Feasts and the Social Order in Early Jewish Society
(ca. Third Century B.C.E.–Third Century C.E.)

by

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Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

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Mary T. Boatwright

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate
Program in Religion in the
Graduate School of
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2014
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

My dissertation elucidates the roles feasts played in constructing the social order for different Jewish communities from approximately the third century B.C.E. to the third century C.E. Feasts – defined in this work as events based on the communal consumption of food and drink conscientiously differentiated from quotidian meals – punctuated the rhythms of the lives of Jews throughout ancient Palestine and the Diaspora. Jews convened feasts before and after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. to mark seminal moments in Jewish history and to commemorate the roles God and his intermediaries played in these events. Jews also held feasts on a number of other occasions. Individuals and groups of Jews may have held feasts upon the visitation of foreign dignitaries, the completion of a major building project, after the safe return of a family or friend from a journey abroad, or during important life-cycle events. Regardless of the occasion, feasts consisted of a host of practices that provided Jews with the means to establish, maintain, or contest social hierarchies and group cohesion. How individuals and groups of Jews manipulated the constitutive elements of feasts during the period under investigation to actuate the social order within their communities is the focus of this dissertation.

To achieve this dissertation’s objective, I will examine the textual and archaeological evidence for the performances of feasts within two domains that were central to the construction of Jewish society: privately owned Jewish domiciles in Palestine and the communal and religious institution of the synagogue located in the Diaspora and Palestine. There have been previous studies that have examined both the textual and archaeological data for the functions of feasts convened within these locations, but they have been temporally
limited and have not taken into account recent anthropological and ethnographic studies demonstrating the dynamic functions of feasts. My analysis of the literary and archaeological evidence for feasts held within Jewish domiciles and synagogues shows that these repasts provided Jews with various opportunities to determine their relationships with one another, advance their economic and political agendas, seek power, and establish and/or contest broader tenets of the social order. I hope that my study will lead to further investigations into the social dynamics of Jewish feasts as well as their role as a catalyst for the transformation of economic, political, and religious institutions that shaped Jewish society in antiquity.
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A Note on Style and Translations

I follow *The SBL Manual of Style* for citation and transliteration of foreign languages. For the Hebrew Bible, I have used the *NRSV*. Translations from the Septuagint are mine based on *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*, published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls are mine based on the *The Dead Sea Scrolls* volumes edited by James Charlesworth et. al (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997–2005). For early rabbinic texts, I have used Chanoch Albeck, *Shisha Sidre Mishna* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1952–1958) and Saul Lieberman, *The Tosefta: According to Codex Vienna, with Variants from Codex Erfurt, Genizah Mss. and Editio Princeps (Venice 1521), Together with References to Parallel Passages in Talmudic Literature and a Brief Commentary* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–1988). For tractates within the orders of Tosefta *Qodashim* and *Tohorot*, I have used Moses S. Zuckermandel, *Tosefta: Based on the Erfurt and Vienna Codices with Parallels and Variants* (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1937). I have used the English translation of *Sifre Deuteronomy* in Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1986). Also, unless otherwise noted in the bibliography, other Greek and Roman literary sources come from the corresponding Loeb Classical Library (LCL) edition. All translations of these texts are mine unless specified.
Abbreviations

AGRW

AJA
*American Journal of Archaeology* (periodical).

ANRW
*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (periodical).

BASOR

CIG

CIJ

CIL

CPJ

DSD
*Dead Sea Discoveries* (periodical).

GRA

HTR

IDelta
IDelos

IEJ
*Israel Exploration Journal* (periodical).

IG II²

ILS

IPalmyra

JBL
*Journal of Biblical Literature* (periodical).

JIWE

JJS
*Journal of Jewish Studies* (periodical).

JQR
*Jewish Quarterly Review* (periodical).

JSP
*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* (periodical).

LSAM

OGIS
PLond


PHI

Packard Humanities Institute numbers for Greek inscriptions. The Greek texts are available online at: <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions/>

RB

Revue biblique (periodical).

RevQ

Revue de Qumran (periodical).

SIG


SYR


TAM

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Dedication

For Sara
1. Introduction

1.1 The Question

Josephus reports that John Hyrcanus (r. 134–104 B.C.E.), the Hasmonean high priest and ruler of the Jewish people, convened an opulent feast for the Pharisees and a number of other guests near the end of his reign. When Hyrcanus saw that his guests were delighted with his provision of food and drink, we are told, he announced that he had always desired to be righteous in all his deeds. Hyrcanus then turned to the Pharisees, imploring them to tell him if they ever felt he was not properly performing his duties as high priest and ruler. The Pharisees assured Hyrcanus, whom Josephus states was one of their disciples, that he was virtuous in everything he did. A guest by the name of Eleazar, however, implies that Hyrcanus was a bastard, born from an illicit union between his mother and a Greek soldier. He therefore could not be the high priest of the Jewish people at all. Josephus states that Hyrcanus became enraged at the calumny and, thinking that the Pharisees approved of Eleazar’s slander because they did not want him killed, proclaimed himself to no longer be a Pharisee, abrogated their religious rulings, and punished anyone who followed them. As a result, according to Josephus, hatred arose among the people against Hyrcanus and his sons (Ant. 16.288–298).

It is possible that Josephus used artistic license to “stage” the political and religious changes that were occurring at the end of the second century B.C.E. as taking shape at a feast (ἐστίασις).¹ Josephus’ record of the events that unfolded at the feast of Hyrcanus, however,

¹ On the changes occurring in Jewish society at this time, see esp. Albert I. Baumgarten, The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Shaye J.
would not have been unusual. Indeed, archaeological and textual evidence for feasts throughout the ancient world shows that while they were often occasions for the gustatory gratification of pleasure-seeking individuals, they were also emotionally charged events at which social relationships were both enacted and altered. Feasts—no matter what occasion they were intended to mark (e.g., religious, life-cycle events)—were thus as much about the establishment, maintenance, and often the contestation of social order and authority as they were about the communal consumption of food and drink. Josephus’ description of the feast hosted by Hyrcanus, as well as recent scholarly investigations into feasts’ social functions throughout the world, invites us to investigate how feasts performed by Jews in antiquity functioned to shape Jewish society. In this dissertation, I intend to examine how individuals and groups of Jews living from the third century B.C.E. until the third century C.E. used feasts to create, reify, and occasionally contest the social order.


I am not suggesting that the occasion on which a feast was convened did not matter with regard to the event’s social functions. Nevertheless, the constitute elements of an explicitly religious feast, for example, could be and often was also manipulated by individuals and communities as a way to accrue social capital. Furthermore, the archaeological evidence to be examined in this work simply does not indicate when feasts were held, whether within a privately owned home or a synagogue.
1.2 Defining Feasts and Their Functions

Before continuing, it is important to be explicit about what I mean by feasts and the ways they have been commonly used to shape social order. I define feasts as events based on the communal consumption of food and drink that are conscientiously differentiated from quotidian meals. Individuals and groups may distinguish feasts from regular meals in a number of ways: through the presentation and consumption of unusual amounts and types of food and drink, by the use of distinctive dining ware, and/or through dramaturgical performances (e.g., singing, dancing, oratorical displays, liturgies, role playing, etc.). Feasts also tend to be marked off from daily meals by being convened in unique locations (e.g., architectonically elaborated spaces, or locations thought to be intricately linked with the sacred). Feasts thus stimulate participants’ senses in ways unlike ordinary meals by “focusing people’s attention and rendering them susceptible to episodes of heightened emotional experiences.”

At the same time, the ways that individuals and groups distinguish feasts from ordinary meals affect the social functions of feasts. Brian Hayden, John R. Perodie, and Miriam Kahn, for example, have shown that some feasts may be designed to uphold

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6 Dietler, “Theorizing the Feast,” 72.
cooperation and downplay social differences, whereas others promote the hosts socially, politically, or economically in relation to other members of society. The former type of feasts tends to be convened by groups at special communal sites on occasions deemed significant by all members. All participants in these feasts also tend to contribute provisions for the feasts, and equal amounts of food and drink are distributed equally among them.

Feasts that function to establish social hierarchies might be held if individuals or groups allot different amounts of food and drink to guests and/or assign guests to particular locations, based on social categories, within dining facilities. Hosts may also display their elevated socioeconomic status by using their own resources to provide guests with an abundant amount of rare food and drink presented on finely decorated tableware. Hosts may also differentiate their status by convening feasts in their own elaborately constructed dining facilities.

Yet anthropologists have shown that feasts are inherently polysemic—they simultaneously convey a number of meanings. Although one social function will tend to be forefronted, feasts simultaneously function as arenas for different levels of social integration and competition. On the one hand, feasts intended by hosts to mark social distinctions may bind participants with one another simply because they consume food and drink together.


These feasts might also provide some participants with the opportunity to create and maintain alliances. On the other hand, as Michael Dietler argues, “feasts conceived sincerely by the participants as harmonious celebrations of community identity are simultaneously arenas for manipulation and the acquisition of prestige, social credit, and the various forms of influence…that social capital entails.” For example, individuals or groups might freely offer food and drink from their own resources to participants in communal celebrations. Not only does the provision of food and drink display wealth and prestige, it also engenders asymmetrical relationships by rendering recipients indebted to those who are providing consumables. Individuals participating in feasts intended to create social cohesion might also use visual cues (e.g., special attire) to indicate their social standing vis-à-vis fellow dining participants. Even feasts hosted by an entire community to generate group cohesion tend to have certain individuals who are tasked with ensuring that the communal meal is

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10 Dietler, “Theorizing the Feast,” 77.

11 Ibid., 74–75, 86. Dietler (74) argues that such commensal hospitality should be understood similarly to other kinds of social relationships engendered through gift exchange. He, however, notes that unlike the exchange of other more durable types of objects, food is destroyed through consumption. Repaying the hosts of a feast in kind would take some time since food production requires extensive agricultural and culinary labor. See further, Helen Leach, “Did East Polynesians Have a Concept of Luxury Foods?,” World Archaeology 34 (2003): 442–57; Junker, “The Evolution of Ritual Feasting Systems;” Roy A. Rappaport, Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), passim; Franz Boas, Kwakiutl Ethnography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), passim.

organized and executed successfully. In these cases, a level of social prestige may be awarded to those who can mobilize such group activities.¹³

At the conclusion of his expansive theoretical consideration of the social function of feasts, Dietler states that the “‘festive landscape’ in any given society will most likely be a palimpsest of several different modes of commensal politics operating in different contexts.”¹⁴ By looking for and identifying various features of the “festive landscape” of different feasting contexts, one can often decode a given feast’s primary social function. E.P. Sanders has argued that the three main physical contexts for the development of early Judaism were the Temple in Jerusalem, the home, and the synagogue.¹⁵ Identifying and analyzing the performances of feasts that took place within these contexts should provide ample material for reconstructing the primary social functions for various Jewish communities, helping us to understand how feasts convened by Jews helped establish and reify the social order in ancient Jewish society.

1.3 The Scope of the Project

This work, however, will not deal with sacrificial feasts held in Jerusalem in light of some scholars’ recent conclusions about the social functions of these feasts. Carol L. Meyers’s recent analysis of sacrificial feasts held during the First Temple period in particular

¹³ Dietler, “Theorizing the Feast,” 80.

¹⁴ Ibid., 83.

has elucidated these feasts’ dynamic social functions for Israelites.\(^\text{16}\) On the one hand, Meyers notes that the agricultural feasts of Passover, Sukkoth, and Shavuot allowed Israelites to accentuate their bonds as they dined together to celebrate seminal aspects of their collective history—respectively, the escape from Egypt, wilderness journey, and Sinai covenant.\(^\text{17}\) She also suggests that these feasts were accompanied by music, storytelling, and dance, in addition to special foods that functioned as auditory, visual, and material “mnemonics” that enhanced Israelites’ connection to their remembered past as well as to one another.\(^\text{18}\) On the other hand, these and other feasts could provide kings, elites, and clan leaders with time to establish and reinforce their political authority. For example, Meyers argues that the sacrificial feast held to inaugurate Solomon’s completion of the First Temple (1 Kings 8:62—66) was intended to showcase the king’s new building project. This dedicatory feast, Meyers contends, “would have served not only to acknowledge divine presence and authority but also the power of the realm.”\(^\text{19}\) In addition, Meyers argues, kings,\(^\text{16}\) Meyers, “The Function of Feasts: An Anthropological Perspective on Israelite Religious Festivals,” in Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect (ed. Saul M. Olyan; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 144–69.

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 157–58.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 158. Nathan MacDonald (Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009], 77–99) provides similar conclusions with regard to foods used on Passover, Sukkoth, and Shavuot.

\(^\text{19}\) Meyers, “The Function of Feasts,” 164. She is careful to note of Solomon’s feast: “Regardless of this feast’s historicity, the biblical account is an appropriate expression of the dynamics of inaugural feasts” (164), which were also held throughout later periods whose accounts scholarly consensus hold to be more historically reliable. On the debate over historicity of the biblical accounts of David’s and Solomon’s projects and the extent of their influence in the region in light of archaeological evidence, see Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel: Invited Lectures Delivered at the Sixth Biennial Colloquium of the

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priests, and the heads of clans could supply the provisions for all participants or for their own social groups celebrating sacrificial feasts. By doing so, these elites secured the recipients’ admiration and gratitude while affirming asymmetrical relationships of power. Social asymmetries in particular were confirmed because this form of commensal hospitality could not possibly be repaid, a situation that would render the receivers of these gifts forever in the debt of the beneficent king, priest, or clan leader.

Much of Meyers’s analysis serves as a lens through which one can also view the role of sacrificial feasts convened in Jerusalem during the Second Temple period. We can assume that the feasts of Passover, Sukkoth, and Shavuot continued to function as a way to create communitas as Jews came together around their tables in Jerusalem to commemorate their shared past. Other feasts that generated a sense of communality likely included those held to celebrate the completion of the altar (Ezra 3:1–6) and the Temple itself (Ezra 6:16–22). The dynamic social function of sacrificial feasts that Meyers describes is also evident at sacrificial feasts held during the Second Temple period. During the feast convened to commemorate the completion of the outer wall, Nehemiah and the leaders of Judah take

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_Meyers, “The Function of Feasts,”_ 164–65. Meyers (165) makes special note of Josiah supplying the sacrificial animals from his own resources for the feast of Passover described in 2 Chron 35:7, 13.

_Ibid.,_ 165–66.

center stage during the procession along the wall to the Temple before making sacrifices there (Neh 11:27–43). At the dedicatory feasts of Hanukkah introduced into the cultic calendar by the Hasmoneans (1 Macc 4:36–59), the Maccabees hoisted their own armor or spoils of war onto the Temple’s façade as a symbol of their military prowess (1 Macc 4:57).\(^2\)

The sacrificial feast hosted by Herod upon the completion of the Temple’s reconstruction just so happened to coincide with the anniversary of the king’s coronation. Accordingly, Herod offered numerous sacrifices to feed his subjects in honor of his building project and kingship (Josephus, *Ant.* 14:421–423).\(^2\) While the sacrificial feasts of Nehemiah, the Hasmoneans, and Herod likely functioned to create some sense of Jewish communality for participants eating and drinking with one another, evidence for each feast demonstrates how Jewish leaders could use sacrificial feasts as an opportunity to emphasize their own socio-religious location vis-à-vis their subjects.

Given that sacrificial feasts held in Jerusalem can readily be shown to have generated a sense of community as well as hierarchical relationships, I have chosen instead to focus on the social function of feasts held in the Jewish domestic sphere in Palestine and in synagogues in the Diaspora and Palestine. Notably, scholars interested in the development of


Jewish domestic dining practices during the early Hellenistic and Roman periods have rarely gone beyond examining Jewish dietary restrictions and related purity concerns. By the first century B.C.E., textual and archaeological evidence attests to many Jews’ embrace and adaptation of dietary and related purity regulations that had been once biblically consigned to Jerusalem’s priests. This decision by many Jews had profound social and religious consequences. As Jacob Neusner writes, the dietary and purity laws that “originally pertained to the priests in the Temple, and now [were] meant to sanctify all Israel and transform each man into a priest and the whole nation into a holy people, had to do with eating: the sanctification of the body and of the body of the believers.”25 Neusner’s influential thesis has led many scholars to explore how the dietary and purity regulations of the Pharisees, the early Jesus movement, and those developed by rabbis helped Jews to distinguish themselves from gentiles as well as from other groups of Jews.26

25 Jacob Neusner, From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism (New York: Ktav, 1979), 90.

Without denying the importance of Jewish dietary and related purity concerns in constructing Jewish identities, I will not directly examine the significance of these meal practices when considering the literary and archaeological evidence for feasts held within the domestic sphere. I will be concerned instead with identifying a number of other dining performances recently highlighted by a number of anthropologists and ethno-archaeologists discussed above, practices which constructed the social order within different Jewish communities. Hosting feasts within one’s own domicile requires individuals to ask a number of socially significant questions – e.g. who is to be invited to the meal, where are diners to be located within the dining room, what type of tableware is to be used, what type of food is to be served, etc.\textsuperscript{27} The performance of any domestic feast is thus encoded with specific messages, as Mary Douglas observed, which are “about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries.”\textsuperscript{28} Examining the evidence for Jewish domestic feasts shall allow us to elucidate how individual Jews variously employed the “festive landscape” to establish and reinforce particular ideologies and solidify notions of their own social, and often socio-religious, locations.

Finally, I will examine the evidence for feasts held within Jewish synagogues in the Diaspora as well as in Roman Palestine. Scholars recognize that ancient synagogues in the Diaspora and Palestine were public structures built by individual communities for a number of purposes, from the manumission of slaves and charity services to worship activities (e.g., scriptural readings, prayers, blessings). Some scholars have also noted that feasts were

\textsuperscript{27} Dietler, “Theorizing the Feast.”

\textsuperscript{28} Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” \textit{Daedalus} 10 (1972): 61.
convened in at least some synagogues. Yet these scholars have not explored the dynamic social significance for specific Jewish communities who hosted feasts within their synagogues. Lee I. Levine, for example, simply states that by the first century C.E. feasts held in synagogues “were recognized by Romans and Jews alike as important communal activities which played an integral part in the corporate life of the Jews.”

Levine seems to be emphasizing that synagogue feasts helped to solidify bonds between Jewish synagogue members. While this may very well have been true, feasts are inherently polysemic. By focusing on a number of textual, epigraphic, and archaeological sources, I intend to explore the more dynamic social function of feasts convened within synagogues during the period under investigation. Focusing on feasts held within synagogues will also broaden the scope of the investigation; examining the performance of feasts conducted within the more public communal center of the synagogue should demonstrate how feasts may have actuated the social order on a scale that exceeded that of feasts hosted by individuals within their own domiciles.

1.4 Outline

In order to provide a wider cultural context for Jewish feasting practices, in Chapter 2 I present a detailed overview of the basic form, settings, and social functions of the Greco-Roman feast that were most typical throughout the Mediterranean. As we shall see, some Jewish groups adopted certain Greco-Roman feasting practices; the background in Chapter 2 elucidates the characteristics that some Jews adopted as mechanisms for social construction

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within their communities. As I will show, these characteristics of Greco-Roman culture did not supplant the social or religious customs of Jews, but rather provided various communities with a performative framework that members could or could not employ to define their relationships to one another and the larger socio-political context.

