Pseudo-Jerome, on which he bases his postulation of a fifth and ultimate source, a missing midrash.[42]

Another panel demonstrates both these interpretive strategies. The image in the lowest register of the west wall to the immediate left of the torah shrine is commonly acknowledged to be a representation of events chronicled in the Book of Esther and associated with the Jewish holiday of Purim (plates 10 and 11). Indeed, the principal figures of this image are labelled. Within the single frame, Mordecai, dressed in Persian attire, rides a white stallion led by the bare-legged Haman. A group of four figures dressed in chitons and himations raise their hands in acclamation. To the right, overlapping the last of these men, a small figure exchanges a text with King Ahasuerus who, clothed similarly to Mordecai, sits on a monumental throne. Queen Esther sits to the right, her maidservant standing behind her. Scholars have agreed to confine the meaning of the left-hand side of the panel to 'The Triumph of Mordecai'. Haman, the vicious enemy of Mordecai and the Jews, is asked by King Ahasuerus, 'What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?' (Esther 6.6). Thinking these honours were meant for himself, Haman proposes that such a man be publicly acclaimed by having a prince lead him through the city astride the king's horse and dressed in royal robes. But the honour is meant for Mordecai, and, adding insult to injury, Haman himself is obliged to implement his own suggestions.

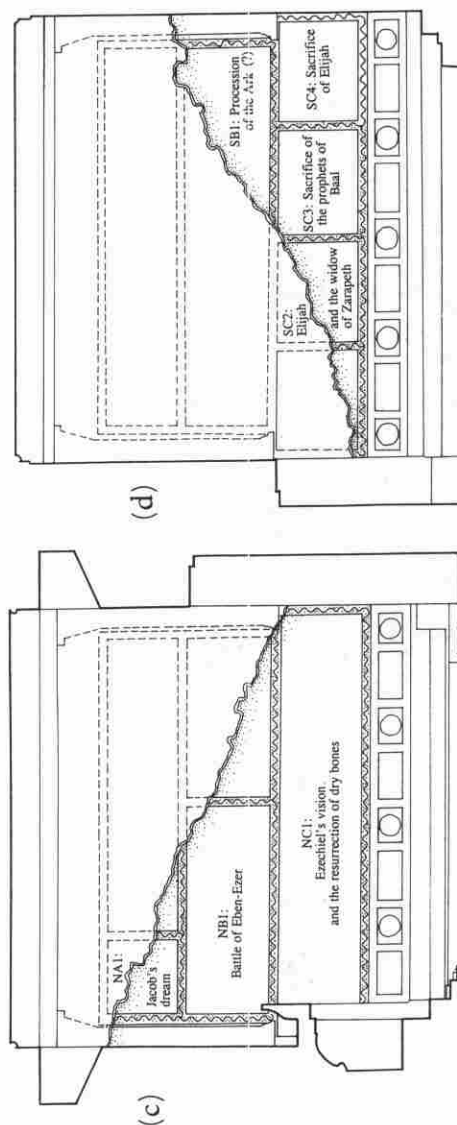In contrast, there is no scholarly consensus concerning a proof-text for the
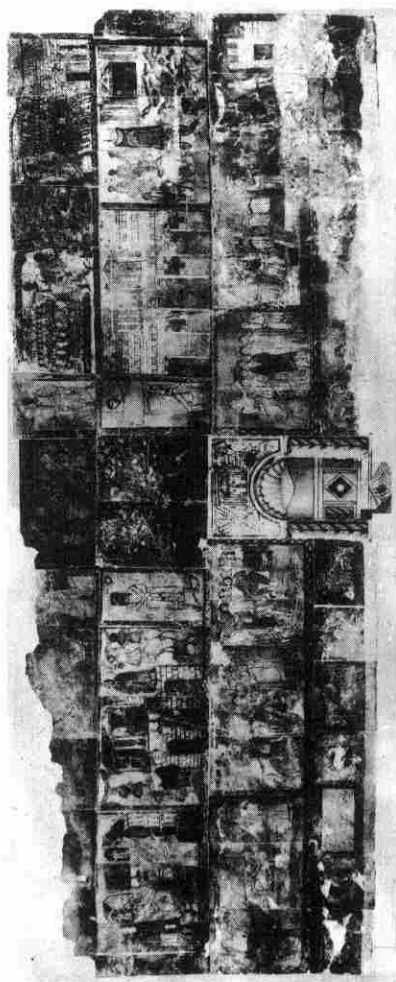
7 Dura Europos, general view of the west wall of the Synagogue (Yale University Museum of Art)
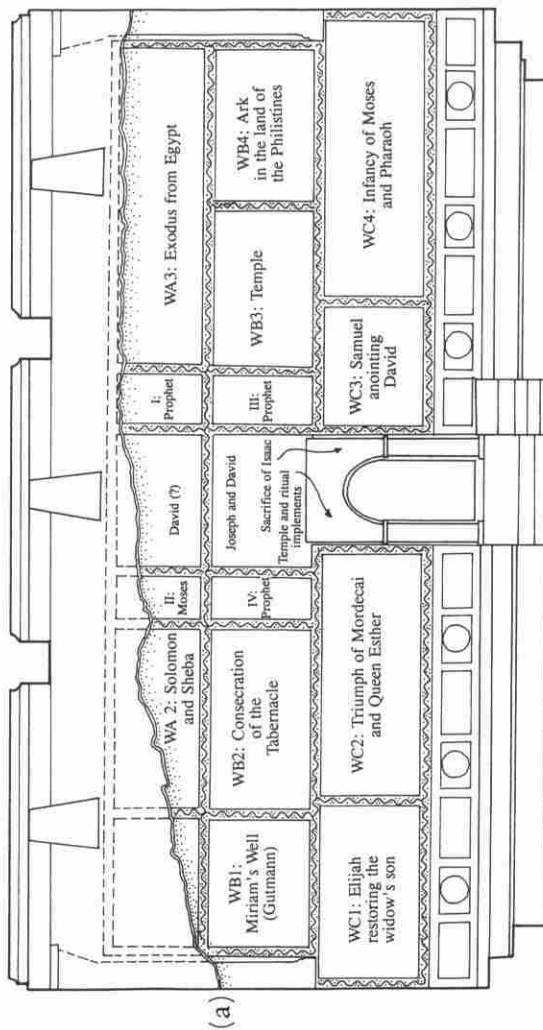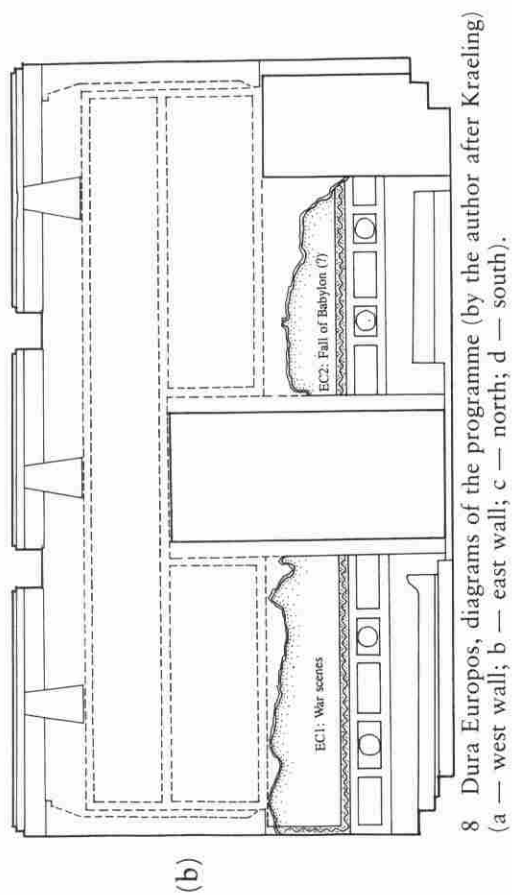
8 Dura Europos, diagrams of the programme (by the author after Kraeling)
(a — west wall; b — east wall; c — north; d — south).

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9   Dura Europos, Anointment of David (Yale University Museum of Art)

right-hand side of the panel. A text is exchanged, but the direction (does the king receive or dispatch?) and object of the exchange (is the text a letter, a chronicle, a report, or a petition?) remains open to multiple interpretations. Detailed arguments have been made that the image depends on *one* of several specific passages in Esther. Schneid identified the scene with Esther 3.8−15 (Haman requests and receives a decree against the Jews).[43] Du Mesnil du Buisson argues for 6.1−3 (Ahasuerus orders the book of memorable deeds to be read).[44] Grabar suggests 8.4−8 (Ahasuerus recalls the extermination order at Esther's request).[45] These texts are all rejected by Kraeling, who insists that only one passage, Esther 9.11−14 (at Esther's behest, an edict is issued by which the sons of Haman are ranged and their followers slaughtered), adequately explains the image.[46] In this image, as in the Anointment fresco, scholars have been preoccupied with identifying *the* text which explains the image. The priority of the text is again reasserted; meaning is restricted to the written word. This preoccupation with identifying *the* explanatory text seems to be a peculiarly scholarly form of controlling meaning. Sometimes the discrepancy between the text and the image is represented, as in Weitzmann, as a translation problem; the artist fails adequately to render the meaning of the text in a visual language.

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Alternatively, the artist himself is represented as a text scholar equivalent to the modern interpreter: the brilliance of the producer in encoding texts in the image is matched only by the brilliance of the scholar in decoding those same texts.

I will come back to this panel to suggest that the readings of the left-hand part of the panel have not attended to texts closely enough and that readings of the right-hand side have been over-assiduously textualized. But for the moment I want to turn to the programme as a whole. Just as scholars have circumscribed the meaning of individual panels, so one meaning has been sought for the programme as a whole. Indeed, a considerable academic effort has been made to compensate for the perceived loss of the originating metanarrative by producing modern alternatives. Among the most masterful is Kraeling's. Kraeling finishes his enumeration of scenes with the remark: 'The tabulation ... shows that the material is of a single cast, and bears upon a single theme .... It begins with the patriarchs ... and extends to the re-establishment of the exiled and dispossessed nation in the Land of Promise in the Messianic era.'[47] Joseph Gutmann more subtly articulates the scholarly assumption that, though it might not now be recoverable, the Synagogue programme originally held one ('full') meaning:

> As some forty per cent of the cycle of paintings has been destroyed, and no similar cycle of synagogue paintings has yet been discovered, we may, at this time, not be able to unravel the *full* meaning of the entire cycle. However, recent research on the second, and largest, of the three bands of the Dura synagogue reveals a series of paintings that may have been analogous to contemporary Palestinian liturgical practice ...[48]