With the larger Greco-Roman feasting practices presented, in Chapter 3 I analyze the primary social functions of the feasting practices evident in the Jewish domestic sphere in Palestine from the third century B.C.E. to 70 C.E. I use the phrase “domestic sphere” to refer private domiciles, including palaces, elite Jerusalem homes, country villas, and other large homes located north of Judea in Galilee and Gaulanitis. This list admittedly reflects a lack of data about non-elite groups of Jews, whose feasts are currently underrepresented in academic publications. In Chapter 4 I present evidence about domestic feasts in Palestine, beginning after the Great Revolt of 70 C.E. and extending to the third century C.E. Due to continual reconstruction and development efforts after the Great Revolt and Bar Kokhba rebellion, however, archaeological evidence for Jewish domestic feasts is currently limited to the city of Sepphoris. To supplement the dearth of available material data from Sepphoris, I turn to the evidence for domestic feasts in early rabbinic texts.

In Chapter 5 I shift focus from the domestic sphere to the more public sphere of synagogues in the Diaspora (ca. third century B.C.E.–third century C.E.), an exploration I continue in Chapter 7 by analyzing evidence for feasts held in synagogues of Roman Palestine (ca. first century C.E.–third century C.E.). Including an analysis of feasts held in synagogues in the Diaspora and Palestine provides a broader cultural context through which to view the social functions of feasts. Looking at evidence in synagogues also provides a different platform for the social functions of feasts, due to the civic and religious nature of
the institution. Chapter 6 intervenes with a detailed discussion of the feasting practices of the Yahad at Qumran (ca. 100 B.C.E.). Their feasting practices illuminate similarities with synagogues of the Diaspora and in Palestine, as well as peculiarities that make the Yahad a unique case study of the social mechanisms that operated during feasts. A study of the Yahad’s feasting practices illustrates the dynamic interplay between elements of Greco-Roman culture and the local and traditional needs of a particular Jewish community.

1.5 Methodology and Limitations

The present work is predicated upon the notion that Jews living in Palestine and the Diaspora during the period under investigation were variously influenced by Greek and Roman cultures. This idea has been widely accepted since Martin Hengel’s massive study of Jewish encounters with Greek and Roman culture throughout the Mediterranean from the Persian through the early rabbinic periods. Hengel concluded that, by the first century C.E., Greek and Roman influences were felt in many spheres of Jewish life: linguistic, literary, educational, architectural, religious, philosophical, artistic, political, economic, and military. Although particular aspects of his work have been criticized, his general argument is now accepted as conventional wisdom.


Several scholars, however, have nuanced Hengel’s thesis. Some have shown that the extent to which Jews living in the Diaspora or Palestine emulated Greek and Roman customs depended on their social class and geographical location. Many have also forcefully argued that the notions of Hellenization or Romanization should not indicate the replacement or imposition of one culture over another. Although many colonized groups adopted Greek and Roman cultural expressions (e.g., philosophical concepts, social institutions, artistic representations, architectural adaptations), they also typically adapted them to their preexisting beliefs and practices. Eric M. Meyers and Mark A. Chancey cogently express

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this idea when they state that Jews’ adoption of aspects of Greek and Roman culture did not require that they “give up their indigenous ways; rather it often allowed them to express themselves within the new culture in ways that were true to their own tradition.”

The Greco-Roman feast (i.e., the symposium/convivium) was a significant element of Hellenistic and later Roman culture. Several scholars have recently shown that the fundamental form of the symposium or convivium became a sort of feasting rubric, malleable in its very nature, through which many peoples of the Mediterranean expressed their own social conventions while still following the trends of the era. The apparent widespread popularity of the form of the Greco-Roman feast throughout the Mediterranean is why I begin this work with a detailed overview into the form, settings, and functions of the symposium and convivium. Doing so provides a foundation from which we can see the extent to which Jews may or may not have participated in this wider feasting phenomena. Despite the symposium’s apparent popularity, the evidence is not clear that all Jews became completely invested in this new dining culture. Furthermore, whether Jews adopted Greco-Roman practices did not affect the longstanding social functions of traditional feasts as they had existed for millennia within the Levant, and for centuries in ancient Israel.

Furthermore, I will use texts and the material record as evidence for specific practices and associated values as I explore the function of feasts within Jewish domestic spheres and synagogues. A judicious examination of literary evidence can help us reconstruct the attitudes and daily practices of Jews. The archaeological evidence can be used to help either supplement interpretations of textual sources or question their veracity. When possible,

35 Meyers and Chancey, Alexander to Constantine, 24.
analyzing both texts and the archaeological record together is thus essential for reconstructing how individuals and groups of Jews used feasts to establish, maintain, or contest the social order within their communities. In addition, I employ recent anthropological and ethnographic conclusions about the social functions of commensal, feasting practices. These studies demonstrate that feasts function quite similarly across cultures, allowing for a more enriched interpretation of the social functions of ancient Jewish feasts.

An analysis of the social functions of Jewish feasts, however, is limited by the fact that there have been very few systematic attempts by archaeologists to collect and interpret data that might be related to domestic feasting practices other than from large homes. This is particularly true for towns and villages in ancient Palestine, where the majority of houses were small. As a result, much of the archaeological evidence for domestic feasts comes from what we may classify as the elite and sub-elite strata of Jewish society. In addition, most ancient literary sources that provide descriptions of domestic Jewish feasts focus on those conducted by these same groups. I have attempted to minimize the effect of the limited evidence for feasts held by non-elite Jews by examining the data from synagogues, which are commonly believed to have been open to a broader demographic of the Jewish population. Yet the evidence for feasts convened within synagogues is largely, though not solely, restricted to material remains. Nevertheless, the available sources allow for an initial, in-depth study into the social functions of Jewish feasts from approximately third century B.C.E. to the third century C.E.
2. Greco-Roman Feasts

Before analyzing Jewish feasting practices from the third century B.C.E. to the third century C.E., we must explore the wider context of Greco-Roman feasting culture. This chapter includes a detailed description of the basic form, settings, and functions of the Greco-Roman feast, which became, in the words of Dennis E. Smith, a “social institution of the first order” during this time for various peoples throughout the Mediterranean.¹ The Greco-Roman feast provided different communities with a performative framework through which dining members could define their relationships to one another. The ubiquitous and standardized feasting practices also presented various communities with a set of practices they could adopt, adapt, or reject, allowing them to define their relationship to the broader culture. While the extent to which Jews made use of the basic features of the Greco-Roman feast is not the central concern of the present work, understanding its basic form and functions is essential. As we will see in the following chapters, an understanding of the basic elements of the Greco-Roman feast will often help elucidate the textual and archaeological evidence for feasts held within the Jewish domestic sphere and synagogues.

2.1 Feasts and Their Settings

This section includes a detailed overview of the basic form and social function of the Greco-Roman feast that were typical throughout the Mediterranean. We must note from the outset, however, that any particular group’s extant social or religious customs undoubtedly influenced the finer details associated with Greco-Roman dining practices. Furthermore, I

note that the words “Greco-Roman feast” are imprecise insofar as Greek dining practices continued to take precedence over Roman customs among some groups even after Rome’s conquest of much of the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the words “Greco-Roman feast” are germane as they signify that Greek and Roman dining customs were often coupled with one another. Indeed, many Roman feast practices appear to be innovations of preexisting Greek practices. With these ideas in mind, I begin with a description of typical Greco-Roman feast practices and the settings in which such feasts were performed.2

2.1.1 The Feast

The order of the feast that developed in the ancient Greek world consisted of the meal proper (deipnon), libation ceremony, and the symposium (symposion).3 The deipnon typically took place in the evening and consisted of appetizers and a main course. Following the deipnon, the tables were removed, the floors were swept, and servants often offered wreaths


3 Even scholars who have dealt with the different types of feasts based on terminology acknowledge the basic features common to all feasts described here. For example, Katherine M. D. Dunbabin and William J. Slater (“Roman Dining,” in The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World [ed. Michael Peachin; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 438–66) have designated different types of Roman feasts as public feasts, patronal convivia, corporate dining, and funeral feasts. Yet they note in their introduction: “Certain broad categories can be distinguished within the spectrum of Roman dining; but the distinction between them was never sharp, and there is considerable overlap. Similarly, Roman technical vocabulary is never precise, and most terms could be used flexibly or changed their significance” (439).
and perfume to the diners.\textsuperscript{4} A libation of unmixed wine was then commonly offered to the “good deity,” often thought to have been Dionysus or Zeus Savior. The cup of wine used for the libation might be poured out onto the floor or into the hearth, or all the diners could consume it.\textsuperscript{5} The libation ended with a paean or hymn sung together by the diners. The libation and paean marked the official transition to the symposium, an extended period of drinking, party games, dramatic entertainment, and/or philosophical conversation on a chosen topic.\textsuperscript{6} Diners at Greek-style feasts tended to abstain from drinking wine with dinner and men most often dined separately from women. It was customary for Greek diners to recline throughout the feast, a practice that appears to have been adopted from the Assyrian culture by the sixth century B.C.E.\textsuperscript{7}

The role of the feast’s host differed slightly according to the feast’s setting and occasion.\textsuperscript{8} Feasts might have been held within a home, for example, upon the safe return of a friend or family member from abroad, the coming of age of a young adult, a marriage, and a birthday. Typically, the host of such feasts would be the owner of the home. He would be responsible for choosing the menu, guest list, how much food and drink each diner would receive, and where people would recline. Other feasts took place within temple complexes to

\textsuperscript{4} See e.g., Xenophon, \textit{Symposium}, 2.2–7; Plutarch, \textit{Quaest. Conv.} 645d; and Athenaeus, \textit{Deipn.} 15.669f–686e.

\textsuperscript{5} Smith, \textit{From Symposium to Eucharist}, 29–30.

\textsuperscript{6} See e.g., Xenophon, \textit{Symposium}, 2.1; Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 176a; and Athenaeus, \textit{Deipn.}, 9.408f.


\textsuperscript{8} On the role of the host for different settings and occasions, see Smith, \textit{From Symposium to Eucharist}, 33, 78, 82, 88, 90.
celebrate religious feast days upon which sacrificial meat was distributed to attendees. A temple’s priest was often imagined to be the host of such feasts, or perhaps the particular god being worshipped was thought to be the host—though a priest customarily performed the god’s role. The host’s duties for sacrificial feasts were very similar to those who hosted other feasts. An official or priest presided over communal meals held by associations. Their roles, at least at many associations, appear to have been very similar to those performed by hosts offering feasts for other occasions.

Diners also chose a symposiarch, often someone other than the host, to set the rules for the symposium proper. This person, who may have been chosen to serve in this role for life as some inscriptions suggest, often determined the proportion of wine to be mixed with water, how much wine each guest received during the symposium, and what kinds of entertainment diners were to enjoy. Priests appear to have fulfilled the role of symposiarch during sacrificial feasts, whereas many Greco-Roman associations chose a symposiarch from their membership. At other times, a symposiarch was not chosen. In such cases, dining groups appear to have decided together about the conduct of the symposium.

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10 See, e.g., AGRW 1 (Athens, third century B.C.E.); AGRW 5 (Athens, 112/111 B.C.E.); AGRW 263 (Thasos, Northern islands, Aegean Islands, second century B.C.E.).

11 See, e.g., Xenophon, Symposium, 3.2; Plato, Symposium, 213c; Plutarch, Quaest. Conv., 620a-622b. See further, Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist, 33–34.

12 IPalmyra 67 (Palmyra, Syria, and Phoenicia; Greater Syria and the East, 262–268 C.E.).

13 See Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist, 33, 78, 82, 88, 90.
From approximately 200 B.C.E., Roman domination of the Greek East helped disseminate Greek dining customs, often with some variances. Unlike the Greeks before them, Roman men and women—at least from the late republic—dined while reclining with one another. Romans also often drank wine during the meal proper (cena), even though the meal was also followed by a drinking party and extended time for entertainment (convivium) structured by the magister bibendi (“master of drinking,” a role equivalent to that of the symposiarch). By the second or first century B.C.E., Romans appear to have gone further in ossifying the Greek practice of positioning guests in a way that reinforced the social status of diners by labeling dining couches in terms that reflected the status of those reclining upon them. In addition, as noted above, Roman incursions into the Greek East did not necessarily mean that Roman dining innovations displaced longstanding Greek practices. Some texts from the Greek East, for example, continued to describe women dining separately from men. In the following sections I will show that archaeological evidence also demonstrates the coexistence of Greek and Roman dining practices.


15 See Roller, Dining Posture, 96–156.

16 Dunbabin, Roman Feast: Images of Conviviality (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21; and Roller, Dining Posture, 181. On the role of magister bibendi, see Dunbabin, Roman Feast, 22. On the ostensible separation between the cena and convivium, see Roller, Dining Posture, 183–84.

17 Some texts indicate, however, that such protocol was a matter of debate. See, e.g., Pliny, Ep. 2.6 [trans. Melmoth and Hutchinson]; Plutarch, Quaest. Conv., 615d-619a; Philostratus, Vita Apollonii, 3.27.3.

2.1.2 Feasting Spaces

Dining rooms tended to be of three forms in the Greco-Roman world. The earliest datable dining room type was the Greek andron (Fig. 1).¹⁹ This room, usually square, was typically decorated with wall frescos, stucco panels, moldings, and floor mosaics. These rooms tended to be the most finely decorated rooms in private domiciles.²⁰ Larger rooms could range between 6.50 and 6.80 meters square, while smaller rooms could be between 4.50 and 4.80 meters square. Larger andrones have been excavated in buildings used for civic and religious purposes, as well as in private homes of the wealthy. Depending on their size, andrones were lined with seven, nine, or eleven klinai (reclining couches) whose dimensions ranged from 1.8 – 1.9 x 0.8 – 0.9 meters.²¹ Each wall would be lined with two to three couches, although one wall would have one fewer couch due to the open space created by the off-centered entrance. One or two people occupied each couch. Andrones could be occupied by seven to twenty-two diners, depending on how many people reclined on a single couch and the total number of couches. Each diner reclined on the left elbow while eating and drinking with the right hand from a small table placed before the couch. Servants would bring food and wine from the center of the room; the central area of the average-sized andron also provided ample space for various forms of entertainment.


Figure 1: Olynthus, Villa of Good Fortune. Room A is a Typical Nine-Couch Andron. After David M. Robinson, “The Villa of Good Fortune at Olynthos,” AJA 38 (Oct. – Dec., 1934): 502, fig. 1.

The second type of dining room is typically referred to as the broad- or long-room (Fig. 2). This room appears to have developed alongside the andron, though it seems to have been restricted to civic and religious contexts during the classical period. Broad-rooms and long-rooms, however, were being used in privately owned domiciles by the Hellenistic period. They were larger than the andron, rectangular, had entrances on either the long wall (broad-room) or short wall (long-room), and were typically located along a building’s central axis. Although it is difficult to determine the arrangement and size of couches within broad-rooms or long-rooms, couches probably lined three walls. If the entrance was centrally located in the short wall, the arrangement of the couches would have resembled the Greek letter πι (Π). If the entrance was located on the long wall, couches would have been configured to resemble a broad Greek letter Pi with shortened “legs.”
The third type of dining room developed in Italy by the late republic and made its way to the Greek East by the first century B.C.E. These rectangular dining rooms, which were entered through a doorway in the short wall, were known in Latin as *triclinia* (borrowed from the Greek) because they were initially outfitted with three (*trī*) couches (*klinai*) or stone benches arranged at right angles, again forming the Greek letter *pi* with stunted “legs.” The couches of a *triclinium*, which were initially broader than those used in an *andron*, allowed for up to three diners per couch (Fig. 3). The diners on these couches would have been in

closer proximity than in an *andron* because the broader *klinai* would have decreased the space in the middle of the room. As communal feasts became a primary mode of demonstrating social prestige during the imperial period, *triclinia* became larger as well (Fig. 4). The bigger rooms allowed for longer or more couches, now set in a regular *pi* shape, which in turn allowed for more guests to recline at their own tables. Space for eleven to thirteen couches was most typical, but some excavations have revealed enough room for as many as seventeen. In addition, space was left between couches and walls so that servants could access diners from behind as well as from the middle of the room, where the allotted space for performances by a variety of entertainers was also increased. More room for performers was created near the entrance as well.

Figure 3: An Early *Triclinium* (1000 Bible Images)
The best archaeological evidence for Greek and Roman dining rooms throughout much of the Mediterranean comes from private homes of the wealthy, which often possessed more than one of the types of rooms described above, but dining rooms are also found in or near temple complexes, within buildings of associations, and cemeteries throughout the period. Several andrones or triclinia built next to one another have also been found within a single temple complex or association building. Ancient sources also describe the same types of dining structures, especially broad- or long-rooms and triclinia, as temporarily constructed

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outdoors to fulfill the needs of many groups that gathered to celebrate public religious feasts.\textsuperscript{24} Other texts and some archaeological evidence confirm that diners simply situated mats in the standard form of an \textit{andron} or \textit{triclinium} in order to dine comfortably outdoors.\textsuperscript{25} The presence of dining facilities in public, private, and ritual contexts accessible to people of different socio-economic statuses and sex supports the notion that the performance of Greco-Roman feast was not the sole privilege of wealthy males.\textsuperscript{26} John M. Wilkins has argued that even poorer classes had opportunities to participate in local religious festivals or life-cycle events such as weddings where the “wine might be less good, the furniture less expensive, the entertainment less subject to international competitive pressures. But the institution was the same.”\textsuperscript{27}

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\textsuperscript{24} See the description in Athenaeus, \textit{Deipn.} 5.194c–195f (quoting Polybius) of the lavish feast offered by Antiochus IV in his garden at Daphne. Athenaeus reports that the king had to provide some 1000 \textit{triclinia} for all the attendees; Plutarch, \textit{Caes.} 55.2, reports that Julius Caesar set up 22,000 \textit{triclinia} in his private gardens as well as in public spaces in Rome during his triumph in 46 B.C.E.


\textsuperscript{27} Wilkins and Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient World,} 178.
2.2 The Social Function of Greco-Roman Feasts: Interplay between Cohesion and Hierarchy

Textual and archaeological sources allow us to reconstruct not only the basic form and setting of Greco-Roman feasts, but also their typical social function. On the one hand, dining groups made use of several practices associated with the Greco-Roman feast to establish community and camaraderie. On the other hand, the same groups might also have utilized other dining practices to acknowledge social hierarchies. As I shall discuss further below, some groups appear to have held feasts championing one set of values over the other. Most of the data indicate a dynamic interplay between practices that fostered communality and ones that maintained social hierarchies.