Messianic, liturgical, mystical and historical metanarratives have been produced to order the Synagogue's copious chaos.[49] The complex work of locating meaning in an image legitimately involves the scholarly exercise of text-tracking.[50] But treating images as illustrations whose completion requires the restoration of a lost text leads to serious epistemological problems.[51] The search for the encompassing text is inevitably frustrated by the excess of the image. Nothing in scripture or commentary explains the particulars of the painting: not just the choice of the subject, but the relative scale of the figures and compositions, the asymmetries, the colours and markings, etc. Indeed, the assumption underlying such a collection of texts — that meaning resides exclusively and exhaustively in the *written* word — is peculiarly philological and academic. In other words, there is a scholarly desire to explain away the apparent incoherence of the paintings rather than attend to it. Nevertheless, the experience of the monument tends to disrupt the fragile order imposed on it by scholarly glosses. A glance at a diagram of the Synagogue suggests that the surfeit of meaning in the individual panels is complemented by a lack of ostensible order in their arrangement. The programme as a whole is patently a narrative bricolage. While identifiable stories are 'told' within single or multiple frames, these isolated narratives do not appear to participate in a monologic whole. The programme is a pastiche.

I am arguing that the 'disorder' of the images and the programme should no
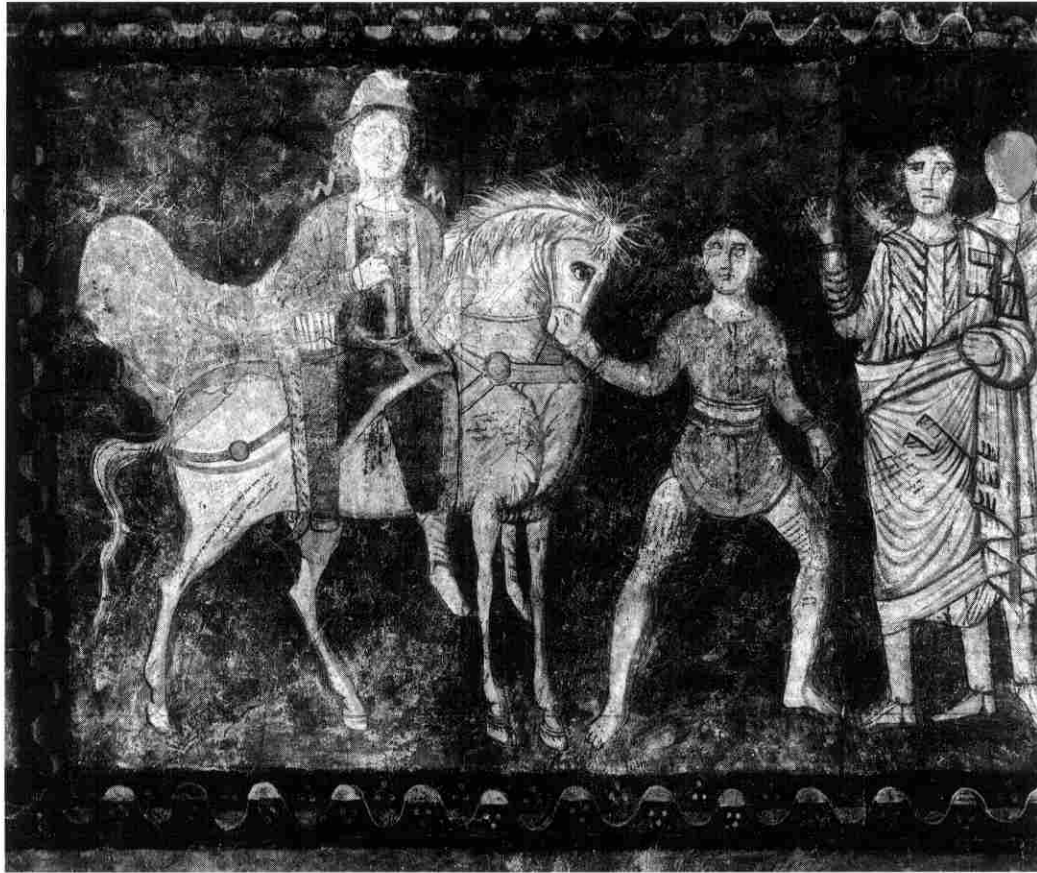
10   Dura Europos, Mordecai and Esther panel, left section (Yale University Museum of Art)

longer be read as incompetence or incompletion, but rather as itself an organizing principle of the Synagogue's visual discourse. Although this mode of discourse was not determined by texts, certain Jewish texts exhibit a suggestive equivalence. Like the frescoes of the Synagogue, the Bible itself has been and continues to be similarly presented as univocal by those for whom it constitutes *the* truth, though its 'disorder' and multiple voices are inevitably revealed both indirectly in the very varied positions taken by pious commentators and directly in scholarly ones. Roland Barthes, for example, read the Genesis account of Jacob wrestling with the angel as 'a metonymic montage', characterized by 'the abrasive frictions, the breaks, the discontinuities of readability, the juxtaposition of narrative entities which to some extent run free from an explicit logical articulation'.[52]

The bricolage of scripture was not suppressed by the Jews in Antiquity. The rabbis' exposition of the torah, preserved in scriptural commentaries, like the Synagogue frescoes, exploited and promoted the disjunctions and incoherencies of the biblical text. Midrash provides a vehicle by which to explore the congruence of visual and textual discourses. This example from *Midrash Rabbah Esther*,

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11   Dura Europos, Mordecai and Esther panel, right section (Yale University Museum of Art)

chosen for its brevity, should give you some sense of how a new narrative might be constructed from fragments of old ones:

VII.22. THEN WERE THE KING'S SCRIBES CALLED ... AND AN EDICT, ACCORDING TO ALL THAT HAMAN COMMANDED, WAS WRITTEN TO THE KING'S SATRAPS ... (Esther 3.12). It is written, *And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying: Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river* (Ex. 1.22). Pharaoh commanded, but God did not command. What can you quote [to this effect]? *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?* (Lam. 3.37). What then did He command? *For by a strong hand shall he let them go* (Ex. 6.1); and so it came to pass, and moreover, *He overthrew Pharoah and his host in the Red Sea* (Ps. 136.15). Similarly, ACCORDING TO ALL THAT HAMAN COMMANDED: he commanded, but God did not command. Haman commanded *To destroy, to kill and to cause to perish*, but God commanded not so. And what did He command? *Let his wicked device, which he had*

devised against the Jews, return upon his own head (Est. 9.25). And so it came to pass, *And they hanged him and his sons on the gallows.* It is written, *He that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction* (Prov. 17.19). If one exalts the gates of his mouth and brings out from them words that are not right, God breaks him, and he is boiled in his own pot, and so Jethro said, *For* [He punished them] *with the thing with which they dealt proudly against them* (Ex. 18.11).[53]

Midrashic didactic commentaries on scriptural readings given during services, like the Synagogue frescoes, celebrate disjunction and incoherence. The wit (and power) of rabbinic exposition lay in the development of a meaningful linkage between proof-texts combined by the chance of liturgical cycles.[54] According to the *Cambridge Encyclopedia* the midrash is:

> teaching linked to a running exposition of scriptural texts, especially found in rabbinic literature. The scriptural interpretation is often a relatively free explanation of the text's meaning, based on attaching significance to single words [indeed, even single letters], grammatical forms, or similarities with passages elsewhere so as to make the text relevant to a wide range of questions of rabbinic interest.[55]

James Kugel summarizes the play of the interpreter and the text:

> There is often something a bit joking about midrash too. The ultimate subject of that joke is the dissonance between the religion of the Rabbis and the Book from which it is supposed to be derived — and . . . more precisely the dissonance between that book's supposedly unitary and harmonious message and its actually fragmentary and inconsistent components.[56]

Included in the midrashic exposition of scripture are not only other scriptural passages, but also fragments of history, fables and personal experience. A few other examples from *Midrash Rabbah Esther* offer some sense of the richness and variety of this non-scriptural material: Trajan's destruction of the Jews is attributed to his wife's anger — the Jews mourned when she bore Trajan a son on the night of the ninth of Ab (when the Jews annually commemorated the destruction of the temple with lamentation and fasting) and lit lights when the infant died (an event which coincided with the celebration of Hanukkah) (*Midrash Rabbah Esther*, 1.3). An explanation of Haman's temporary elevation is provided by a parable: a filly complains to an ass that while they work hard but are fed sparingly, a lazy sow is given all she can eat. At Calends the sow is slaughtered and the filly worries about eating at all. The ass points out to the filly, 'My daughter, it is not the eating which leads to slaughter, but the idleness' (*Midrash Rabbah Esther*, 7.1). In describing how Ahasuerus was thwarted in his attempt to use Solomon's throne, R. Eleazer b. R. Jose is quoted as having seen its fragments in Rome (*Midrash Rabbah Esther*, 1.12). The heterogeneous juxtaposition of scriptural and non-scriptural fragments provided new space —

an intertextual space — for the production of responses relevant in some way to the contemporary community.

I am not here repeating an argument for the priority of midrash to fresco. Like most of the targum and midrashic texts which have been cited as explanations of the Synagogue frescoes, *Midrash Rabbah Esther* was compiled in the fifth or sixth century CE, long after the Synagogue was decorated and destroyed. Rather, there appears to be a coincidence in the intertextual practice of the midrash and the Synagogue frescoes. The midrashic text cited above begins with a verse (Esther 3.12) which has been identified by one scholar and rejected by another as the subject of the right-hand side of the Mordecai-Esther fresco. The presupposition that an image can legitimately have only one 'true' subject is opposed by the midrash, which provides a model for an alternative relationship between text and meaning. This other reading allows the image to have a particular verse from Esther as its subject at one moment and a different narrative at another moment, depending on how it operates for its reader/viewer.

Both midrash and fresco exemplify how the juxtaposition of narrative fragments produce a new text. In the midrash, quotations from Esther, Exodus and Psalms present an analogy between Haman's frustrated plan to destroy Mordecai and the Jews and Pharaoh's thwarted attempt to destroy the Jews with his army. Similarly, the non-sequential arrangement of the Synagogue frescoes promotes an itinerant gaze which readily links the Pharaoh's destruction by Moses in the upper right-hand panel of the west wall with Haman's fall at Ahasuerus's command. In both verbal and visual narratives, the pastiche re-enacts for its audience a Jewish past under Persian and Egyptian domination and thus constructs an historical morality tale. But like all morality tales, this one reframes the present. It promises a variety of possible restorations -- from national restitution after the tyrannies of Roman domination to personal recompense for the oppressions of daily life.