2.2.1 Building Communality

Several practices associated with the typical Greco-Roman feast allowed dining communities to establish a sense of community. The most basic embodiment of community would consist of simply partaking of the same food and wine together. A similar sense of community appears to have been established when the libation cup was passed to each dining member and when the libation ceremony’s accompanying paean was sung in unison. Other texts mention that each diner was expected to contribute equally to songs during the

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29 See, e.g., Plutarch, Quaest. Conv. 642f-644f; 1 Cor 10:17; 11:27–28; and Athenaeus, Deipn. 11.504a.

symposium that followed the libation ceremony. Still others emphasize the importance of holding conversations during the symposium such that all might contribute equally to the issues under discussion. The design of the andron and the early form of the triclinium also appear to have been intended to foster bonds and a sense of community among dining members. The layout of both types of rooms would have reinforced a feeling of close bonds by creating an equivalent space among diners and a concentric space for their gaze.

2.2.2 Reification of Hierarchies

At many of these same feasts, individuals and communities utilized multiple dining practices to maintain extant social hierarchies. Many members of the elite, for example, emphasized their own social status by paying special attention to the decorations of their dining rooms, impressing guests with the presentation of dining accoutrements, and providing the finest foods and most impressive entertainment available. Variations in the


32 See references in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 50–54.

33 See Dunbabin, “*Ut Graeco more biberetur*,” 83; and Klinghardt, “A Typology,” 29.

social standing of other guests might be distinguished by differences in the amounts and quality of food provided to them. Individuals’ social statuses were also signified through bodily postures. Women’s lower social status was embodied by the fact that, unless they were courtesans, they did not typically recline with men at Greek-style feasts. Women appear to have had more opportunities to recline with men at Roman-style feasts, which may reflect developments in the perception of women’s social status in the Roman world. Yet at both Greek and Roman-style feasts, adolescent males and females of all social classes sat or reclined while slaves stood.

The floor plans of the andron and early form of the triclinium appear to have functioned to create a sense of communal bonds; even so, social hierarchies of guests who


were afforded opportunities to recline might have been signified by their locations on the couches or benches within these rooms. Plato, for example, informs us that the guest of honor reclined at the top place on the first couch to the left of the door, while the host reclined at the bottom of the last couch to the right of the door (Symposium, 175c; 177d). The locations of the host and guests of honor within the andron signified their social relationship to the other male guests. Roman dining protocol also dictated that the host, guests of honor, and guests of higher social standing be distinguished from other diners through their locations on the klinai. These members of the dining community would recline at or near the back wall opposite the room’s entrance. Perhaps more indicative is the fact that the position in which a diner reclined on a single couch was referred to in terms that evoked his or her social status. A guest reclining in the middle of a couch was thought to be reclining above (supra) the socially inferior dining companion reclining to his or her right (that is, in view of the diner’s back), but below (infra) the social superior reclining to his or her left (that is, in full view of the diner).

The layout of long-rooms and the later form of triclinia further emphasized social distinctions between members of a single dining community. The host, the guests of honor, and those of higher social status would have reclined at or near the center couches on the short wall opposite the entrance of the broad-room or the later, elongated, and larger form of

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40 For the material and social dimensions of the couches, see Wallace-Hadrill, Rome’s Cultural Revolution, 421–35.

41 Katherine Dunbabin remarks that the elongated design of long-rooms and larger triclinia “establishes the whole party as more of a spectacle of social order to be admired from outside, less of a coherent group, than the traditional Greek system, or indeed the Roman one of the Republic” (“Ut Graeco more biberetur,” 95). Whereas these comments aptly describe the sense of dining created by the architectural form of the long-room and the later form of the triclinium, this “coherent group” composed of the Greek andron and the early form of the triclinium could be illusory.
the *triclinium*. Those positioned at the back wall would have been located at some distance from those reclining on couches closest to the entrance; such distances would have reinforced indications of their social statuses according to their locations on the reclining couches as well as by their physical separation from the rest of the dining members.42

Data strongly suggest routine coexistence between dining practices that were meant to solidify communality and those that were intended to reify social hierarchies. As previously mentioned, Plato describes the host and guest of honor as reclining in positions indicative of their social statuses (*Symposium*, 175c; 177d), but he also portrays all of the guests as partaking equally in the philosophical conversations that were typically thought to actuate social equality.43 Similarly, Plutarch argues that where one reclined was less important than making sure that all guests received the same amount of food and drink and were given opportunities to participate in the conversations held at the symposium proper. According to Plutarch, the latter two practices established friendships and equality in a way that compensated for some dining guests’ need to display their higher social status (*Quaest. Conv.* 642f-644d).

The display of wealth and social prestige through hosting elaborate feasts did not necessarily mean that a sense of community among those gathered together was completely absent. Xenophon, for example, reports that although the feast hosted by Callias and attended by Socrates and his companions was quite lavish, all enjoyed the same feast and offered a libation together (*Symposium*, 1.24–2.1). In addition, all the guests are portrayed as


participating equitably in orderly conversations. Even feasts held in large broad- or long-rooms and the later form of the *triclinium*—typically those hosted by Greek and Roman aristocrats—could provide opportunities to establish a sense of equality and communality. Many sources indicate that a sense of equality could be maintained as long each member was treated in ways that were clearly proportionate to others of the same social status.\(^44\) At the most basic level, as Dennis E. Smith argues, a sense of bonding could have “simply derived from the fact that the diners shared the event together.”\(^45\)

**2.2.3 Associational Feasts**

The notion that the typical Greco-Roman feast concomitantly fostered feelings of communality and recognition of social distinctions across a wide spectrum of people throughout the Mediterranean is perhaps best exemplified by the evidence of meals held within associations. As we understand them, Greco-Roman associations were semipublic, pseudo-political groups comprised often of men and sometimes women of different social statuses; by the Hellenistic period they had become common in Mediterranean cities and towns.\(^46\) Associations were formed from extant social units: households, neighborhood

\[^44\] See discussion and references in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 11–12.

\[^45\] Ibid., 9–10.

affiliations, professional networks, ethnic and geographic connections, and relationships to a cult or temple. Their various functions were not mutually exclusive (e.g., worship of one or more deities, furthering a particular guild’s economic prospects, enhancing the collective’s or an individual’s social standing, allowing members to simply have a good time). In order to accomplish these various goals, associations adopted similar sets of basic rules and organizational patterns that were generally derived from preexisting civic institutions. These sets of rules and structuring mechanisms transcended temporal and geographic boundaries.

Whatever their official raison d’être, associations commonly dined communally in typical Greco-Roman fashion. Some associations even defined themselves and their officials with references to meal practices alone. For example, inscriptions refer to “college of messmates” (collegium comestorum), “drinking partners” (sodales ex symposia), “table

2006), 49–210. For primary evidence of women’s presence and role within associations, see Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg, Associations in the Greco-Roman World, s.v. “women”.

47 See John Kloppenborg, “Collegia and Thiasoi,” in Voluntary Associations, 16–30; and Harland, Associations, , passim.

48 For associations’ roles in economic prospects and enhanced social standing, see esp. Tran, Les membres des associations romaines, 48; 97; 459; Koenrad Verboven, “The Associative Order: Status and Ethos Among Roman Businessmen in Late Republic and Early Empire,” Athenaeum 95 (2007): 861–93; and Harland, Dynamics of Identity, 143-81.


50 See Donahue, The Roman Community at Table, 126; Dunbabin, The Roman Feast, 99; Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist, 90, 96; F. M. Ausbüttel, Untersuchungen zu den Vereinen im Westen des römischen Reiches (Kallmünz: M. Lassleben, 1982), 55; and Ascough, “Social and Political Characteristics of Greco-Roman Association Meals,” 82–100.
companions who customarily share feasts together” (*convictores qui una epula vesci solent*), and “diners” (*comestores*). Association officials are often described as “host” (*ἐστιάτορ/προζένος*), “head of the couches” (*κλίναρχος*), “chief presider at the table” (*πρότοκλίναρχος*) “head of the feast” (*ἀρχιερανιστὲ*), and “symposiarch” (*συμποσίαρχος*). Other associations referred to some of their members in terms commonly linked with feasts, such as “attendants/servants” (*διάκονος*) and “choral singers” (*ὑμνῳδοί*).

Archaeological evidence of buildings belonging to associations also demonstrates the importance of communal dining for association members. At Ostia, for example, four rooms with masonry *triclinia* were constructed in a large building (ca. second–fourth century C.E.) that served as the headquarters of a merchants’ association. The size of the rooms suggests that as many as fifty members ate in the same building at the same time. Other prominent examples of associational buildings outfitted with *triclinia* include the association of traders and financial dealers at Pompeii (mid-first century C.E.) and the Dionysiac *Bukoloi* (“cowherds”) at Pergamon (second–fourth century C.E.). The former building included five separate rooms with *triclinia*, which would have allowed for more than one hundred diners. The latter building had several *triclinia* along its walls for approximately seventy participants. Other association buildings had multipurpose rooms that could be converted into

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52 *AGRW* B14.

53 For images and description the association at Pompeii, see *AGRW* B23; for Pergamon, see *AGRW* B6; see further, *AGRW* B1–B28.
dining spaces, while some associations appear to have met in the homes of wealthy members who had dining rooms.\textsuperscript{54}

Based on the evidence for the centrality of communal meals within associations, several scholars have argued that the feast served as a major social structuring mechanism for these groups. Citing the work of sociologist Claude Grignon, John F. Donahue has stated that the performance of feasts of associations is best described as “segregative commensality.”\textsuperscript{55} On the one hand, such meals established and maintained boundaries between association members who shared meals with one another and non-members who did not participate.\textsuperscript{56} On the other hand, each meal also performed an internal social function that reinforced social boundaries between association members.\textsuperscript{57} Donahue concludes that on both an external and internal level, segregative commensality was “a way for a group to gain self-identity, to keep tabs on its members, and even to confirm internal divisions and hierarchies.”\textsuperscript{58}

The ever-growing number of association inscriptions from the Greco-Roman world evinces the segregative commensality described by Donahue. For example, the dedicatory inscriptions from an association of farmers in Lower Egypt (67/64 B.C.E.) and the bylaws of an association in Lanuvium, Italy (136 C.E.) state that their respective feasts were for

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\textsuperscript{54} Dunbabin, \textit{The Roman Feast}, 94.


\textsuperscript{56} Donahue, “Toward a Typology,” 105–6.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 105.
members only.\textsuperscript{59} An inscription for the religious association of Aesclepius and Hygia on the Campus Martius (153 C.E.), which had a building with rooms for feasts, states that membership was limited to sixty dues-paying members.\textsuperscript{60} Inscriptions of many other associations show that feasts were strictly regulated to ensure that meals were shared only among members.\textsuperscript{61} These inscriptions show that associations carefully demarcated those who could participate in the association’s feasts from those who could not. The feasts thus served to create and maintain social boundaries in ways that reinforced a sense of communality within the group as a whole.

The same inscriptions also demonstrate that these meals served as forums whose purpose was to reinforce status differentials among association members.\textsuperscript{62} The inscription of the association of farmers in Egypt, for example, states that a member by the name of Paris had given the association land to build a meeting place and feast hall. In return, the association decided that Paris was to be “welcomed and honored with two portraits which will be placed in the gymnasium and in the clubroom, and that these be crowned on the eponymous days when we get together to sacrifice in the name of the kings. He shall also be offered the first couch (κλισίαν πρώτην) for life.”\textsuperscript{63} In addition, the inscription recorded on the association building in Lanuvium denotes internal stratification through its statement that a member who serves as president “honestly shall receive a share and a half of everything at

\textsuperscript{59} AGRW 287 (Lower Egypt, 67/64 B.C.E); AGRW 310 (Lanuvium, Italy, 136 C.E.); AGRW 322 Campus Martius, Rome, 153 C.E.); AGRW 8; AGRW 22; AGRW 28; AGRW 295
\textsuperscript{60} CIL VI 10234.
\textsuperscript{61} See IG II\textsuperscript{2} 1369. See further, Ascough, “Social and Political Characteristics,” 86–87.
\textsuperscript{62} See further, Tran, Les membres des associations romaines, 49–210.
\textsuperscript{63} AGRW 287, line 28.
the feast as a mark of this honor, so that other presidents will also hope for the same by discharging their duties properly.”\textsuperscript{64} The amount of food a president received at this association’s feasts demonstrated his status—at least for a time. The bylaws of the religious association of Aesclepius and Hygia show that status was also marked by how much sportula was received at their feasts: every time the members met, the president (\textit{quinquennalis}) who served for life, the father (\textit{pater}) and mother (\textit{mater}) of the association (\textit{collegium}), dues-exempt members (\textit{immunes}), supervisors (\textit{curatores}), and the general membership (\textit{populus}) would receive money and wine during the feast. The amount that each member received differed according to rank, however, in descending order from the president to the general membership.\textsuperscript{65} The feast practices described in inscriptions from Egypt, Lanuvium, and Campus Martius appear to have been common among associations throughout the Greco-Roman world.\textsuperscript{66}

This evidence for associational dining practices demonstrates the ubiquity of the basic functions of the Greco-Roman feast. On the one hand, many associational dining practices fostered a sense of community by holding communal meals that were limited to members. Associational meals thus served to distinguish association members from non-members, but a sense of communality would have been established as all members came to identify themselves with one social group over another. On the other hand, many associational feasts appear to have solidified social hierarchies through such practices as

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{AGRW} 322.
\textsuperscript{66} See references and discussion in Ascough, “Social and Political Characteristics.”
assigning different reclining locations and allotting members different amounts of food and drink.

2.2.3.1 Discussion

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin and William J. Slater remark that the social contradictions associated with the Greco-Roman feast signify the underlying tension between the ideology of equality and the actual practices that confirmed hierarchies. As shown above, however, one set of values did not always dominate over another. Rather, value sets appear to have coexisted with one another often, albeit, in a state of tension. Hal Taussig’s recent work on the competing sets of values reflected in Greco-Roman feast practices helps to illuminate the social functions of the typical Greco-Roman feast. Taussig employs the work of anthropologists to help explain how bonds, boundaries, stratifications, obligations, and equality could all simultaneously be expressed through the performance of the Greco-Roman feast. He argues that the ritual performance of feasts reflects the attempts by diners to process “relatively intractable issues […] in a relatively safe and constructed environment.” Citing Catherine Bell and Jonathan Z. Smith, Taussig argues:

Rather than try to come up with a common and final solution to the differences, the multivalent symbols of ritual keep allowing for indirect recognition of those differences. This allows each different sub-group to be recognized and for the group as a whole to work regularly on non-final, adaptive and constantly revised compromises.

While the social status of some diners could be recognized based on where they reclined relative to other diners in the room, the dining group as a whole could have decided to allot

68 Taussig, In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation & Early Christian Identity (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 66.
69 Ibid., 61.
the same amount of food to all diners as a “non-final, adaptive” compromise that indicated all members were equal to some degree. He argues that, in the end, the performance of any Greco-Roman meal offered groups the opportunity to establish, maintain, and negotiate a set of practices that were reflective of their larger cultural and socio-religious values.70

2.3 Conclusion

The detailed description of common Greco-Roman feasting practices and the venues in which they were conducted provided in this chapter shall help elucidate some of the archaeological and textual evidence of Jewish feasts presented in the remaining chapters. The typology of the Greco-Roman feast, the settings in which they were conducted, and the description of its basic social functions has been gleaned from a variety of sources throughout the ancient Mediterranean. This evidence demonstrates that the general features of the Greco-Roman feast influenced the basic form and functions of the dining practices of many different cultures in a number regions. Matthias Klinghardt argues that widespread use of Greco-Roman feasting practices provided the “grammar for social understanding. Just as the abstraction of a literary genre carries an understanding of its own, so does the ‘typical’ meal: inherent to it is a particular semantics. In different meal ‘texts,’ this basic semantics may be spelled out differently but not arbitrarily.”71 In other words, the Greco-Roman feast was defined by specific practices (e.g., reclining and the tripartite division of the feast), which were laden with meaning. In the following chapters, we will see that some Jews living during the third century B.C.E. until the third century C.E. were indeed familiar with the “grammar”

70 Ibid., esp. 68–85 and 145–71.
and “semantics” of the Greco-Roman feast. We will also see that some appear to have consciously rejected particular aspects of the Greco-Roman feast, combined some of its features while maintaining traditional Jewish feasting customs, or infused the *basic* dining rubric with specific Jewish practices. In other cases, the evidence is too limited to confidently argue to what extent they were familiar with Greco-Roman dining customs at all. Nevertheless, even in these cases, one may interpret the available evidence to begin to illuminate the dynamic social functions of Jewish feasts.
3. Feasts and the Social Order in the Jewish Domestic Sphere (ca. Third Century B.C.E.–70 C.E.)

Greeks and Romans did not teach Jews how to conduct domestic feasts! The Hebrew Bible records longstanding feasting traditions convened by the ancestors of the Israelites and Israelites themselves during the First Temple period. These customs were imbued with the power to enact and reify complex social relationships in similar ways as the performance of feasts throughout the ancient Near East. Many of the biblical stories recount feasts that functioned to foster peace between Israelites’ ancestors and neighboring Canaanites,¹ while others are depicted as events intended to promote harmony between Israelite factions.² The Hebrew Bible also provides several descriptions of feasting practices that appear to have been integral to the micro-politics of Israelite households and the royal court.³ A diner’s physical location of the host or the amount or quality of food diners received, for example, appear to reflect ways that some Israelites differentiated statuses.⁴ In addition, the display of

¹ In Gen 26:26-31, e.g., Isaac is reported as hosting a feast to ratify a peace treaty with Abimelech.

² 2 Sam 3:20, e.g., portrays David as hosting feasts for Abner, Saul’s former commander, who subsequently allies himself to David.

³ See further Nathan MacDonald, Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 154-60. Macdonald argues that his review of texts “is a minimal account that makes no claims that the biblical material stems from the period that the biblical narrative describes” (153). He suggests that the several biblical accounts of feasting events may very well reflect commonly held ideas of dining etiquette throughout Israelite society before the Second Temple period.

⁴ Gen 43:33 states that Joseph’s brothers were seated by him according to their order of birth. 1 Sam 9:23–24 states that Saul receives from Samuel the choicest meat upon his coronation.
wealth, particularly at the feasts of Israelite kings and elites distinguished hosts from their guests as well as from those who stood outside their social groups.⁵

Depictions of Jewish domestic feasts in the Hebrew Bible dating to the early Second Temple period are less common and tend to provide less detail. Nevertheless, some texts are intriguing. Jacob L. Wright has argued Nehemiah 5:17–18 shows that the new Jewish governor provided lavish feasts on an ongoing basis for the Judean elites as a way to bring together the local competing factions as he attempted to rebuild the Temple’s walls.⁶ Wright states that “Nehemiah’s table would have continued to feed growing alliance networks between groups and regions within Judah itself as well as with its neighbors.”⁷ We may say more concerning Nehemiah’s commensal politics, however. Anthropologists argue that the provision of food and drink is an especially effective mode of gift-giving that stimulates within the recipients of such gifts an heightened sense of reciprocity. Michael Dietler, for example, argues that providing food and drink to guests is a particular powerful form of gift-giving because the gift is “destroyed by ingesting it into the body. This is the literal ‘embodiment’ or ‘incorporation’ of the gift and the social debt that it engenders.”⁸

⁵ See, e.g., 1 Kings 10:4–5 and Amos 6:4–7.