Other aspects of the midrash offer useful analogies for an understanding of the relationship between the image and the sacred text.[57] Just as the midrash comments on fragments of scripture — letters of the alphabet, words, phrases, episodes — so in the fresco, details invite associations outside the narrative. The elaboration of the throne of Ahasuerus as a parallel to that of Solomon (who also appeared on the west wall) offers no less a commentary than does *Midrash Rabbah Esther*, 1.12, cited above. Similarly, just as the midrash depends on a variety of sources beyond scripture — earlier commentary, history, fable, practice — so the paintings invoke for their viewers a variety of shared experience, from familiar ritual to habits of costume. Finally, the objectives of the midrash and painting are equally multiple and disparate. Lessons drawn by the rabbis and collated in both midrash and image address all parts of experience, ranging from ethical admonition and ritual precedence to messianic promise and celebrations of revenge on the enemies of Israel. One theme rarely articulated but inevitably present in both verbal and visual commentaries is the power of the author, the rabbi, over his sources and coincidentally over the community. The manipulation of images may have been as important then in the constitution of authority in the Synagogue as it is now in a public lecture on the history of art.

Arguing for the correspondence of midrash and fresco has implications for

the production as well as for the reception of the Dura Synagogue programme. Instead of treating the frescoes as illustrations of scripture or midrash, it is possible to read the frescoes as *prior* to the written text. Although it is historically improbable that the Jewish community at Dura contrived the first or only painted synagogue, it does not follow that the images are slavishly dependent on a hypothetical earlier model. Details, even sequences, might participate in an *oral* tradition intimate with both the sacred texts and the narrative embellishments which so effectively integrated scripture with the daily life of the community. Indeed, evidence of local engagement is found in the only texts which can be claimed with certainty to be associated with the Synagogue — those contemporaneously written *into* the building. A first set of such texts consist of Aramaic and Greek inscriptions, painted on ceiling tiles, which name the elder of the Synagogue and the members of the community appointed to oversee the project.[58] These men, working in conjunction with a local painting workshop, may have been the authors of the fresco.[59] Multiple authors inevitably involve multiple voices and multiple meanings.

Other texts provide a different sort of evidence against univocal interpretations of the Synagogue's paintings. These texts, mentioned earlier as being largely ignored in art-historical interpretations of the Purim fresco, were written *on* and *in* the paintings themselves. Ten Middle Persian inscriptions, added to the frescoes before the building's destruction in 256, within the first decade after the execution of the decoration, record the day and month in which a *named* visiting (?) scribe viewed the paintings.[60] Although the exact translation of these dipinti is contested, they augment the meaning of the work in a way familiar from the signatures in certain modern painting, such as Barnett Newman's *Fourth Station of the Cross* (plate 12). Like the signature of the Barnett Newman, the dipinti affect the work on several levels of signification. They act on a formal, visual plane, changing the look of the image. These authors wrote themselves into the foreground, not the background of the painting. As in the modern work, the name and its ground contrast. In Dura, the inscriptions are written in black for the most part on the light flesh of the body.[61] At the same time the 'signature' is not distruptive; it participates in the structure it occupies, reasserting rather than contradicting the integrity of the form. Again like the Barnett Newman, the writing on the image also introduces a distinct socio-economic frame which affects the work's evaluation.[62] These texts, obviously countenanced by the community, involve a complementariety of status: the act of inscribing the paintings permanently affirms the authority of the authors at the same time that it confers the distinction of their acknowledgement on the images. The dipinti thus presume strata of meaning independent of religious texts within the Synagogue frescoes, contradicting the notion that these images were closed or canonical in their signification.

One final text may further attest to the indeterminacy of the meaning of these images. In the ground above the billowing cloak of the triumphant figure of Mordecai is a graffitto in Parthian which reads: 'This is I(?), Aparsam, the scribe.'[63] Perhaps this inscription represents an ancient version of 'Kilroy was here.' Alternatively, it might be read as the author's identification of himself with the powerful horseman. Such projection is a familiar enough experience, though

20
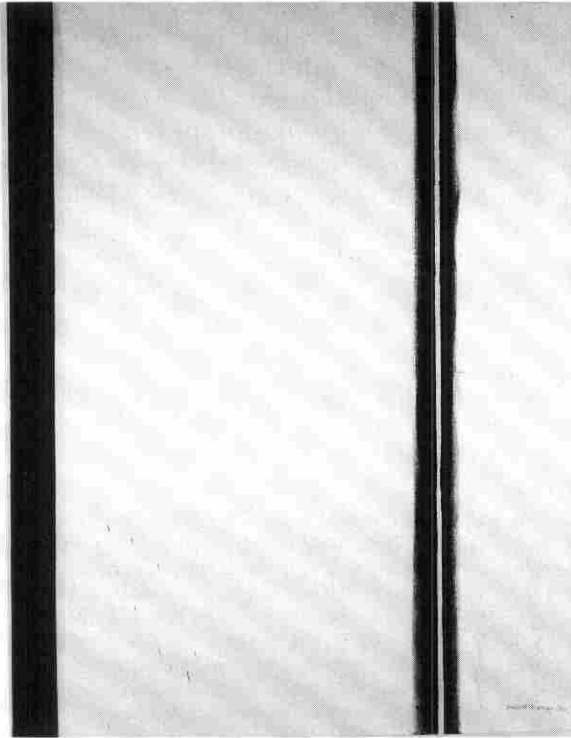
12   Barnett Newman, *Fourth Station of the Cross*, 1960 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)

now it is more readily associated with movies, television and advertising than with 'art'.[64] The breakdown of distance between the viewer and viewed is, indeed, thematized in such works as Woody Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), and Cindy Sherman's self-portraits. Idiosyncratic acts of identification do not erase the meanings of the image provided by historical narratives, but rather supplement signification.

Recognizing the local, open quality of representation in the Dura Synagogue frescoes undermines basic art-historical conventions relating to this and many other pre-modern monuments. The scholarly prejudice in favour of *the* canonical text is disputed, and in this case a vast hypothetical library of illustrated manuscripts and elaborate model-books is eliminated. More fundamentally, it calls into question scholarly assumptions of non-originality. In the instance of the Dura Synagogue, such assumptions in modern interpretation were initially ideologically framed; they have been maintained at least in part because the poor quality of the available reproductions offered no resistance.

Just as a visit to the site provoked a re-evaluation of Dura's topographic status, so, for me, seeing the Synagogue frescoes and registering the professional quality of their execution (the agility of the brushwork, the varied palette, the direct address of the figures) stimulated a rethinking of their art-historical status. I am sorry that I cannot simulate something of that experience for the reader with high-quality colour reproductions of the original. But I have tried to mark the

modernist (totalizing, essentialist, global, Orientalist) historical practices by which good originals were superseded by bad copies. By so doing, I hope I have allowed some room for reinventing the images of the Dura Synagogue as postmodernist (deconstructive, circumstantial, local and multicultural).

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Notes

An article by the deceased Professor Warren Moon, 'Nudity and Narrative: Observations on the Frescoes from the Dura Synagogue', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 60, no. 4 (Winter 1992) appeared in Spring 1993, after the submission of this article for publication. Also J.R. Branham, 'Sacred Space under erasure in Ancient Synagogues and Early Churches', *Art Bulletin*, 74, 3, 1992, pp. 375–94. Some of the issues I have discussed — particularly orality and a critique of conventional ideas of the relationship between text and image — are intriguingly treated from a distinct perspective.

1 Fieldwork for this paper was made possible by a travel grant from the Research Council of Duke University. Research was undertaken with the aid of a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend. Writing was completed as part of a broader study tentatively entitled *Construction of Absence in the Post-Classical City*, while in residence as an Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellow at the Center for the Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery in Washington DC. I am indebted to Susan Matheson of Yale University Art Museum for making archival material as well as objects there so readily accessible. I must also admit that, despite my complaints about the unavailability of good reproductions, Dr Matheson provided excellent black and white prints from Yale's early negatives of the Synagogue's frescoes for this publication. I also want to thank Professor Kalman Bland for his help with Hebrew texts and his insights into rabbinic and other forms of thinking.

2 For the classic statement on this subject, W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, New York, 1969, pp. 217–51; for its postmodern application, S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialects of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1989, especially pp. 341–75.

3 'The Newest Weeping Icons', *Sacred Art Journal*, vol. 9, no. 3, September, 1988, pp. 72–7.

4 The literature on the subject of image, illusion and truth is immense, ranging in time and ideological location from E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York, 1961, to B.E. Savedoff, 'Transforming Images: Photographs of Representations', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1992, pp. 93–106.

5 'Ideology', a word with more meanings daily, perhaps requires some explanation. I use 'ideology' here not to refer to rigidly held, extremist political views, but rather habits of thought which naturalize idiosyncratic social practice and mask the structures of authority which those social practices empower. R. Williams, 'Ideology', in *Marxism and Literature*, New York, 1977, pp. 55–71. For the intellectual and social history of the term, see T. Eagleton, *Ideology, an Introduction*, New York and London, 1991.

6 Publication on Dura is extensive. The best brief introduction, which includes bibliography, is S.B. Matheson, *Dura Europos. The Ancient City and the Yale Collection*, New Haven, CT, 1982. In addition to the preliminary and final reports of the excavation published by Yale, several older studies remain standard: for example, M.I. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europus and Its Art*, Oxford, 1938. For the extremely interesting reassessment of the site offered by the Franco-Syrian excavations now being undertaken, see the important series of articles in *Syria. Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie*, vol. 65, 1988.

7 A.R. Bellinger, M.I. Rostovtzeff, R.E. Brown and C.B. Welles (eds.), *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. Preliminary Report of the Ninth Season of Work*, 1935–1936, Part III, The Palace of the *Dux Ripae* and the Dolicheneum, New Haven, 1952, pp. 93–4.

8 Salihiyah is the modern village at the site, located between the larger cities of Deir ez-Zor and Abu Kamal.

9 The surviving fragments of the Konon frescoes are on display in the National Museum in Damascus.

10 J.H. Breasted, *Oriental Forerunners of*

Byzantine Painting, First-Century Wall Paintings from the Fortress of Dura on the Middle Euphrates, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications, vol. 1, Chicago, 1924.

11 C. Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, edited by B. Goldman, New Haven and London, 1979.

12 E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, 1979 and more recently, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, 1993. *Orientalism*, despite [because of?] its apparent limitations, has had an enormous impact on historical thinking in humanistic and social scientific fields. By dismissing *Orientalism* as 'intellectually insignificant', E. Gellner (*TLS*, 9 April, 1993) reveals himself to be the ideologue which he claims to be criticizing.