⁷ Wright, “Commensal Politics in Ancient Western Asia,” 351.
Nehemiah’s guests would have become indebted to him, therefore, generating asymmetrical power relationships.

These general characteristics and the powerful role of feasting within the domestic sphere must have continued to hold true through the beginning of the Second Temple period. We lack reliable historical evidence for Jewish domestic feasts in the Levant before the third century B.C.E., however. Significantly, just prior to this time, Alexander defeated the Persian Empire and took control Judea. We cannot assume there was drastic change in the form and functions of Jewish feasting practices between the sixth century B.C.E. and the third century B.C.E. Changes do appear, however, by the third century B.C.E. The evidence seems to suggest that these changes first occurred in Jerusalem, developed over the next couple of centuries in Judea, and then were adopted by some Jews living in Galilee and Gaulanitis by the first century C.E. As we will see, these changes seem to have occurred in tandem with alterations in socio-economic and political structures within each region. In this chapter I shall therefore proceed chronologically as well as geographically, examining the literary and archaeological evidence for the form and social functions of domestic feasts beginning in Judea from the third century B.C.E. until 70 C.E. I will then present the textual and archaeological evidence for some Jewish domestic feasting practices in the regions of Galilee and Gaulanitis during the first century C.E. until 70 C.E.⁹

⁹ As we shall see, however, the currently available evidence is limited to elite or the well-to-do. Identifying feasts in the archaeological record is difficult because archaeological evidence from most
3.1 Judea

Alexander’s defeat of the Persian forces in 332 B.C.E. consolidated Greek control over the Levant. Following his death in 323 B.C.E., Alexander’s empire was divided among his Greek generals, with Ptolemy and Seleucid in dispute over Judea. Although the Ptolemies maintained control over the Levant, including Judea, for much of the third century B.C.E., no fewer than a half-dozen separate military campaigns occurred in this period, and the advantage began to slowly shift in favor of the Seleucids. The aggressive actions of Antiochus III (r. 222–187 B.C.E) resulted in the Seleucid’s decisive control of the area by end of the third century B.C.E. Jews, under the leadership of the High Priest Simon, played an active role in securing the favor of Antiochus III. The benefits the Jews received from Antiochus III included aid for their efforts to rebuild the dilapidated portions of the Temple, homes throughout antiquity demonstrates that rooms were multifunctional. Household activities such as weaving, cooking, eating, and even sleeping do not appear to have had fixed locations within the majority of privately owned residences. This observation has been documented at sites such as Olynthus and Pompeii, where catastrophes stopped daily activities in their tracks. See Nicholas Cahill, Household and City Organization at Olynthus (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 84–147; and J. Berry, “Household Artifacts: Towards a Re-Interpretation of Roman Domestic Space,” in Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond (ed. R. Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill; Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997), 183–95. For similar evidence of multifunctionality of domestic spaces from Palestine, see Miriam Peskowitz, “Family/ies in Antiquity: Evidence from Tannaitic Literature and Roman Galilean Architecture,” in The Jewish Family in Antiquity (ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen; Atlanta: Scholars Press , 1993), 9–38; Cynthia M. Baker, Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), passim; and Eric M. Meyers, “The Problems of Gendered Space in Syro-Palestinian Domestic Architecture: The Case of Roman-Period Galilee,” in From Antioch to Alexandria: Recent Studies in Domestic Architecture (ed. Katharina Galor, Tomasz Waliszewski, and Frédéric Alpi; Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, 2007), 107–24.

10 For a detailed overview of this period and its implications for Judea and Jerusalem in particular, see esp. Anatha Portier-Young, Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 48–129.
provisions to maintain its daily offerings, reduction or elimination of some taxes, and recognition of the right to live according to their ancestral laws (Josephus, *Ant.* 12:138–144). These actions appear to have been intended to establish an era of peaceful relations between Seleucid overlords and their Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, which seems to have been sustained during the remainder of Antiochus III’s reign and the rule of his son Seleucus IV (r. 187–175 B.C.E.).

Yet a closer examination of the privileges offered by Antiochus III to the Jews of Judea demonstrates that they would have mostly benefited the inhabitants of Jerusalem and its elite. To be sure, the Judean populace would have welcomed Antiochus’ official affirmation that Jews had the right to govern themselves according to their ancestral customs and his decree that Jewish captives of the Ptolemies were freed and returned to their homes (*Ant.* 142, 144). They would have likely also been pleased with the Seleucid king’s one time donation for the Temple’s sacrificial offerings and monetary help for the reconstruction of portions of the Temple. Yet the population living outside of Jerusalem received no direct monetary assistance, but had to continue to pay taxes. The continued payment of taxes would have been considerably difficult for the people of Judea, since, according to Josephus, much of their land was decimated during the battle between Antiochus and the Ptolemies (*Ant.* 12:139-140). In contrast, the community leaders and cultic functionaries—including

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12 Josephus’ description of the war’s effects on the land of Judea is supported by archaeological evidence from Antiochus’ other campaigns in Coele-Syria. See esp. Susan M. Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (Berkeley:
members of the *gerousia* (a council of elders), the priests, the temple scribes, and the temple singers–received lifelong tax exemptions (*Ant.* 142), while the rest of the population living within Jerusalem obtained a three-year long reprieve (*Ant.* 143).

Furthermore, before, during, and after the war Fifth Syrian War, Judeans were divided in their allegiances between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. These divisions likely existed both among the general populace and among the community leaders. 13 Commenting about the leadership of Jerusalem in particular, Anathea E. Portier-Young writes:

> After the war, those leaders who had allied themselves with the Seleucids were confirmed in positions of authority and privilege within the Jerusalem community. Leaders who supported the Ptolemies were disenfranchised. They might now choose to leave, accept a position of lower status within the community, fight to regain influence, or work to integrate into the current pro-Seleucid leading class. 14

By the third century B.C.E., therefore, some leading members of the Jewish people living in Jerusalem had become more economically privileged than others as well as divided according to their political allegiances. The performance of domestic feasts within this milieu would have been an important means by which some Jews defined their place within Jerusalem’s highly stratified, if not competitive, society.

University of California Press, 1993), 58, 201-02. Those in the countryside would have also had been adversely affected by being required to supply the warring states. See Angelos Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 121-29, 140-41.


3.1.1 The Feasts of Jerusalem’s Elites

The earliest archaeological evidence for the presence of Greek dining culture in many parts of Palestine is dated to the sixth century B.C.E. The material record of this period includes finely crafted Greek tableware imported from Rhodes, Cyprus, and Athens. Among the earliest Athenian ware discovered are wine-storage vessels, elaborate drinking vessels, and kraters for mixing wine. A beautifully made drinking or pouring goblet (rhyton) has been discovered among hundreds of Greek Attic pottery sherds as far inland as Sepphoris in Galilee. We cannot link these archaeological remains with Jewish inhabitants, however.\footnote{See Ephraim Stern, \textit{Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period}, 538-332 B.C. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982), 232; Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, “The Persian Period at Sepphoris,” \textit{Eretz Israel} 29 (2009): 136–43; and Eric M. Meyers and Mark A. Chancey, \textit{Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 18–28.}

Significantly, it is not until the end of the third century B.C.E. that we may associate similar imported dining ware and wine with Jews. Over one thousand stamped jar handles, dating from the end of the third century B.C.E. through the middle of the second century B.C.E., show that some of Jerusalem’s residents began to consume wine produced from vineyards in Rhodes, Cos, Cnidos, and Chios.\footnote{Donald T. Ariel, \textit{Excavations at the City of David 1978 –1985 Directed by Yigal Shiloh}, Vol. 2: \textit{Imported Stamped Amphora Handles, Coins, Worked Bone and Ivory, and Glass} (Qedem 30; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1990), 15-25.} They did so despite the fact that vintners in Judea and its surrounding regions had produced high quality wine for interregional and intraregional consumption for millennia.\footnote{See Rafael Frankel, \textit{Wine and Oil Production in Antiquity in Israel and Other Mediterranean Countries} (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 39; and Avraham Faust, “Household Economies in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah,” in \textit{Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond} (ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling, and Laura B. Mazow; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 255–49.} Additionally, despite ready access to locally made ceramics,
some Jews chose to import nicely decorated plates, bowls, and drinking vessels from Athens, Antioch, Alexandria, and other manufacturers in the eastern Mediterranean. This material evidence strongly suggests that at least some Jews living in Jerusalem used expensive drink and dining implements at feasts as indexical markers of their social status. Since wine was consumed and dining vessels were used on a daily basis throughout the Mediterranean, status came to be marked not simply by the consumption of wine or the use of vessels, but by the kinds of wine consumed and vessels used. Using imported wine from the Aegean Islands and dining vessels as far away as Athens, while hosting domestic feasts, would have allowed some Jews in Jerusalem to concomitantly portray a sense of their wealth and social stature to their guests.

Demonstrating one’s social stature to guests through drink and dining accoutrements does not necessarily equate to social competition between those dining together. Instead, doing so might allow those hosting feasts to solidify social cohesion between a particular

74. For the continued significance of wine production in Hellenistic and Roman Palestine, see Uzi Leibner, Uzi Leibner, *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Galilee: An Archaeological Survey of the Eastern Galilee* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 328, 335, 374-375, 382 n. 92.


dining community based on class and symbolized through shared tastes.\textsuperscript{20} At the same time, the archaeological remains described above suggest that some Jews hosted others to reify asymmetrical relationships between each other. Anthropologists have demonstrated that by hosting lavish feasts, indicated here by the imported wine and beautifully decorated ware, typically requires that the guests repay their hosts in kind.\textsuperscript{21} Guests with the means to do so, however, often try to outdo their former hosts with a feast of their own to symbolically renegotiate social relationships, typically leading individuals to engage in a competition of feasts to obtain social advantages over others.\textsuperscript{22} These feasting competitions have been shown to have become so intense in some societies as to drive some into poverty.\textsuperscript{23} The non-canonical book of Sirach, originally composed by the Jerusalem scribe Ben Sira sometime between 200-180 B.C.E. and translated into Greek by his grandson in 116 B.C.E., seems to


\textsuperscript{21} See supra n. 8.


provide evidence that some Jews living in Jerusalem used feasts in this way.\textsuperscript{24} Ben Sira warns his readers: “Do not revel in great luxury, or you may become impoverished by its expense. Do not become a beggar by feasting with borrowed money when you have nothing in your purse” (Sirach 18:32-33).\textsuperscript{25} The archaeological evidence from the third century B.C.E. through the middle of the second century B.C.E., combined with comments made by Ben Sira, suggests that at least some of Jerusalem elites used feasts as a way to sustain or establish their own social status among members within their own circles.

Evidence for competitive feasting practices employed by Jerusalem’s elite is further explicated in Sirach, though through another performative aspect of domestic feasts: namely, proper dining decorum. Benjamin G. Wright III remarks that Sirach was originally written to help scribes and priests “navigate treacherous social waters…to accrue and maintain social honor and status” within the upper echelons of Jewish society in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{26} To direct his fellow scribes and priests through the vicissitudes of daily life among Jerusalem’s elite, Ben Sira offered instructions on the central tenets of Torah in addition to ethical teachings concerning everyday conduct. His latter teachings include his ideas about how one should act at symposia (consistently translated as συμπόσιον οἶνον). These instructions demonstrate how


\textsuperscript{25} I have used the the Greek translation of Sirach from the Septuagint throughout this manuscript because it is a complete text and it is a translation of an older form of the Hebrew than any single extant manuscript. See further, Benjamin G. Wright III, \textit{No Small Difference: Sirach's Relationship to its Hebrew Parent} (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
important domestic feasting etiquette was for establishing, maintaining, and perhaps contesting the social order among Jerusalem’s elite.

Although feasts held in Jerusalem may have functioned to establish a sense of communality, a close examination of Ben Sira’s instructions gives the impression that the symposia convened by Jerusalem’s elite were primarily intended for maintaining social hierarchies. Ben Sira states that a host of a feast should not locate his enemy (ἐξορός) to his right at a feast (12:12). In the Greek world, the host would always take the first position with his honored guest located to his right.²⁷ Ben Sira’s instruction in this case is intended to inform his readers how they can maintain their higher social standing vis-à-vis an adversary at a feast. Elsewhere in his text, Ben Sira teaches that a host should take care of the needs of his guests first before reclining with them (32:1). On the one hand, taking care of the guests would seem to have created a sense of communality at the feast. On the other hand, Ben Sira continues by stating that a host is to do this in order to ensure good order so that he will “receive a crown (στεφάνον) for excellent leadership” (32:2). Once again, establishing one’s social standing appears to be Ben Sira’s overriding concern. Finally, he states that older men may speak freely and with “accurate knowledge,” but they are advised to speak at the proper

²⁷ See, e.g., Plato, Symposium, 175c; 177d; See further, Dennis E. Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist: The Feast in the Early Christian World (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 135–36. Roman dining protocol also dictated that the host, guests of honor, and guests of higher social standing be distinguished from other diners through their location on the κλίνα. See further, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Rome’s Cultural Revolution (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 421–35.
time and on a proper subject. A young man is only to speak if asked, and even then is to speak as little as possible (32:3–9). Earlier in his text, we learn why Ben Sira is concerned with whom, when, and how one is to speak. He warns his readers that some feasting participants will test the wisdom of others and even spread rumors after the feast is over (13:11–12). For Ben Sira, engaging properly in table talk was even necessary to guard against potential threats to one’s credibility.

The work of Ben Sira shows how a guest’s social standing was constantly under threat during the performance of symposia in Jerusalem. Yet according to Ben Sira, if his readers followed his instructions, they could establish and maintain their social status and honor among Jerusalem’s elite. The dining lessons recorded in Sirach supplement the image derived from the archaeological evidence of some Jews’ penchant for fine wine and ostentatious dining ware described above: Jewish domestic feasts convened in Jerusalem during the third and second century B.C.E. were central arenas for enacting and maintaining one’s social status. Hosting lavish feasts would have been particularly important for those who attempted to rise among the ranks of Jerusalem’s elite under the new political order established by Antiochus IV (175–c.163 B.C.E.). The rivalry between the high priests Jason (175-172 B.C.E.) and Menelaus (172-167 B.C.E) and their supporters to obtain their offices from Antiochus IV through bribery speaks to an atmosphere well suited for competitive feasting.

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3.1.2 The Feasts of the Hasmoneans

The instability in Jerusalem caused by the internecine warfare between Jason and Menelaus gave Antiochus the excuse he needed to make a grand statement of his imperial authority. Antiochus embarked on a campaign of terror in Jerusalem and Judea, abducting and murdering members of the Jewish population, conducting home invasions, and plundering the Temple. Perhaps the most spectacular display of imperial order over the Jewish population followed. Antiochus decreed that Jews who continued to observe their religious practices would do so upon the pain of death (1 Macc 1:57). Coupled with this edict was Antiochus’ introduction of new compulsory religious rites. The new rites were established in dramatic fashion: Antiochus dedicated the Temple to Zeus of Olympia in 167 B.C.E. on the twenty-fifth of Chislev—the king’s birthday (1 Macc 1:59; 2 Macc 6:2, 7). Significantly, Jews were forced to consume the sacrifices during the initial dedication of the Temple to Zeus as well as those sacrifices offered on the twenty-fifth day of each subsequent month intended to celebrate the birth of Antiochus (2 Macc 6:7). While some Jews complied with the edicts (e.g., 1 Macc 1:43, 46, 48), others decided to fight under the leadership of the Hasmonean Mattathias (2:1–23).

Though scholars agree that Antiochus IV’s religious persecution of the Jews and the profanation of the Temple was the immediate cause of the Hasmonean revolt, they have debated what Mattathias and his sons had hoped to accomplish once the revolt began. Some have suggested that Judah in particular, who lead the rebellion after his father’s death,

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quickly came to believe that he could establish a new Jewish state. Others have argued that his goals were more limited. Whatever his intentions were, he was killed in battle defending Jerusalem one year after he and his brothers rededicated the Temple without making any major territorial gains. Judah’s successors, however, appear to have been fully committed to obtaining complete political and religious freedom for the inhabitants of Judea under Hasmonean leadership alone. The Hasmoneans slowly accomplished their goals despite nearly constant foreign opposition and occasional resistance from Jews within their realm dissatisfied with their rule. The current section suggests that the Hasmoneans, beginning with Judah’s brother Jonathan, used domestic feasts as a way to bolster impressions of their prominence within their broader socio-political landscape in addition to maintaining support from leading members of their own subjects.

The evidence for how the Hasmoneans employed domestic feasts comes from 1 Maccabees and material remains from their palaces at Jericho. 1 Maccabees recounts the events preceding the Hasmonean revolt, the revolt itself, and the Hasmonean attainment of the offices of the Jewish high priest and leadership of the Jewish people up to succession of John Hyrcanus (r. 134–104 B.C.E.). For this reason, most scholars date the final redaction of 1 Maccabees to some time during the rule of Hyrcanus. Despite the use of biblical


associations and likely fabricated speeches, the author of 1 Maccabees appears to have accurately recounted most events described in the text. Bezalel Bar-Kochva’s extensive analysis of 1 Maccabees has buttressed a scholarly consensus that the author used eyewitness reports, oral testimonies, and official archives to produce a relatively consistent and coherent historical work. Several scholars have argued that the author’s access to such materials strongly suggests he was a close associate of the Hasmonean family and their court. Accounts in 1 Maccabees associated with Hasmonean dining practices, like the general events recorded in the rest of the work, seem to accurately reflect early Hasmonean feasting practices.