13 Breasted, op. cit., p. 5.

14 The italics are mine. Hopkins, op. cit., pp. 10–11.

15 The other early writers on Dura represented it similarly. Rostovtzeff wrote, 'Dura-Europos ... was never an important centre of ancient life ... [The city] played no momentous part in the history of its time; nor was it ever distinguished for independent creative activity.' Rostovtzeff, 1938, op. cit., pp. 1–2. In his masterful final report, C.H. Kraeling begins and ends the section on Interpretation with reference to this quote. A.R. Bellinger et al (eds.), op. cit., *The Excavations at Dura-Europos*, Final Report VIII, Part I, New Haven, 1956, pp. 321, 401–402.

16 E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, London, 1972, p. 89; H.W. Janson, *History of Art*, New York, 1991, p. 252.

17 J. Gutmann, 'Programmatic Painting in the Dura Synagogue', in J. Gutmann (ed.), *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-Evaluation (1932–1972)*, *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 1, Missoula, Montana, 1973, p. 140.

18 B. Geyer, 'Le site de Doura-Europos et son environnement géographique', *Syria, Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie*, vol. 65, 1988, pp. 285–95.

19 W. Hoepfner and E.L. Schwandner, *Haus und Stadt in klassischen Griechenland*, Wohnen in der klassischen Polis I, Munich, 1986, pp. 207–210. Their assessment is, however, criticized by E. Will, 'La population de Doura-Europos: une évaluation', *Syria. Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie*, vol. 65, 1988, pp. 315–21.

20 A. Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europus*, Oxford, 1973, p. 33.

21 The supercession of the object by its reproductions is also treated by M. Camille, 'The *Très Riches Heures*: An Illuminated Manuscript in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, 1990, pp. 72–107. In the case of the *Très Riches Heures*, the archetype is too elite to be displayed; with Dura, the original is too modest to require scrutiny.

22 Susan Matheson, Curator of Ancient Art at Yale University Art Museum, summarized for me the recent history of the frescoes of the Christian Building. They were treated on site in Syria with a consolidant which, in interaction with the environmental conditions in New Haven, caused serious scaling of the paint surface. The reconstruction of the Christian Building at Yale was dismantled in the 1970s when the Ancient works in the Yale collection were moved to air-conditioned quarters. At that time it was determined that little of the original paint surface remained intact.

23 On the modern construction of Jews as verbal and not visual see Kalman P. Bland, 'Medieval Jewish Aesthetics: Maimonides, Body, and Scripture in Profiat Duran', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54, no. 4, 1993, pp. 533–59.

24 D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Bloomington, 1990, p. xi.

25 For example, E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, abridged edition, Neusner (ed.). Princeton, 1988, pp. 249–65.

26 K. Weitzmann and H.O. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, Washington DC, 1990.

27 Weitzmann and Kessler, op. cit., p. 174.

28 ibid., p. 150.

29 For example, the criticisms of Weitzmann's method made by J. Gutmann already in 1987 remain unanswered by Weitzmann in the *Dura Synagogue* volume. 'The Dura Europos Synagogue Paintings: The State of Research', in L.I. Levine (ed.), *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, Philadelphia, 1987, pp. 61–72.

30 Apparently the Byzantines, being more western, were more faithful to their 'Hellenistic' models: 'Whenever a figure or a group of figures agrees with Byzantine miniatures it shows the Hellenistic mode, and where it differs usually the oriental mode is used.' Weitzmann and Kessler, op. cit., p. 147.

31 A model for an Orientalist critique of Weitzmann's method as exemplified in *Illustrations in Roll and Codex*, Princeton, 1947, was provided by A. Taylor, 'Picture Criticism and an Invisible East', *Abstracts and Program Statements*, College Art Association of America, Chicago, 1992, p. 175.

32 Kraeling, op. cit., pp. 394–5. The author explicitly acknowledges his dependence on Weitzmann.

33 Joseph Gutmann deals extensively with this material; for example, 'The Illustrated Jewish Manuscript in Antiquity: The Present State of the Question', *Gesta*, vol. 5, 1966, pp. 39–44; 'The Dura Europos Synagogue Paintings and Their Influence on Later

Christian and Jewish Art', *Artibus et historiae*, IX/17, 1988, pp. 25–9; also see, R. Stichel, *Die Namen Noes, seines Bruders and seiner Frau. Ein Beitrag zum Nachleben jüdischer Überlieferungen in der ausserkanonischen und gnostischen Literatur und in Denkmälern der Kunst*, Göttingen, 1979, esp. pp. 103–113.

34 J. Gutmann, 'The Illustrated Midrash in the Dura Synagogue Paintings: A New Dimension of the Study of Judaism', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 50, 1983, pp. 91–104.

35 For a discussion of the interaction of Jews and non-Jews within urban communities during the late Empire see L.V. Rutgers, 'Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and non-Jews in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 96, 1992, pp. 101–118.

36 Kraeling, op. cit., p. 3; Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1975, p. 28.

37 S.B. Downey, *Mesopotamian Religious Architecture, Alexander through the Parthians*, Princeton, 1988, pp. 115–118, with earlier bibliography. She characterizes Dura's temples as 'original creations based on the principles of Babylonian architecture', p. 179.

38 J. Neusner, 'Judaism at Dura Europos', *History of Religions*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1964, pp. 81–102; B. Goldman, 'Foreigners at Dura-Europos: Pictorial Graffiti and History', *Muséon. Revue d'études orientales*, vol. 103, 1990, pp. 5–25; Fergus Millar, 'Paul of Samosata, Zenobia and Aurelian: The Church, Local Culture and Political Allegiance in Third-Century Syria', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 61, 1971, pp. 1–17, for the heterogenous population of the region.