First Maccabees provides two short descriptions suggestive of how the Hasmoneans used domestic feasts to inculcate notions of their elevated status vis-à-vis their guests. The earliest reference is linked to a description of the Seleucid king Antiochus VI’s letter sent to Jonathan. The letter verifies Jonathan’s status as the Jewish high priest and the “king’s


friend” (11:57), first bestowed on him by Antiochus VI’s predecessor Alexander Balas in 152 B.C.E. (10:18–20). To reaffirm Jonathan’s status as the Seleucid king’s “friend,” we read that Antiochus VI assured him that he had the right to wear a purple robe given to him by Balas. In addition, Antiochus VI gave to Jonathan a golden buckle and the right to drink from the golden chalices he had sent to him (11:58). Significantly, these very same gifts are attested in non-Jewish literary sources, which, according to Rolf Strootman, functioned “as a symbolon – an inheritable material reminder of a xenia bond.” Other scholars have also noted that to receive such gifts bestowed on the receiver the status of the giver. Edward Dąbrowa argues that Jonathan’s attire “made him stand out and emphasized his authority. Exactly when and how Jonathan used those symbols is purely a matter of conjecture, but the meaning they implied to all those around him was obvious enough.” While Dąbrowa’s hesitation to surmise when Jonathan donned the clothing representative of his status may be warranted (though see below), determining when Jonathan used his golden chalices does not require much speculation. His new golden chalices were meant to be brandished about at his

36 “Friend of the king” was a common Greek phrase employed by Hellenistic kings as a way to officially recognize that someone belonged to a social circle connected with the monarchy. See the discussion of the evolution of the term and references in Rolf Strootman, “Dynastic Courts of the Hellenistic Empires,” in A Companion to Ancient Greek Government (ed. Hans Beck; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 43–4.


feasts. It seems highly likely that Jonathan would have used his golden chalices, and possibly would have worn his purple robe and golden buckle, while dining at his feasts to convey notions of his political prominence within Judea and the broader political landscape to his guests.40

The need for Jonathan to make use of such symbols of his political stature at his feasts might have been enhanced due to the fact that his rise to power was not without internal Jewish opposition. In 1 Maccabees 10:60, we read of a group of Jewish “malcontents” and “renegades” who complained about Jonathan’s rule to Alexander Balas in Ptolemais while the Hasmonean attended the Seleucid king’s marriage to King Ptolemy’s daughter. Balas responded by dressing Jonathan in purple, seating him by his side, parading him about the city, and proclaiming that no one was to bring charges against the Hasmonean again (10:62-63). Additional resistance to Jonathan seems to have come from those closer to home. Some priests of the Zadokite line appear to have appealed to Jonathan personally to change aspects of his administration of the Temple.41 Their appeals seem to have fallen on

40 Moreover, rulers (and the elite in Jerusalem as described above) living throughout the ancient Mediterranean—well before, during, and after Jonathan’s rule—typically drank wine from finely crafted drinking vessels to represent their prestige vis-à-vis fellow dining members and the population more generally. That Jonathan also did so would have been within a well-established tradition. The early evidence for the use of finely crafted drinking vessels and dining accoutrements is nicely summarized and interpreted by Wright, “Commensal Politics in Ancient Western Asia,” 212–233. For the Hellenistic and Roman periods see esp. John Wilkins and Shaun Hill, Food in the Ancient World Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 41–51; and John F. Donahue, The Roman Community at Table During the Principate (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), passim; and Nicholas Hudson, “Changing Places: Archaeology of the Roman Convivium,” AJA 114 (October 2010): 663-95.

41 This evidence appears to come from a letter, known as 4QMMT, sent to the political and religious leaders of Jerusalem. 4QMMT outlines several problems with how the Temple’s sacrificial system was functioning. Though the addressee(s) are not designated by name, many scholars believe the letter was intended for Jonathan and his priestly advisors. See, e.g., Hanan Eshel, The Dead Sea Scrolls and
deaf ears, whereupon they separated themselves from the Temple’s sacrificial system, forming the *Yahad* at Qumran approximately fifty years later. Given such resistance to Jonathan’s rule, it seems likely that he would have taken advantage of any opportunity to display images of the new social order established under his leadership. His dinner table would have been one of the best places to start, ensuring that those closest to him remained cognizant of his status and the formation of the Hasmonean state. The evidence suggesting that Jonathan used feasts to display objects signifying the Hasmoneans’ growing prominence within the region suggests that his successors would do the same.

The reference in 1 Maccabees to a feast convened by Jonathan’s brother and successor Simon (r. 146–134 B.C.E.) appears to describe such a scenario. First Maccabees 13:43–48 and 14:3–7 describe the territorial expansion undertaken by Simon after his supporters named him ruler (ἡγεμόν) of the Jewish people upon the capture and murder of his brother Jonathan (13:8–23). His successful military campaigns directly led to

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A possible reference to Jonathan’s drinking practices comes from 1QpHab XI, 12–15, which interprets Habakkuk 2:16. 1QpHab XI, 12–15 refers to a priest, stating that he could not quench his thirst for alcohol. His gluttony would thus result in his death. James C. VanderKam (*From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 267) believes the priest mentioned in 1QpHab XI, 12–15 might be identified with Jonathan. VanderKam notes, however, that little should be made from this text concerning Jonathan’s actual drinking practices because the text was not necessarily to be read literally (268). I do not consider 1QpHab XI, 12–15 because it does not actually refer to Jonathan and, following VanderKam, we do not know if the text was meant to be a literal representation of Hasmonean drinking habits. For the full text of 1QpHab XI, 12–15, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Pesharim, Other Commentaries, and Related Documents*, vol. 6b (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 180–83.
representatives among the Jewish priests, leaders of the people (ἀρχόντων ἔθνους), and elders of the country (πρεσβυτέρων τῆς χώρας) to officially bestow on Simon the office of high priest, name him leader (ἡγεμών), commander (στρατηγός), and to permit him to wear purple and gold (14:29, 43-45). In response to Simon’s military achievements and rise to power, 1 Maccabees states that the new Seleucid king Antiochus VII sent his emissary Athenobius to Jerusalem to demand that Simon give up his new land or pay tribute (15:28–31). We then read that Simon receives Athenobius as his guest at a feast in his palace in Jerusalem. Upon his arrival, 1 Maccabees states that the king’s emissary was “amazed (ἐξίστατο) at the splendor of Simon and the magnificent display of his gold cups and silver plates on his dining table” (15:32). First Maccabees then reports that Simon denies the king’s request (15:33). Athenobius is enraged and returns to the king, recounting Simon’s response as well as the “splendor of Simon and all that he had seen” (15:36). Antiochus VII is then said to have reacted by launching armed operations in Judea. The campaign ended in failure for the Seleucid king, whose army was crushed by Jewish forces led by Simon’s sons (1 Macc 15:38–16:10; Josephus Ant. 13.225–227).

As scholarly consensus attributes these accounts to a close associate – possibly a court historian – of the Hasmoneans, the author of 1 Maccabees seems to have been in a position to capture Simon’s adeptness at commensal politics. Like his brother Jonathan—as well as most rulers throughout the ancient Mediterranean—Simon would have displayed fine dining accoutrements at his feasts to signify his wealth.43 Yet Simon’s wealth, also like other

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43 See supra n. 39.
rulers throughout antiquity, was directly linked to successful military achievements.\textsuperscript{44} Noteworthy for this particular dining scene depicted in 1 Maccabees 15:32 is the fact that Simon’s coffers expanded greatly when he acquired the cities, towns, a seaport, and land previously controlled by the Seleucid state.\textsuperscript{45} Athenobius would likely have perceived Simon’s display of gold cups and silver plates as an affront to the Seleucid king, for they signified wealth accrued, at least in part, by the aforementioned military gains.\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, Antiochus VII responded with military actions against Simon immediately after Athenobius reported back to the king. Ultimately, the portrayal of Simon’s feast in 1 Maccabees shows how he used feasts, like Jonathan, to establish a sense of the new social order solidifying under the Hasmoneans.

First Maccabees seems to be a reliable window into how the first generation of Hasmoneans employed feasts. Though the evidence is limited, it seems very likely that Jonathan and Simon convened feasts within their palace in Jerusalem to display symbols of their socio-political stature, as well as to impress upon their guests notions of the Hasmonean state’s growing significance within the power structure of the region. The literary evidence

\begin{footnotes}
\item[44] Judah, Jonathan, and Simon appear to have obtained spoils of war in large amounts. For booty won by Judah, see 1 Macc 5:3, 35, 51, 68. For Jonathan, see 9:40; 10:84, 87; 11:61; 12:31; For Simon, see 5:22.
\item[46] Doron Mendels (“Was the Rejection of Gifts One of the Reasons for the Outbreak of the Maccabean Revolt? A Preliminary Note on the Role of Gifting in the Book of 1 Maccabees,” \textit{Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha} 20 [2011]) argues that Antiochus VII sent Athenobius to “spy out the ‘real’ wealth” (254) of Simon to determine what he could extract from the Hasmonean ruler. We may augment Mendels’ statement by asserting that the Seleucid king also sent Athenobius to see how powerful Simon really was, and whether he could acquire any tribute at all from Simon.
\end{footnotes}
for feasts convened in Jerusalem is largely mirrored by the archaeological evidence for feasts convened by the following generation of Hasmoneans, beginning with John Hyrcanus, in their palaces at Jericho. Excavations have revealed three triclinia or long-rooms dating from the late second century through the first century B.C.E. The earliest triclinium-type room was located in the so-called Buried Palace built during the reign of John Hyrcanus. The other two are located in the Twin Palaces built by Queen Salome (r. 76–67 B.C.E.) for her two rival sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. All three of these dining rooms are located off large courtyards, measure approximately 6.5 x 6 meters, and are lined with three reclining benches along three walls. John Hyrcanus’ triclinium was decorated with Hellenistic-styled stucco and frescoes that included drafted blocks of marble and imitation alabaster. Decorations from the dining rooms in the Twin Palaces have only survived from the Eastern

47 Ehud Nezter, *The Palaces of the Hasmoneans and Herod the Great* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2001), 17–18; Ehud Nezter, (“A Synagogue from the Hasmonean Period Recently Exposed in the Western Plane of Jericho,” *IEJ* 49 [1999]: 203–31) argues that the dining room and associated court of John Hyrcanus’ buried palace is actually a synagogue with a triclinium. His view that this portion of the buried palace was a synagogue has gained little traction. Scholarly consensus holds that this was a large dining room associated with the Buried Palace. See discussions by Lee I. Levine, “The First-Century Synagogue: Critical Reassessments and Assessment of the Critical,” in *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches* (ed. Douglas R. Edwards; New York: Routledge, 2004), 84–89; and David Stacey, “Was There a Synagogue in Hasmonean Jericho?” at http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Hasmonean_Jericho.shtml. The evidence appears to support the scholarly consensus. I have therefore chosen to include the evidence from Jericho’s Buried Palace within this section. Whether this is in fact a dining room set off in a courtyard or a synagogue with a triclinium does not affect my overall argument.


Mansion, in the form of Roman-style stucco painted in red, black, and white.\textsuperscript{50} The Western Mansion would have been decorated similarly, given the palaces’ exact replication of every other architectural aspect of the palaces of Hycanus II and Aristobulus II.

The architectural elements from the Hasmonean palaces allow us to confidently assert the primary function of their feasts. The benches of their \textit{triclinia}, first used by John Hyrcanus, show that the Hasmoneans reclined at their feasts. As Matthew B. Roller has shown, reclining at feasts was understood throughout the Greco-Roman world to symbolize pleasure, leisure, and the luxury associated with social prestige.\textsuperscript{51} The Hasmoneans’ dining posture thus allowed them to reinforce their notions of elevated social status. The decoration of each \textit{triclinium} would have functioned similarly. While all three palaces utilized Greek and Hellenistic architectural designs, the exteriors of each building appear to have been architecturally simpler than other contemporaneous large private residences or palatial complexes, both in the region and abroad.\textsuperscript{52} This is also true of the architectural features of a number of swimming pools and gardens at the site.\textsuperscript{53} The interiors of each building utilized more complex architectural designs however, and the \textit{triclinia} and their entrances were the

\textsuperscript{50} Nezter, \textit{The Palaces of the Hasmoneans}, 164.


most elaborately decorated rooms. Guests’ impressions of the wealth and prestige of the Hasmoneans would have increased as they moved from the outsides of the Hasmoneans’ palaces to the interiors of their dining rooms.

The ceramic evidence from the Hasmonean palaces suggests that the Jewish rulers also used feasts to project a modicum of communality with their guests. The majority of the tableware consisted largely of the relatively mundane types of locally produced and minimally decorated or slipped bowls and plates that have been found throughout the region. The shape and design of the most widely used items, the bowls and plates, demonstrate Hellenistic influences, although these vessels were rarely coated in decorative slip. A small amount of tableware dating to the end of the Hasmonean period was decorated with simple geometric patterns. In this later period, Roman influence seems to have been limited to one tall, narrow, undecorated cup. Eyal Regev argues that the dining ware used by the Hasmoneans “reflected a plain character, manifesting shared commensality with their guests, based on the ostensibly equal lay status of all participants. These meals may have been used to show outsiders that the ruler/king/queen/prince was not remote from the

54 Eyal Regev suggests that because all of the pools but one were relatively detached from the palaces, the pools were “presented or conceptualized not as the king’s personal luxurious apparatus, but as more natural and national ones” (“Royal Ideology,” 62).


58 Ibid., 101–2.
people.” Regev’s focus on the dining ware used by the Hasmoneans to interpret the function of their feasts in general, however, seems overstated. Although using simply-crafted bowls and plates may have been intended by the Hasmoneans to foster some sense of equality between feasting participants, the mundane character of the dining vessels would not have undermined the messages conveyed by the ornamentation of the feasts’ spatial settings. Nevertheless, some symbolic tension does appear to exist between the evidence of the elaborately decorated triclinia that conveyed notions of prestige, wealth and power, and the use of mundane dining ware to convey communality.

The literary and archaeological evidence for the Hasmoneans’ domestic feasts, beginning with Jonathan and his golden chalices through the festive landscapes uncovered at Jericho, suggests that the Hasmoneans were deft at commensal politics. It seems plausible that Jonathan would have used golden chalices given to him by Antiochus VI at his domestic feasts to display his social prestige as well as the ascendance of the Hasmonean state. His brother and successor, Simon, seems to have used fine dining accoutrements for similar ends. Yet Simon appears to have gone further than his brother by displaying his beautifully crafted plates and cups while hosting one Seleucid emissary to a feast as a way to signify the Hasmoneans’ growing prominence within the region’s politic regimes. Beginning with Simon’s son, John Hyrcanus, we have archaeological evidence from Jericho that demonstrates attempts by the Hasmoneans to reify notions of their higher social status vis-à-vis their guests at feasts held within the dining rooms in their palaces. At the same time, the

dining ware excavated at Jericho suggests that they may have attempted to establish at least a modicum of equality among their guests.

3.1.3 The Feasts of Herod

Hasmonean influence quickly declined when Roman troops entered Palestine in 63 B.C.E., under the leadership of Pompey, to settle the internecine conflict between the Hasmonean brothers Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II. Aristobulus was imprisoned, Hyrcanus retained his role as high priest, while the non-Hasmonean from Idumea, Antipater, came to oversee Palestine. Antipater in turn delegated responsibilities to his sons Phasael and Herod. Herod served as governor of Galilee, then governor of Syria, and then co-tetrarch of Judea with Phasael until the latter’s death in 40 B.C.E. Herod then fled to Rome the same year in the face of the Parthian invasion, whereupon the Roman Senate named him king of Judea. He returned to Palestine with a sizable army the following year, taking over the area controlled by the Parthians and their Hasmonean allies by 37 B.C.E. For the next thirty-three years, Herod demonstrated himself to be one of Rome’s most loyal client kings. And despite his ruthless treatment of those in his own court, executing anyone he suspected of treason, including his wife and three sons, Herod succeeded by and large in bringing peace and order to his realm.60

Several scholars have recently shown how significant Herod’s building program was in displaying his allegiance to Rome, as well as signifying his commitment to and dominion over his own subjects. Dominating the harbor of his new seaport city of Caesarea-Maritima, for example, Herod constructed an enormous temple to Roma and Augustus. After describing the above projects and commemoration of the city to Augustus, Josephus reports that “it was said that Caesar and Agrippa remarked that the dominion of Herod was too small for the greatness of his soul” (Ant. 16.141). At the same time, Herod’s reconstruction of Jerusalem and his aggrandizement of the Temple were undoubtedly intended to signify the king’s proclivity towards seeing to the needs of his Jewish subjects as well as to display his own piety. Neither of these projects, and numerous others, was purely altruistic on Herod’s part. In his brief analysis of Herod’s predispositions, Josephus remarks that the Jewish king “was a lover of honor (φιλότιμος) and, being powerfully dominated by this passion, he was led to display generosity (μεγαλωνυχίας) whenever there was reason to hope for future remembrance (μνήμης) or present reputation” (Ant. 16.153). In other words, Herod’s

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63 Josephus explicitly notes that Herod’s reconstruction of the Temple was seen as an act of piety (ευσέβεια) in *J.W.* 1.400.

building program was intended to bolster his reputation in the eyes of the Roman emperor as well as to generate gratitude, loyalty, and proper respect from his subjects.

Josephus’ descriptions of Herod’s feasts, though far less extensive than those recounting the king’s building projects, allow us to see that they were intended to function similarly. Josephus’ most detailed report of Herod’s domestic feasts concerns the king’s commensal hospitality offered to Agrippa, Augustus’ general and closest friend. Upon hearing of Agrippa’s visit to Asia Minor, Josephus informs us that Herod insisted that Agrippa join him on a tour of his kingdom so that he might “partake of what he [Agrippa] might justly expect for being his [Herod’s] guest and friend” (Ant. 16.12). Agrippa accepted Herod’s request whereupon we are told that Herod spared no expense on the feasts for Agrippa and his courtiers at his palaces throughout Judea (Ant. 16.13). Herod ended the tour with a final feast in his lavish palace in Jerusalem. Josephus then states that Agrippa responded to Herod’s commensal hospitality by providing a grand feast of his own for the king and all the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem (Ant. 16.14).  

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65 It is possible that Herod’s commensal hospitality in particular had a lasting effect on Agrippa. Josephus states that when Agrippa arrived in Ionia, a year later, Jews there pleaded with him to restore their right to observe “the practices of their ancestors” that the local governing body seems to have repealed (Ant. 16.27–28). Herod’s court historian Nicholas of Damascus, quoted in Josephus, states
palaces and grand feasts were undoubtedly intended to ingratiate himself to Agrippa, and in a roundabout way, to build political capital among his own subjects. Agrippa’s response by holding feasts for Herod and the Jewish populace not only demonstrated Agrippa’s recognition of Herod’s hospitality, but also that Herod succeeded in solidifying his close relationship with Rome. This in turn would have signified to Herod’s subjects that his friendship with Agrippa, and by extension Rome, would bear fruit for them as well. Hosting feasts for Agrippa served, in part, as a mechanism to construct, maintain, and negotiate complex relationships between Rome, Herod, and his own subjects.

Another account from Josephus suggests that Herod employed feasts to generate an obsequious relationship from those he ruled. Josephus states that Herod commemorated the completion of the seaport city of Caesarea-Maritima in 10 B.C.E. with gladiatorial games, horse races, and enormous provisions for feasts (ἔορταίς) for those living in the city as well as “ambassadors sent there by those who had already received Herod’s benefactions (ἐὐεργεσίας)” (Ant. 16:137–140). Josephus concludes by stating that Herod’s commemorative feasts in particular were intended to “publicly demonstrate his generosity” (μεγαλοψυχίας) (Ant. 16:140). Partaking of Herod’s feasts, however, was not without a

that Agrippa restored the Jews’ rights because of the precedent set by Rome as a way to reward the Jews’ fidelity to the empire as well as “Herod’s good will and friendship” (Ant. 16.29-60). Nicholas, however, does not explicitly mention Herod’s feasts.

price. From an anthropological perspective, Herod’s free giving of food and drink—like many of the feasts provided by hosts described throughout this chapter—should also be understood as a type of gift exchange, whereby a sense of reciprocity would have been engendered. Unlike Agrippa, however, it is highly unlikely that those attending his commemorative feasts at Caesarea-Maritima could ever repay his commensal hospitality. Those living in the city as well as those who had already received Herod’s benefaction thus would have become indebted to the king. Functionally, Herod’s lavish feasts at Caesarea-Maritima would have established asymmetrical relationships between those living within the city and their king and sustained a sense of dependence on Herod for those who had already benefitted from his largesse.

The archaeological evidence from Herod’s palatial complexes and villas supports the descriptions that Josephus provides, and as will be discussed below, elucidates the role of feasts in constructing relationships particularly between the king and those in his own court. At Jericho, Masada, Herodium, Caesarea, and Samaria-Sebaste, archaeologists have revealed


broad-rooms, long-rooms, and large *triclinia*; frescoed walls, stuccoed moldings, and mosaics are extant in some of these dining rooms.\(^6^8\) Perhaps the most impressive dining room built by Herod was located in the southernmost wing of his immense palace at Jericho, above the riverbed of Wadi Qelt (Fig. 5).\(^6^9\) The main building measured 84 x 37 meters and contained various reception rooms and halls, two peristyle courtyards, a Roman-style bathhouse, and a large *triclinium*. At 28.9 x 19.9 meters, this is the largest dining hall yet discovered from pre-Roman and Roman Palestine. Three sides of its interior were lined with large columns to support the expansive roof, the hall was decorated with frescoes and stuccoed moldings, and the outside floor areas were adorned with the Roman-style decoration known as *opus sectile* (multicolored stone tiles). The center of the floor was decorated with a large mosaic (ca. 5 x 7.5 meters). The room’s only entrance consisted of a large doorway (5.7 meters), an opening that would have allowed diners to see outside and over the wadi below.

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The ceramic evidence found at many of Herod’s residences demonstrates his proclivity for opulent feasts. His palaces at Jericho and Herodium, for example, contained luxurious tableware imported from Italy, Cyprus, and the Phoenician coast.\textsuperscript{70} Inscriptions on storage jars from his palace at Masada demonstrate that Herod enjoyed fine wines produced in Chios and Kos (Aegean islands) as well as the highest quality of wine from famous Italian vineyards.\textsuperscript{71} Inscribed containers from Masada and Jericho show that he enjoyed sweet fruits

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from Italy and garum from Spain.\footnote{Ibid., 71.} In addition, imported Italian pans as well as locally made versions of these pans, which were designed for cooking Roman-style dishes, have been found at Herod’s palaces at Jericho, Herodium, and Masada.\footnote{Renate Rosenthal-Heginbottom, “Fine Ware and Lamps from Area A,” \textit{Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1969-1982, Vol. II} (ed. Hillel Geva and Donald T. Ariel; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2003), 215–17. For identifying particular types of cooking vessels with ethnic cuisines, see Andrea Berlin, “Italian Cooking Vessels and Cuisine From Tel Anafa,” \textit{IEJ} 43 (1993), 35–44; and idem, \textit{Tel Anafa II: Hellenistic and Roman Pottery: The Plain Wares} (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum, 1997), 84–109.} The quantity of all these vessels also demonstrates that Herod had an abundance of wine, sweets, fish sauce, and cooking ware with which to wine and dine numerous guests within his expansive dining halls.\footnote{Ecker, “Dining With Herod,” 73.}

The material evidence demonstrates that Herod’s feasts not only would have allowed him to impress guests such as Agrippa, but also would have been particularly effective in establishing the social order within his inner court. His inner court consisted of extended family, his own wives and sons, as well as his advisors, emissaries, and commanders of his soldiers.\footnote{For a detailed description of members of Herod’s inner court, see esp. Rocca, \textit{Herod’s Judea}, 72-96.} These individuals would have dined on the finest wines and foods served on beautifully decorated tableware within some of the most luxurious settings in the Roman Empire, all the while looking upon their host reclining at the most prominent position in typical Roman fashion. Herod’s domestic feasts would have reinforced upon his court notions of the vast resources that were under his control and power commensurate with his
position as the king of the Jews. Hosting members of his court to such lavish feasts would have also engendered a sense of reciprocity, one that they could never repay in kind, ensuring their indebtedness. It is likely that Herod hosted such feasts often, as the material record suggests, in order to express his royal ideology and to guarantee complete loyalty to him alone.

The message conveyed through his feasting practices comports with what we know about his royal ambitions, perhaps best symbolized in his building program throughout Judea. Significantly, many of the cities he constructed or rebuilt included facilities for entertainment or worship that incorporated views of his grandiose palaces. Even the Temple in Jerusalem was visually coupled, according to Josephus, with Herod’s own palace (War. 5.241, 245). The function of his architectural program mirrored the function of his dining rooms and the activities performed within them; both served as sites to display Herod’s largesse to his friends and subjects while affirming his royal status. Yet while Herod’s physical transformation of the Judean landscape allowed him to symbolize his great wealth,

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76 See Gleason, “Ruler and Spectacle;” Richardson, Herod, 174–214; and Rocca, Herod’s Judaea, 291-362.


78 Ecker, who has come to similar conclusions about the food served at Herod’s feasts, remarks that the “culinary evidence is essentially no different than that architectural evidence, the consumption of Roman delicacies being the equivalent of using opus reticulatum in the construction of the palace complex at Jericho” (“Dining with Herod,” 72–73).
power, and his beneficence, Herod’s feasts ensured that his friends and subjects fully digested the new social order that he established and maintained during his reign.

3.1.4 Other Examples in Judea

In seeking further indications of the social roles that Jewish domestic feasts would have played in Judea during the period immediately following Herod’s death in 4 B.C.E., we turn first to the archaeological evidence from domiciles in Jerusalem. By the beginning of the first century C.E., many Jews were building and remodeling homes in the Upper City, on Mount Zion, and near the Golden Gate. All featured rooms with frescos and stuccoed moldings that were often accompanied by mosaics in the centers of the floors. In addition, short three-legged round tables used by reclining diners have been found in the Upper City; these are similar to feasting accoutrements found in dining rooms throughout Italy and the Greek East. Furthermore, every sort of vessel necessary for several personal table settings and for serving both food and drink have been found in many of the homes in the Upper City: these include plates, bowls, cups and mugs; broad, narrow-necked jugs; and several types of serving bowls. Fine red slipware and vessels with geometric and vegetal patterns were


imported from Italy, Cyprus, and the Phoenician coast, demonstrating that decorated
tableware was apparently desirable for the residents of this area of Jerusalem. Locally made
vessels were fashioned after these models as well.\textsuperscript{83}

The so-called “Middle Complex” and “Palatial Complex” in the Upper City are the
best preserved of these reconstructed homes. The Middle Complex contained at least one
dining room, of approximately 5.5 x 4 meters. The room, which was entered through an off-
centered doorway, had a square mosaic floor with geometric designs that measure
approximately 3 x 3 meters. The room’s floor plan and decoration allow us to conclude that
this was an \textit{andron} that would have accommodated seven average-sized reclining couches.
The Palatial Complex contains a dining room with dimensions identical to the Middle
Complex’s room. Situated off the main entrance of the building, it is also entered through an
off-centered doorway. Although there is no extant mosaic, the complex’s dining room is
decorated with a fine fresco of the first Pompeian style as well as stuccoed moldings. The
decorations and floor plan allow us to conclude that this room was an \textit{andron} that also
accommodated seven reclining couches.

The dining rooms, accoutrements, and ceramic assemblages from the domiciles in
Jerusalem—specifically the Middle Complex and Palatial Complex—demonstrate that feasts
were held while diners reclined in typical Greco-Roman fashion. The decorations of the
rooms appear to have been intended to display the homeowners’ wealth and social status. The
apparent intention of the decorations parallels the messages that would have been conveyed

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
through the fine dining accoutrements and ceramic assemblages used during the feasts. According to Andrea Berlin, the ceramic assemblages from each home are evidence of meals that were “urbane and showy affairs, replete with the luxury of individual table settings and beautifully decorated serving pieces.”84 It is essential to note the prevalence of Greco-Roman influences in the examples from Jerusalem. The adoption of Greco-Roman feasting style denotes a certain “taste” that would have placed the homeowner, already of high social status, into a further refined cultural elite.85

The adoption of a similar festive landscape can be discerned from at least one other private domicile in Roman Judea, the large rural villa at Khirbet el-Muraq, found near Hebron and dated to the first century C.E.86 An inscription in the large, peristyle courtyard suggests that the villa belonged to a wealthy Jew named Hilkiyah. A pavilion in the center of the courtyard features a mosaic floor surrounded by applied columns. In the middle of this pavilion, the three stone benches carved into the rectangular structure attest to a small triclinium. Excavations have also revealed stuccoed moldings similar to those used in the dining rooms of Jerusalem and some of Herod’s palaces, as well as decorated imported wares similar to those discovered at the Upper City of Jerusalem and Herod’s palaces and villas.87

84 Berlin, “Jewish Life Before the Revolt,” 448.
85 See further, the anthropological analysis of feasts by Michael Dietler, “Theorizing the Feast,” 85–92.
From an anthropological perspective, the spread of these Greco-Roman feasting practices—and their clear synonymy with culturally “elite” status—to the city of Jerusalem as well as a countryside villa imply that Jewish feasting was following what Arjun Appadurai has termed a “turnstile effect.” 88 Appadurai uses this term to describe the diffusion of luxury goods and practices from the upper echelons of society to a broader community. Michael Dietler has elaborated on the “emulation” patterns characteristic of the turnstile effect by describing both “objects” and “styles of action” as “materialized signs of a particular social identity.” 89 In Judea, we see how aspects of Greek and Roman dining culture emulated variously by priestly classes, Hasmoneans, Herod, Jerusalem elites, and Hilkiyah in order to denote elite socio-cultural status. The domestic feasts of these Jews also allowed them to engender asymmetrical relationships, and perhaps create lasting bonds. The festive landscape of the domestic sphere in Judea, beginning in the third century B.C.E., functioned as a central mechanism that helped Jews construct meaning and maintain delicate social relationships.

Moving north to Galilee and Gaulanitis, it is worth exploring the local social function of Jewish domestic feasting practices, and whether or not such practices followed a similar pattern as in Judea.

3.2 Galilee and Gaulanitis

Before proceeding, it is important to note that over the past decade there has been a shift in scholars’ characterization of urbanization policies of Galilee and its possible effects


89 Dietler, “Theorizing the Feast,” 86.
on particular settlements in Gaulanitis. The urbanization process of the region began under Herod’s son and succeeding ruler of the region, Herod Antipas (r. 4 B.C.E–39 C.E), and appears to have continued well after him. The earlier regnant view imagined that Sepphoris and Tiberius became urban centers that had parasitic relationships with the villages and towns in the surrounding countryside. According to this view, the inhabitants of Sepphoris and Tiberias siphoned off virtually all resources produced by those dwelling in the countryside, leaving those living outside the two major urban hubs with barely enough on which to subsist. Recent studies suggest that the socio-economic picture of the region was much more complicated. Many scholars have cogently argued that the policies of Antipas appear to have fostered a reciprocal relationship between urban and rural areas from which the inhabitants of towns and villages in the region also benefitted. Excavations in the fishing villages of Capernaum and Magdala and the small agricultural settlements of Yodefat and

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Khirbet Qana, for example, demonstrate that these sites were part of a rather vibrant regional and even international economy. The general economic vitality of the region does not appear to have benefitted everyone, however. Socio-economic disparity as well as economic opportunities in Sepphoris, Tiberias, and the interconnected villages and towns increased rapidly beginning in the first century C.E. The urbanization of Galilee begun under Antipas would have likely created the necessary conditions for the maintenance of one’s socio-economic status within a economically stratified society. In addition, the economic growth of the region appears to have provided the foundation for opportunities for some ambitious individuals to accrue wealth and move up the social ladder. Before the Great Revolt, for example, John Gischala cornered the market on kosher olive oil throughout Galilee and even southern Syria, reaping a financial windfall (War 2.591-592). He seems to have been able to start his entrepreneurial activities by obtaining the imperial grain stores in Upper Galilee through bribery (Life 71), and/or by capturing Galilean production centers with the help of his armed companions (Life 94, 101). Within this new socio-economic context, hosting domestic feasts would have been a particular potent way for Jewish inhabitants of Galilee and Gaulanitis of the first century C.E.—like those living in Judea before and during this time—to establish and reinforce one’s social location.

92 Jensen, Herod Antipas in Galilee, 126–86.
94 See further Thomas Longstaff, “Gush Ḥalav in the Ancient Literary Sources,” in Excavations at the Ancient Synagogue of Gush Halav (ed. Eric M. Meyers, Carol L. Meyers, and James F. Strange; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 16-17, and 20-21.
3.2.1 Feasts in Galilean Villages according to the New Testament

To discuss Jewish domestic feasting practices in Galilee during the first century C.E., one must acknowledge the dining scenes depicted in the Gospels. Significantly, descriptions of the feasts attended by Jesus and his disciples found in the Gospels contain several references to typical performative elements of the Greco-Roman symposium. These include such features as reclining (Mark 2:15; 6:39; 8:6; 14:3; 14:18; Luke 7:36; 11:37; 14:7; 24:30), washing of the feet prior to reclining (Luke 7:44; John 13:3-5), anointing the head with perfumes (Mark 14:3), saying prayers before the *deipnon* (Mark 6:41; 8:6–7; 14:22), ranking at the table (Luke 14:7) and at the symposium (Mark 14:23), sharing a wine libation around the table (Mark 14:23), discourse on appropriate themes during the symposium (Luke 14:7-24), and ending the meal with a hymn (Mark 14:26). The complicated redactional history of each Gospel, however, means we cannot take their accounts of the feasting practices of Jesus and his disciples at face value. Moreover, Dennis E. Smith states:

> Since the Gospels are literary presentations of the Jesus story, they also utilized the common literary motifs of the feast in the Greco-Roman world. Significant literary models include the literary form of the symposium or the idealizations of the hero at the table…[which] complicate our quest for historical data.97

That is, the Gospel writers’ familiarity with typical Greco-Roman dining practices may say more about their acquaintance with sympotic literature and the lessons they were meant to

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95 John Dominic Crossan (*The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*; San Francisco: Harper, 1991, 304) states emphatically “magic and meal or miracle and table […] is the heart of Jesus’ program […] If that is incorrect, this book will have to be redone.”

96 See discussion and references to secondary sources in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 220–223.

97 Ibid., 223.
teach than reflect actual dining practices of the earliest Jesus movement. In addition, archaeological evidence from some homes in Galilee dating from the first century C.E. does not readily support a wholesale adoption of Greco-Roman dining practices throughout the region as the texts from the New Testament suggest. There are remains, however, that present a significant amount of data that feasts continued to play an important role in constructing the social order for Jewish society in Galilee and the neighboring region of Gaulanitis.

3.2.2 Sepphoris

Excavations at the western summit of Sepphoris have identified multiple homes, courtyards, cisterns, and work areas, as well as numerous miqva’ot (Jewish ritual baths), and chalkstone vessels. In addition, several fragments of imported fine-ware dining vessels have been found throughout the site’s various strata, which date from the first century B.C.E. through the third century C.E. Excavators of this area of Sepphoris have concluded that the existence of such a large assemblage of fine wares points to the prevalence of “feasting: beautifully finished or decorated pottery is an archaeological correlate of special meals… Feasting is indicative of economic surpluses as well as organizational hierarchies and can


serve many interrelated political, economic, social, and religious functions.’’

Their conclusion is supported by remains from at least one section of a domicile on the eastern edge of this area dating to the first century C.E.

Although many sections of this domicile are difficult to reconstruct and date with certainty, at least one room in the home appears to have been intended specifically for dining. The northern section of the home underwent several phases of reconstruction through the fourth century C.E., but two rooms at the south went out of use during the first century C.E. due to a large fire. These two rooms seem to have had a shared purpose. The room in the southwest corner has been identified as an open-air kitchen. Remains of many bones, a basalt grinder, a tabun (oven), cooking vessels, storage jars, and stone vessel fragments were all found directly on top of the room’s packed-earth floor. The adjacent room was rectangular (4.25 x 2.25 meters) and entered through a slightly off-center doorway in its long, northern enclosing wall. The room contained numerous small bones, incense shovel and lamp fragments, a water jug, and a stone dining vessel, as well as an imported plate known as Eastern Terra Sigillata. There is no evidence for a mosaic but the room’s floor was nicely plastered. The room was also decorated with molded plaster and frescos that imitated marble, as well as curtains (perhaps in first or second Pompeian style) and the same type of fresco


designs found in the dining rooms in Jerusalem. Evidence for an adjoining kitchen and its material remains strongly suggests that feasts were held in this room.

Before commenting on the social functions of the feasts held within this domicile, it is noteworthy that the shape of this home’s dining room does not resemble the typical design of andrones or triclinia found throughout the Greek East or the ones discussed above that were discovered in Judea. If reclining couches were used in this room, they would not have been arranged in any way to resemble configurations in Greco-Roman dining rooms. We therefore do not have evidence for the adoption of typical Greco-Roman dining posture, but this evidence perhaps indicates a conscientious accommodation to Greco-Roman culture. For example, some elements of the Greco-Roman festive landscape (e.g., decorations and dining ware) were adopted, while other elements (e.g., the reclining posture) do not appear to have been incorporated by the owner of this domicile. It is possible that sitting instead of reclining within this domicile allowed feasting participants to reify their shared sense of Jewishness, an ethno-religious identity reflected in the ritual baths and chalkstone vessels found within this home and those across the western summit. At the same time, the imported fine dining ware and decorative schema in this room demonstrate that the homeowner’s notion of his Jewish identity did not preclude enjoying other aspects of Greco-Roman culture.

Turning now to the social functions of the feasts held within this domicile, we can argue, at the very least, that the homeowner used fine dining ware and decorated his dining room to solidify his class membership among his neighbors. This home and those on the western summit seem to be homogenous in basic size, and those living in them appear to have held feasts using the same fine ware (Eastern Sigillata A). This suggests there existed a
type of “consumption community,” individuals who shared styles and tastes in feasting. Because of these similarities, individuals from the western summit who dined with one another could have cultivated an identity that differentiated themselves from the large majority of those living in the surrounding countryside. At the same time, we cannot rule out that those dining together at Sepphoris would have performed feasting practices to create and maintain hierarchical boundaries amongst themselves. To date, however, we do not have literary and archaeological data to support this notion.

3.2.3 Yodefat

Excavations at Yodefat, which was destroyed during the Great Revolt and remained largely undisturbed after the first century C.E., have uncovered five residential areas dating to the period just prior to the revolt. This area consisted mostly of private dwellings with cisterns, miqva’ot, storage units, cooking ovens, pressing installations, an oil press, pottery kilns, loom weights, spindles, clay and stone vessels, and a large defensive wall. Different types of homes have been identified; most were small and unadorned. Portions of a large house believed to have belonged to a wealthy area of the village have also been excavated. A room within this larger house featured walls that were decorated in first Pompeian style

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102 Dietler, “Theorizing the Feast,” 85-86, 94.
(frescoed panels that imitated colored stone) and a floor designed in *opus sectile*, similar to the dining rooms in Herod’s palaces. The ceramic assemblage from this house as well as the rest of the site, however, consists of undecorated dining ware made locally.