39 For a summary of discussion, see A. St Clair, 'The Torah Shrine at Dura-Europos: A Reevaluation', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 29, 1986, pp. 109–117.

40 The identification of the subjects of the central panels as 'David, King over all Israel' and 'The Blessings of Jacob and David' are broadly but by no means universally accepted by scholars. The prophets have also been variously named. Most recently, H.L. Kessler, 'Prophetic Portraits in the Dura Synagogue', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 30, 1987, pp. 149–55; J.A. Goldstein, 'The Central Composition of the West Wall of the Synagogue of Dura-Europos', in his *Semites, Iranians, Greeks, and Romans. Studies in their Interactions*, Atlanta, 1990, pp. 67–114, first published in *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, vols. 16–17, 1984–85, pp. 99–141.

41 Kraeling, op. cit., p. 168.

42 J. Gutmann, 'Early Synagogue and Jewish Catacomb Art and its Relation to Christian

Art', in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, II, Berlin and New York, 1984, p. 1320.

43 N. Schneid, *The Paintings of the Synagogue of Dura-Europos* (in Hebrew), 1956, p. 23.

44 Comte du Mesnil du Buisson, 'Les nouvelles découvertes de la Synagogue de Doura-Europos', *Revue biblique*, vol. 43, 1934, pp. 546–63, esp. p. 553.

45 André Grabar, 'Le Thème religieux des fresques de la synagogue de Doura (245–256 après J.C.)', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, vol. 123, nos. 2–3, 1941, pp. 143–92; vol. 124, no. 1, 1942, pp. 5–35, esp. p. 18.

46 Kraeling, op. cit., pp. 162–4.

47 ibid., p. 350.

48 Gutmann, op. cit., 1987, pp. 62–3. The italics are mine.

49 I use this term as it is being redefined by chaos theorists. See N.K. Hayles, *Chaos Bound. Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science*, Ithaca, 1990, pp. 209–235.

50 Considering the centrality of the text in traditional iconographic studies, it is worth noting that the Synagogue frescoes were discovered the year after Panofsky began teaching at New York University. C. Eisler, '*Kunstgeschichte* American Style: A Study in Migration', in D. Fleming and B. Bailyn (eds.), *The Intellectual Migration. Europe and America, 1930–1960*, Cambridge, 1969, pp. 554–629; E. Panofsky, 'The History of Art', from W.R. Crawford (ed.), *The Cultural Migration: The European Scholar in America*, Philadelphia, 1952, pp. 82–111, reprinted as 'Epilogue: Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European', in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Garden City, 1955, pp. 321–46.

51 For a related critique of Panofskian iconology, C. Harbison, 'Meaning in Venetian Renaissance Art: The Issues of Artistic Ingenuity and Oral Tradition', *Art History*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1992, pp. 19–37.

52 R. Barthes, 'The Struggle with the Angel', in L.A. Wagner (ed.), *Image Music Text*, trans. Laurence Scott, Austin, 1977, pp. 125–41. The piece ends with an apt statement: 'The problem . . . is exactly to manage not to reduce the Text to a signified, whatever it may be (historical, economic, folkloristic or kerygmatic), but to hold its *significance* fully open.'

53 *Midrash Rabbah Esther*, trans. M. Simon, London, 1939; third impression, Hertford, 1961, pp. 100–101.

54 For a discussion of the construction of the midrash and targum, A. Shinan, 'Sermons, Targums, and the Reading from Scriptures in the Ancient Synagogue', in L.I. Levine (ed.),

The Synagogue in Late Antiquity, Philadelphia, 1987, pp. 97–110.

55 *The Cambridge Encyclopedia*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 792.

56 J.L. Kugel, 'Two Introductions to Midrash', in G.H. Hartman and S. Budick (eds.), *Midrash and Literature*, New Haven, 1986, p. 80.

57 A detailed discussion of the rabbinic sources used to explain details in the Synagogue frescoes is provided by Kraeling, op. cit., pp. 351–60.

58 Kraeling, op. cit., pp. 263–317.

59 The maker of the torah shrine and perhaps even the painter are named in the graffiti in Aramaic which appear under the menorah: 'I, 'Uzzi, made the repository of the Torah shrine.' and 'Joseph, son of Abba, made the . . .', Kraeling, op. cit., p. 269.

60 The inscriptions (nos. 42–51) are translated and discussed in detail by B. Geiger in Kraeling, op. cit., pp. 300–311. Reference is given to alternative readings. I want to thank Professor Victor Mair for his helpful comments on these inscriptions and for bibliographical references. I wondered whether *dipîwar*, translated commonly as 'scribe' might be more broadly interpreted as 'writer'. However, it has been argued that writing was so limited and specialized that scribesmanship (*dipîrêh*) was equivalent to membership in an exclusive guild. D.A. Utz, 'Language, Writing, and Tradition in Iran', *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 24, 1991, pp. 8–11.

61 I benefited from discussions about writing-on-the-body with Professors Kristine Stiles and Carol Mavor.

62 On signatures, J. Derrida, 'The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Peter Brunette and David Wills', in P. Brunette and D. Wills (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, New York, 1994, pp. 9–32.

63 Kraeling, op. cit., p. 314.

64 For example, J. Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements. Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, London and New York, 1978.