That the beautifully decorated room in Yodefat’s large home contained artistic embellishments similar to other dining rooms in palaces and elite homes in Judea suggests that some elements of Greco-Roman dining culture were used to display the wealth and prestige of the homeowner while dining with others, as well as to showcase an affinity to styles and tastes of other elites. This evidence seems to support the “turnstile effect” discussed above (i.e., as decorations and practices are imbued with social status, they will be adopted by those seeking to display such status). The partial excavation of the home, however, does not allow us to reconstruct the overall dimensions of the room. Therefore, we cannot be sure what type of dining room might have existed within this home or whether diners adopted the reclining position that denoted luxury in the Greco-Roman world. The ceramic evidence also demonstrates that food was not served on decorated imported dining ware. The tableware was simple and locally made, perhaps suggesting that the feasts hosted within this room also served to display the host’s modesty, a connection to those he feasted, and/or may reflect a concern for ritual purity. The possibility also remains that the importation of fine dining ware to a location such as Yodefat was prohibitively expensive.

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107 Andrea M. Berlin (“Jewish Life Before the Revolt: The Archaeological Evidence,” *JSJ* 36 [Nov, 2005]: 417-70, esp. 420-29) notes a dramatic increase in the production and use of pottery at sites traditionally occupied by Jews beginning in mid-first century B.C.E. She argues that the use of locally,
However we interpret the use of the mundane dining ware, it seems likely that the owner of the home hosted feasts in his finely decorated dining room to maintain his class membership and/or establish and maintain hierarchical relationships. Feasts held in this room would have allowed the homeowner to showcase his taste and economic stature to other wealthy neighbors who seem to have lived in the same vicinity. And though such feasts likely generated a sense of reciprocity between diners, wealthy guests from Yodefat could have likely repaid their host in kind. At the same time, feasts held among the well-to-do residents of Yodefat would have helped them reify their own sense of their elevated status vis-à-vis the majority of the town’s inhabitants. Based on the small and unadorned homes

Jewish-made pottery by Jews at this time was due to an increase in ritual purity concerns among Jews during the first century B.C.E. She suggests that at least some Jews preferred to obtain their pottery from Jewish manufacturers because they believed that non-Jews were intrinsically impure, and therefore they could transmit ritual impurities to vessels through contact. There is not, however, any Jewish literary evidence from the Second Temple period to support this supposition. The earliest evidence that gentiles were thought to be intrinsically impure, and therefore could possibly contaminate new pottery during the manufacturing process, occurs in only a few tannaitic texts (ca. third century C.E.). Yet this early rabbinic evidence is contradicted by other rabbinic statements from the same time period. For discussions concerning rabbinic views about the purity status of gentiles, see esp. Jonathan Klawans, “Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism,” *AJS Review* 20 (1995): 285-312; and Christine E. Hayes. *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 19-103, 109-116, 123, 142, 206. On early rabbinic statements that explicitly state gentile vessels may be used by Jews, see Donald T. Ariel, “Appendix: On Amphoras and Ritual Purity,” in *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City Of Jerusalem Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1969-1982 Vol 1: Architecture and Stratigraphy: Areas A, W and X-2, Final Report* (ed. Hillel Geva; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 267-83.


109 See *supra* n. 105. We must also note that Josephus refers to a group of powerful men (οἱ δυνατοὶ) of the village of Yodefat with whom he took counsel when considering making his escape during the Roman siege (*War* 3.193), as well as men of distinction (οἱ ἐπίσημοι ἀνδρεῖς) with whom he hid when the city fell in 67 C.E. (*War* 3.341). These men may very well been those who lived in what appears to be a wealthy area of Yodefat.
surrounding the home with the beautifully decorated dining room, the majority of Yodefat’s residents appear to have been relatively poor.\textsuperscript{110} The feasts held in the homes of the wealthy residents would have helped maintain hierarchically status within the community.

### 3.2.4 Khirbet Qana

Khirbet Qana sits on a 100-meter high hill on the north side of the Beth Netofa Valley, across from Sepphoris (eight kilometers south-south-west), and two kilometers west of Yodefat. The archaeological evidence from Khirbet Qana is quite similar to the evidence from Yodefat. Remains dating to the first century B.C.E.–C.E. include installations for oil and textile production, pigeon raising, and glassblowing, as well as clay and stone vessels, \textit{miqva’ot}, and burial chambers typical of Jewish interment practices.\textsuperscript{111} Most of the excavated homes were small and unadorned.\textsuperscript{112} On the northern slope of Khirbet Qana, however, excavations have partly exposed a large home with a room (12 x 8 meters) that bordered a courtyard dating to the first century C.E.\textsuperscript{113} This large room had a nice plastered floor, frescoed walls, and stuccoed moldings, as well as an interior pilaster that appears to have supported a second floor. More fragments of tableware were found within this room

\textsuperscript{110} Aviam, “Yodefat/Jotapata,” 121.


\textsuperscript{112} Richardson, “Towards a Typology,” 57, 60.

compared to the rest of the building. Like Yodefat, the tableware was undecorated common ware produced locally.

The fine decoration and higher number of tableware within this large room strongly suggests that feasts were held within it. The simple dining ware, as at Yodefat, might have been intended to stymie notions that the owner of the home was overly ostentatious and/or may have reflected a concern for ritual purity. In any case, the size and decoration of the dining room were certainly intended by the owner as a way to display his wealth and prestige similarly to other relatively wealthy homeowners living in the Galilee described above. Yet here at Khirbet Qana, the room appears to have been designed as a long- or broad-room or a large *triclinium*. Accordingly, the homeowner and his guests very likely would have reclined in typical Greco-Roman fashion. Doing so would have signified a particular cultural elitism associated with other wealthy Jews living in Judea. The Jerusalemite priest Josephus reports he spent time in Qana during his tenure as general in Galilee (*Life* 86). It is likely he would have felt comfortable feasting in this home. Moreover, the performance of the feasts convened within this home at Khirbet Qana would have also stood in stark contrast to those that could have been held in the majority of the small and unadorned homes that sprawled down the hillside below. Ultimately, hosting feasts in this home would have allowed the homeowner to concomitantly inculcate notions of his membership within the upper classes of Jewish society while strengthening ideas about his elevated social status vis-à-vis fellow residents of Khirbet Qana.

\[114\] C. Thomas McCollough, personal communication, November 12, 2012.

\[115\] See *supra* n. 105.
3.2.5 Gamla in Gaulanitis

The evidence from Gamla in Gaulanitis is somewhat different from that found in Galilee. After Gamla was destroyed during the Great Revolt against Rome, the site was largely undisturbed for centuries. Excavations there have unearthed remains that mostly date from the late second century B.C.E. to approximately 70 C.E. The most abundant evidence, which comes from approximately the end of the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., includes several agricultural installations, *miqva’ot*, chalkstone vessels, loom weights, shops, a basilica, and a synagogue.\(^{116}\) During this period, classical orders of columns were used to decorate some of the homes and shops, as well as the synagogue and basilica.\(^{117}\) Like Yodefat and Khirbet Qana, the site exhibits many simple, unadorned homes, but there are also at least three imposing domiciles. Only two of the larger homes, both located in the western quarter of Gamla, have been excavated enough to allow us to propose the main functions of some of their rooms.

One partly excavated home featured a nicely decorated anteroom and dining room located off a central courtyard. The anteroom (3 x 6.5 meters) was entered through a wide (2.2 meters) arched doorway. From the anteroom, one entered a *triclinium*-styled room (4.5 x 6.5 meters) through a doorway centrally located on its short wall. This room’s floor was


covered in gray plaster. The room was also decorated with finely crafted stuccoed moldings in the same style as those found in the dining rooms of Herod’s palaces at Jericho, Herodium, and Masada as well as the dining rooms in the Middle Complex and Palatial Complex in Jerusalem and in the rural villa at Khirbet El-Muraq. Significantly, the triclinium is the only room from the portions of the home thus far excavated that has any decorations.

The second home, which appears to have had three stories, has been more extensively excavated. Its outer walls delimited an interior space of 15 x 28 meters that contained several rooms. A cellar (identified by a number of storage jars) and kitchen (identified by two tabuns, basalt grinders, cooking ware, and animal bones) have been discovered at the level of the first floor in the southern portion. The existence of rooms above the cellar and kitchen is evident from the eleven corbels around these rooms. Extant remains of the second story are found approximately two meters above and just north of the cellar and kitchen. There, a corridor running the width of much of the interior of the home has been uncovered. This corridor appears to have separated southern rooms on the second floor (the remains of which no longer exist) from what appears to be the home’s andron. The suggested dining room was square (4 x 4 meters) and entered through an off-centered doorway from the corridor. This


119 Yoav Farhi, “Stucco Decorations From the Western Quarter,” in Gamla II, 182.


121 Ibid., 79–80.
room had a nicely plastered floor and was decorated with vegetal-designed frescoes as well as stuccoed moldings in the same fashion as the *triclinium* described above.\textsuperscript{122}

Significantly, fragments of interior decoration are found throughout the site but these two rooms are the most intensively decorated rooms excavated to date at Gamla.\textsuperscript{123} The fine decoration of the *andron* comports with the dining ware found in it. Excavations of this room have revealed four fragments of at least two different kinds of finely crafted imported serving plates.\textsuperscript{124} Some drinking vessels imitating luxurious Roman pottery forms have also been found near this room.\textsuperscript{125} Some fragments of imported Italian pans and lids and locally made imitations have also been discovered nearby.\textsuperscript{126} Unfortunately, not as much is known about the ceramic assemblage from the house with the *triclinium*. Excavators from the initial expedition at Gamla did not keep many of the pottery sherds they found; instead, they kept only special finds and complete vessels in the areas they had excavated.\textsuperscript{127} The home with the *triclinium* was within one of these areas. We cannot know, therefore, whether the owner(s) of this home also possessed fine imported ware.

Although one house contained a room designed as a long-room or *triclinium* and the other house contained an *andron*, both would have accommodated several reclining couches

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Farhi, “Stucco Decorations,” 178, 185.}
\footnote{Ibid., 185–86.}
\footnote{Berlin, *Gamla I*, 112.}
\footnote{Ibid., 152.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{For further discussion, see Berlin, *Gamla I*, 3–4.}
\end{footnotes}
so meals could be shared in typical Greco-Roman fashion. The rooms’ designs suggest that the homeowners employed these Greco-Roman dining practices in order to showcase a particular cultural elitism associated with these practices. In addition, the available evidence for interior decoration at Gamla suggests that the decoration of each dining room surpassed the other rooms within these homes (as well as any other structures on the site). This evidence indicates the significance of feasting for these homeowners in establishing and maintaining their social status. The fine ware excavated from the andron (some of which was imported) also allows us to confidently assert that meals served in this room were meant to display the homeowner’s status vis-à-vis their guests.

Significantly, Josephus reports that some wealthy Jews who owned villages adjoined to Gamla also had immediate family members who lived in Gamla (War 4.84; Life 46-47, 61). These residents, according to the same accounts from Josephus, also had close ties to the elite in Jerusalem and Rome. We do not know whether these homes belonged to those identified by Josephus, but it is likely that they were owned by individuals with similar socio-economic and political connections. We can say, at the very least, that feasts held within the above two domiciles would have been a particularly powerful way for these homeowners to inculcate notions of their class membership with those living in Jerusalem, the elite or sub-elite residing in the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, and the towns of Yodefat and Khirbet Qana. At the same time, these homeowners’ feasts likely functioned to solidify ideas about their own elevated status vis-à-vis the majority of Gamla’s poorer residents in addition to most of those who lived in the region. These differential statuses, which were at least in part concretized through feasts, did not go unnoticed by other Jews in region. Indeed, the daily
practices intended to maintain the status of Gamla’s wealthy citizens appear to have had unintended consequences as the Great Revolt came to a head. Josephus reports as Jews in the region were gaining ground in the region, a rebel leader by the name of Joseph “persuaded some of the principal men (πρωτοι) in Gamla to revolt from the king [Agrippa]…, while others they forced into service. And for those that would not submit, they killed” (*Life* 185).

### 3.3 Conclusion

The significance of feasting in Jewish society can be traced back at least to the Israelite period. The evidence provided above focuses on the practices and functions of feasts specific to the mid- to late-Second Temple period. Understanding Jewish practices in this period is important in light of the larger context of the rise and spread of Greek and Roman culture throughout the Mediterranean as well as many of the socio-economic and political upheavals in the region. Analyses of Jewish domestic feasting practices at this time demonstrate that the tables of many Jewish elites were sites where they negotiated their positions within a fluctuating socio-political environment. On the level of regional and even imperial politics, feasts hosted by the Jewish ruling class played a significant role in managing relationships of power and authority.

In Jerusalem, by the end of the third century B.C.E., expensive imported wine and dining vessels from Greek islands as well as Athens quickly replaced locally produced wine and tableware. These items were used by Jerusalemites at their domestic feasts as they jockeyed for their positions within the upper echelons of society now controlled by the Seleucids. At virtually the same time, Ben Sira instructs his readership among the priestly class and scribes on the how to maintain their social status and honor at symposia in
Jerusalem. Shortly after the Hasmoneans revolted against Antiochus IV, they too used feasting symbols, such as their golden chalices and silver plates, as they increasingly established their autonomy within the region’s political structure. The next generation of Hasmoneans continued to use the festive landscape to maintain their roles as the sole leaders of the Jewish people. Herod, for his part, excelled at displays of largesse and benefaction at his feasts in order to accrue imperial and local political capital.

By the first century B.C.E., the use of symbols of wealth, prestige, and cultural elitism in domestic feasting are apparent in homes from places as diverse as the cosmopolitan city of Jerusalem and the small Galilean town of Yodefat. Archaeological evidence of triclinia and andrones at Jericho, Jerusalem, Khirbet El-Muraq, Khirbet Qana, and Gamla demonstrates a desire to display the luxury and prestige associated with reclining diners. The use of Greco-Roman decorative techniques in the dining rooms of homes within Judea, Galilee, and Gaulanitis also displayed homeowners’ elite tastes. In addition, the evidence for Jewish domestic feasts also suggests that some Jews chose to use economic surpluses as a way to solidify hierarchical relationships and/or to build alliances within a highly stratified social milieu.
4. Feasts and the Social Order in the Jewish Domestic Sphere (post-70–ca. Third Century C.E.)

In 70 C.E. the Roman army destroyed the Temple, Jerusalem, and decimated many towns and cities in Palestine. Following the Great Revolt, Roman presence in Palestine grew exponentially as they built roads for the movement of an increased number of Roman troops, imposed civic and religious institutions on cities and towns, and transformed the urban and rural landscape through the construction of monumental structures. Despite (or because of) Rome’s increased presence, some Jews took up arms against Rome once again during the years 132–136 C.E. under the leadership of Bar Kokhba. They hoped to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and restore the land of Palestine to Jewish sovereignty. The Bar Kokhba Revolt also failed, leaving much of Judea reduced to ruins. After the second revolt, Rome emphatically reasserted its hegemony over Palestine and the Jewish people in number of policies and symbolic gestures. Perhaps the most strident claim of Rome’s authority over the land and people of the Jews was made in the construction of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, renaming the city Aelia Capitolina, and banning Jews from residing in their holy city.

The failure of both revolts had far-reaching consequences for Jews spiritually, institutionally, and psychologically. Not only were many Jews uprooted from their homes, they were forced to develop Jewish practices and beliefs without the centralizing institution of the Temple. The foundations for the renewal of Jewish life, however, had already been laid.

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long before the first century C.E. While Jerusalem and the Temple were undoubtedly central to Jewish identity, a number of practices had become increasingly important for the Jewish people from the later Second Temple period forward. Reading from the Torah, synagogue worship activities (e.g., reading from Scripture, sermons, prayers), and observing dietary laws and related purity regulations were among some of the most significant practices that could continue without the Temple and its sacrificial system.²

Additionally, domestic feasts continued to provide Jewish communities with a means to solidify socio-religious structures after the Great Revolt. The continued significance of domestic feasts for establishing and maintaining the social order is evidenced in early rabbinic sources (as we will see below). Yet archaeologists—especially those who have examined the material remains from towns and villages in Roman Palestine—have by and large neglected to systematically collect and interpret the evidence indicative of domestic feasts conducted during this period. The most complete material evidence for Jewish domestic feasts following the Great Revolt to the end of the third century C.E. comes from the city of Sepphoris. The current chapter will thus provide an analysis of the archaeological remains for feasts held within homes at Sepphoris before examining the more abundant textual evidence preserved in the early rabbinic corpus. The archaeological evidence from Sepphoris along with early rabbinic texts demonstrate that Jewish domestic feasts continued to function quite similarly to those convened by Jews well before 70 C.E.

4.1 Sephoris

After the Great Revolt many Jews relocated to the north in Galilee, to nearby areas in Gaulanitis, as well as to the Diaspora where there were already a number of Jewish communities.³ Residents in Galilee appear to have largely abstained from participating in the Bar Kokhba Revolt, leading to further demographic shifts to the region during the turmoil that engulfed Judea during 132-136 C.E.⁴ Perhaps few cities in Galilee were as significant for the reconstitution of the Jewish people as the city of Sephoris, due in no small part to the pacifistic/pragmatic gestures of the city’s residents during the Great Revolt and their refusal to participate in the Bar Kokhba Revolt.⁵ As the latter revolt came to an end, the city was renamed Diocaesarea in honor of Zeus and Caesar during the time of Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161 C.E).⁶ It also became adorned with architectural features representative of the


⁴ For demographic shifts after the Bar Kokhba revolt, see Leibner, *Settlement and History*. There is a virtual lack of archaeological evidence for Galilee’s participation in the Bar Kokhba revolt. For the limited evidence, see Hanan Eshel, “The Bar Kokhba Revolt,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 421–25.

⁵ During the apex of the Great Revolt, for example, Josephus chides the residents of Sephoris for their pro-Roman stance and their failure to protect the many villages that surrounded it (*Life* 346). Archaeological evidence supports Sephoreans’ pro-Roman stance as mentioned by Josephus. Jewish residents of Sephoris minted coins in the year 68 C.E. incised with a Greek inscription that translates “In the time of Vespasian, EireNOPOLIS, Neronias-Sephoris.” Mentioning the name of the general (and soon-to-be emperor) Vespasian, designating Sephoris as the “City of Peace” (Erienopolis), and renaming the city after the current emperor Nero all point to a singular conclusion: the Sephoreans wanted it to be known that they were on Rome’s side. For further discussion and references, see Meyers and Chancey, *Alexander to Constantine*, 161–64.

⁶ See further Meyers and Chancey, *Alexander to Constantine*, 303–04. Some scholars have suggested that the change of name reflects morphing of the city’s local administrative council (*boule*) morphed
prototypical Roman city. East of Sepphoris’ summit, excavations have revealed large, orthogonally aligned streets, an elaborately decorated villa, a large civic archival center or library, a forum and basilica, a Roman Capitoline temple and temenos, along with a number of shops attached to the main street.\(^7\) At approximately the same time, a mid-sized theater (with enough space for forty-five hundred souls) was built just to the northwest of the lower city.\(^8\)

Despite the transformation of Sepphoris into an archetypal Roman city and the influx of gentiles (as evidenced by the Roman temple and temenos), many Jews continued to flourish there. Material remains on the western summit above and to the west of the lower


city attest to the growth and relative affluence of the city’s Jewish population. While Jews continuously inhabited the western summit from the late second century B.C.E. until 363 C.E., Jews enlarged the homes in this area primarily during the early second century C.E. up to, but mainly in the Middle to Late Roman periods. The Jewish identity of the inhabitants of the western summit from this period is signified by the near complete absence of pig bones, the presence of more than twenty-five *miqva’ot*, chalkstone vessels, some small discus lamps decorated with *menorot*, and incense shovels symbolizing the Jewish priestly class and/or the Temple’s sacrificial system. A few discus lamps with erotic images as well as two miniature statues of Prometheus and Pan were also excavated from one (possibly two homes) on the western summit. Given the overwhelming evidence for Jewish occupation of this quarter, it seems likely that the erotic images on the lamps and statuettes demonstrate that at least some Jews were comfortable with figural images and possessing three dimensional representations of Greek gods. In the end, the aggrandizement of the homes and wide variety of small finds from the western summit speak both to the Jewish inhabitants’ general increase in wealth and

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their ability to thrive as Jews while the city was transformed into an religio-ethnic mixed Roman city.

4.1.1 Feasting at Sepphoris after the Great Revolt

As I argued in Chapter 3, by the beginning of the first century C.E., the western summit of Sepphoris boasted at least one home with a dining room that incorporated Greco-Roman decorative motifs while fine imported Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) was found throughout the site. This home and several others on the summit were continuously remodeled from the second century until 363 C.E., however, making the task of delineating the form and function of individual rooms – including dining rooms – from the second to the fourth century C.E. nearly impossible. We also lack mosaics dating to this period that might help us determine if any of these rooms were designed as *triclinia.* Nevertheless, multiple fragments of Eastern Sigillata A indicate that this fine ware continued to be used through the third century C.E. The use of ESA during domestic feasts, both before and following the Revolt, would have helped Jews living on the western summit of Sepphoris to signify their wealth as well as their distinct styles and tastes vis-à-vis those who were less well off living in other parts of Sepphoris or in the surrounding countryside. Using ESA while hosting feasts for members of different households on the summit would have concomitantly displayed, at the very least, a shared class membership. Other feasting practices may very well have been

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11 Indeed, the houses are devoid of any mosaics until the fourth century C.E. Ben G. Gordon, personal communication, October 12, 2014. See also, Meyers and Chancey, *Alexander to Constantine,* 313 n. 41. Meyers, Meyers, and Gordon, eds., *The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Western Summit* (forthcoming).

employed by those living on the western summit to establish and maintain asymmetrical relationships within their community as well. As we will see below, rabbinic sources contain dicta for establishing and maintaining differential relationships within their communities, and it may be significant that some of these sources were compiled in Sepphoris. This being said, we do not currently have archaeological evidence for such practices from this area of the western summit.

The apparent shared class membership reified through the feasts convened by those Jews living on the western summit, however, would have been differentiated from the feasts hosted by at least one other homeowner living in the same area. During the early third century C.E., a large home was built on the eastern edge of the western summit (Fig. 6). Measuring 23 x 48 meters, this home is by far the largest domicile located in the area. In addition, it was furnished with a finely executed mosaic pavement that clearly delineates a Pi-shaped arrangement of a large triclinium measuring 9.2 x 6.9 meters.13 The central panel of the triclinium’s mosaic depicts a drinking contest between Dionysos and Herakles. In addition, many of the fifteen surrounding panels portray aspects of Dionysos’ role as the god of feasting, carousing, and fertility.14 The Dionysian-themed mosaic of the home’s triclinium

13 Eric Meyers, Ehud Netzer, and Carol Meyers, “A Mansion in the Sepphoris Acropolis and Its Splendid Mosaic,” Qadmoniot 21 (1988): 87-92 (Hebrew); Rina Talgam and Zeev Weiss, The Mosaics of the House of Dionysos at Sepphoris, Qedem 44 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004). It should be noted that two other homes located in the lower city share many of the same basic architectural features of the House of Dionysos. These two homes also had large, Pi-shaped triclinia exhibited by their T-shaped mosaics. One home is called “The House of Orpheus” because an image of this mythical Greek musician occupies most of the vertical panel of the triclinium’s T-shaped mosaic. See Zeev Weiss, “The House of Orpheus: Another Villa from the Late Roman Period in Sepphoris,” Qadmoniot 36 (2003): 94–101 (Hebrew).

14 Talgam and Weiss, House of Dionysos, 8–12, 1-106; See further, Meyers and Chancey, Alexander to Constantine, 306–14; and Eric M. Meyers, “Roman Sepphoris in Light of New Archaeological
has led scholars to call the home the “House of Dionysos.” Finally, we must also note that the House of Dionysos’ architectural plan resembles the typical Roman *domus*: a home with a peristyle courtyard situated between the entrance and *triclinium*, with ancillary rooms closely surrounding both of these larger rooms.\(^\text{15}\)

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Figure 7: The House of Dionysos (Courtesy of the Sepphoris archaeological expedition, The Hebrew University)

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Unfortunately, lacking from this home are familiar Jewish identity markers like those found in the homes located to its west, though full publication of all the finds might prove otherwise. The fact that the House of Dionysos is situated so close to the Jewish inhabited western summit, however, may suggest that the home’s owner was one of the more prominent Jewish citizens of the area. As Zeev Weiss argues, the choice to build the home so close to the Jewish quarter and away from the lower city may demonstrate a conscious decision to be close to fellow Jews.\textsuperscript{16} Weiss has gone so far as to claim that Rabbi Judah I (the Patriarch and the compiler and editor of the Mishnah) owned the home since he was the most influential Jewish citizen living in Sepphoris when it was constructed.\textsuperscript{17} Rina Talgam, however, argues that the mosaic’s depiction of Greek mythological scenes is so finely executed that gentiles built the house for gentiles.\textsuperscript{18} Yet the existence of such finely executed iconography does not necessarily mean that the owner was a gentile.\textsuperscript{19} The mosaic’s images may simply reflect the owner’s attraction to some elements of Greco-Roman culture in the same way the lamps decorated with figural images and statuettes of Greek gods typically

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\textsuperscript{17} Weiss, \textit{House of Dionysos}, 129–32.
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\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 128.
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\textsuperscript{19} Meyers and Chancey (\textit{Alexander to Constantine}, 312) note that “we need not conclude that whoever sponsored the mosaic was necessarily as informed about the Dionysos cult and myth as was the designer himself. Such themes were popular throughout the Roman World and are most appropriate in the context in which we have found them.” For Jews’ use of art in antiquity, often infused with Greek and/or Roman themes, see Lee I. Levine, \textit{Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity: Historical Contexts of Jewish Art} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); and Steven Fine, \textit{Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See further, Kalman P. Bland, \textit{The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–12.
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associated with non-Jews might have appealed to some Jewish residents of the western summit.

If we can identify the owner of the House of Dionysos as Jewish, then we would have evidence for at least one wealthy Jew living in Sepphoris who fully adopted the bodily comportment and decorative motifs intricately linked with Greco-Roman feasts. And while the feasts convened within the home of this particularly affluent Jewish resident (if indeed he was Jewish) could have generated at least a sense of communality, the feasts would have also functioned to markedly differentiate the host from his Jewish neighbors living on the summit. Dining guests would have instantly become cognizant of the homeowner’s superior wealth and stature as they entered the grand structure, one that far surpasses the size of any other home on the summit. The homeowner’s singular status and his particular cultural tastes would have been greatly accentuated in the minds of his guests once the repasts began. He would have had them recline in typical Greco-Roman fashion and gaze upon his beautifully crafted Dionysian-themed mosaic in the center of the home’s large triclinium. Feasts convened within the House of Dionysos by a Jewish aristocrat would have ultimately functioned as a way for him to reify his social stature while exemplifying his comfort with many elements of Greco-Roman culture so prevalent at Sepphoris.

It is more difficult to assess the effect of feasts convened within the House of Dionysos on Jews if we imagine that a Roman official or some other wealthy gentile owned the home. There is little reason to doubt that at least some Jews would have attended feasts in

\[20\] Whether or not other Jews living on the western summit during this time period also reclined during their feasts cannot be determined, but we know that they would not have done so in such a large room with such refined artistic embellishments. On the lack of mosaic pavements within the other homes on the western summit, see supra n. 11.
the House of Dionysos regardless if a gentile or a Jew hosted them. Even the early rabbis were aware that Jews ate and drank with non-Jews (e.g., *m. ‘Abodah Zarah* 5:5; *t. ‘Abodah Zarah* 4:6). If Jews attended feasts in the House of Dionysos hosted by a gentile, a whole range of relationships could have been negotiated between the gentile host and his Jewish guests as they dined. Yet fully determining what these relationships would have looked like is severely hampered by the fact that we cannot reconstruct how the host conducted his feasts. Did he, for example, offer the same amount of food and drink to his Jewish guests, was it kosher, and/or did he assign particular locations according to his guests’ social status? While we cannot answer these questions, we can assume that such feasts would have provided the gentile host (if he was indeed a gentile) with an opportunity to establish and maintain his elevated status vis-à-vis his Jewish guests.

4.1.1.1 Discussion

The material evidence from Sepphoris postdating the Great Revolt suggests that some Jewish homeowners living on the western summit continued to use feasts as a way, at the very least, to reinforce notions of their shared class membership similarly to those Jews

\[\text{21} \quad 
\text{M. ‘Avod. Zar. 5:5, for example, states: ‘[If a Jew] was eating with [a gentile] at the same table, and [the Jew] put a bottle [of wine] on the table and a bottle on a side-table, and [the Jew] left it and went out–what is on the table is forbidden [for the Jew], but what is on the side table is permitted.’ The reason the wine on the table is forbidden to the Jew is because the gentile may have offered a libation from the wine to an idol while the Jew left the room. In any case, it seems likely that this proscription arose due to questions that Jews within rabbinic circles had regarding what one was to do when dining with gentiles. In *t. ‘Avod. Zar. 4:6*, we read that R. Shimon ben Elazar denounced all Jews who lived outside of Israel as idolaters because they attended the wedding banquets of non-Jews. David M. Freidenreich (“Foreign Food: Restrictions on the Food of Members of Other Religions in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law” [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2006], 174) argues that though *t. ‘Avod. Zar. 4:6* specifically refers to diaspora Jews, “the logic of this assertion applies equally with the Land of Israel, where a Jew might also receive a wedding invitation from a gentile neighbor or choose to attend such a celebration.” In any case, R. Shimon ben Elazar’s denunciation of those who attended a gentile’s wedding banquet suggests that he was aware that Jews in fact did so.} \]
living at the same location prior to the Revolt. The House of Dionysos, located on the eastern edge of the western summit, provides further evidence for feasts. Yet the festive landscape of the House of Dionysos demonstrates that feasts held within its confines were qualitatively different from those held by other residents of the western summit – the constitutive elements of this landscape were incontrovertibly derived from Greco-Roman culture. Moreover, whether a Jew or a gentile owned the home, feasts held within its triclinium would have functioned as a way to differentiate the homeowner’s status and class membership from the rest of the Jewish population on the western summit, while also proclaiming his comfort with many features of Greco-Roman culture.

Before continuing to the following sections, it is worth noting that some rabbinic texts demonstrate an acquaintance with the basic features of private domiciles like those of the House of Dionysos. In T. ‘Erub. 5:8, for example, we read:

In the case of five associations [who observed the Sabbath in one building], and part of them was in side rooms and part of them was in upper chambers, their triclinium (׳ניולג) [functions] like a courtyard in relation to [its surrounding] houses [for the purpose of eruv].

T. ‘Erub. 5:8 seems to describe several rooms surrounding a triclinium where each association met to eat on the Sabbath. Similar descriptions are found in other rabbinic texts as well.22 These texts thus describe building plans that are consistent with the general layout of the House of Dionysos. Though Rabbi Judah compiled many of these texts in Sepphoris in the beginning of the third century C.E., the traditions and sayings often appear to have originated elsewhere and may be dated to different periods.23 Thus, these textual sources

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22 m. ‘Erub. 6:6; m. Mid. 1.6; and Sifre Deut 29; y. B. Bat. 9.3, 16d; and y. Ketub. 4.7, 28d. See further, Klein, “Torah in Triclinia,” 347–48.
suggest that more homes like these existed in towns and cities frequented by the rabbis. Knowledge of such private domiciles as well as triclinia also suggests familiarity with the *basic* form and function of Greco-Roman feasts.

### 4.2 The Early Rabbis and Domestic Feasts

Admittedly, the archaeological evidence is limited to the point that it becomes difficult to draw concrete conclusions about Jewish domestic feasting practices in Palestine during this time period, yet we are not without further evidence. The Mishnah, Tosefta, and some early *midrashim*, each redacted during the third century C.E. Roman Palestine, provide data that can help us reconstruct the form and role of feasting practices within at least some Jewish homes. On the one hand, these texts provide a good amount of information concerning the cultural milieu and *realia* of the rabbinic tradents. On the other hand, early rabbinic texts were certainly collated in order to help cultivate a particular Jewish identity. As Jordan Rosenblum notes, a rabbinic prescription or proscription “is not empty rhetoric, but rather is an attempt to craft a bundled set of social activities – a practice – that constructs, in part, a discrete identity…In short, [rabbinic] *texts prescribe practices; practices index*

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24 See the collection of essays in Steven Fine and Aaron Koller, eds., *Talmud De-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).
While early rabbinic texts might provide insights into actual daily practices, they certainly provide a window into the early rabbis’ attempts to define particular practices that were or were not acceptable to create a distinct Jewish identity.

Conclusions drawn about domestic feasting practices derived from rabbinic texts, however, do not necessarily denote the dining habits of the broader non-rabbinic Jewish population. The texts themselves appear primarily intended for rabbinic communities. These communities were most often composed of rabbinic households, both the actual family of the rabbis (e.g., their wives and children and extended family) and individuals consisting of slaves and rabbinic students. Thus, while the tannaitic sources discussed below concerning feasting practices might refer to meal practices conducted by Jews outside rabbinic circles in the second or third century, they very likely refer to either actual rabbinic household practices or the rabbis’ attempt to cultivate such practices primarily within their own rabbinic networks. The rabbinic discussions about feasting practices, therefore, demonstrate first and foremost how the rabbis fostered social cohesion and Jewish identity while simultaneously reifying social hierarchies within their own communities.

25 Jordan Rosenblum, Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5-6 [emphasis original].


28 For a discussion on the debate between the “insular” vs. “outward” goals of the rabbis, see esp. Stuart S. Miller, Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in Talmud Yerushalmi (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1-24.
4.2.1 Contextualizing Rabbinic Feasts

The texts of the early rabbis (tannaim) living in Palestine after the destruction of the Temple through the beginning of the third century C.E. show that they directly or indirectly interacted with gentiles and non-rabbinic Jews as well as many of the social institutions built around them.²⁹ One of the effects of these interactions can be seen in their fluency with the “grammar” of the Greco–Roman feast. The tannaitic loci classici for evidence that the rabbis could draw on this “grammar” at least on occasion are m. Pesahim 10 and t. Pisha 10, which appear to be the earliest sources to carefully delineate the Passover Seder. Scholars examining these texts invariably note that the descriptions of the Passover Seder in m. Pesahim 10 and t. Pisha 10 emphasize the importance of reclining, the question-and-answer format, the motif of instruction, and the etymological word games on the food. Moreover, these texts show that the basic form of the Seder paralleled that of the tripartite division of Greco-Roman feast.³⁰ After reclining and washing, the Seder began with a glass of wine so


that feasting participants may recite blessings over the day and wine. The meal proper
followed. The meal then ended with a type of libation ceremony, which included a cup of
wine for the grace after meal (the birkat hamazon) and another cup of wine associated with
recitations of the Hallel. M. Pesahim 10:8 then states “that the Passover meal does not end
with afikomen” (אפיקומן = Greek ἐπίκωμον or “after-dinner revelry”).31 Instead, according to
t. Pisha 10:12, the feast concluded with a period of discussions on halakhot about the
Passover, or “table talk”. The dictum in m. Pesahim 10:8 may have simultaneously
functioned to solemnize the Seder and to differentiate it from the typical Greco-Roman
practice of drinking during the symposium proper, as well as other rabbinic feasts (see
discussion below). Nevertheless, the conclusion of the Seder still resembled the symposium
proper of some Greek and Roman philosophical circles in so far as the Seder concluded with
a period of table talk.32

The specific features of the Passover Seder as described in the Mishnah and Tosefta
(e.g., the occasion it celebrated, the food consumed during the meal, the concluding hymns)
temple and may have influenced their choice of the features to be developed from the ancient heritage.
It is therefore not surprising that rabbinic circles may have drawn upon feast practices to enrich what
they were doing” (62).

31 On the Hebrew transliteration of afikomen from the Greek, see Saul Lieberman, Ha-Yerushalmi
Kiphshuto: A Commentary Based on Manuscripts of the Yerushalmi (2nd ed.; New York: Jewish
Theological Seminary of America, 1995), 521.

32 On the desire by some philosophical circles that sobriety be maintained during the symposium
proper, see esp. Philip A. Stadter, “Drinking, Table Talk, and Plutarch’s Contemporaries” in Plutarco,
Dioniso y el Vino. Actas del VI Simposio Español sobre Plutarco (Cádiz, 14–16 de Mayo 1998) (ed.
J.G. Montes Cala; Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 1999), 481-99; and Josefa Fernández Zambudio,
“Moderación en el simposio en Sobre la vida y poesía de Homero de Pseudo-Plutarco,” in Symposium
and Philanthropia in Plutarch (ed. José Ribeiro Ferreira, et al.; Coimbra, Portugal: Centro de Estudos
Clásicos e Humanísticos da Universidad de Coimbra, 2010), 31-36.
certainly made this feast a unique Jewish household event. Yet these particular practices do not mean that the rabbis did not use the basic form of the Greco-Roman feast. Indeed, the basic features associated with the Passover Seder and the Greco-Roman feast appear to be normative rabbinic feasting practices. *T. Berakot* 4:8 states:

> What is the order of a meal? Guests come in and sit down on top of benches and on chairs until all [guests] have gathered. [After] they have all come in, and they [the servants] have given them [water] for their hands, every one of them washes one hand. When [the servants] mixed for them a cup [of wine], each one recites a benediction [for the wine] himself. [When] they have brought them appetizers, each one makes a blessing [over them] himself. [When] they have risen [from the chairs and benches] and reclined, and [the servants] have given them water, even though [each person] has washed one hand, he washes both of his hands. When [the servants] have mixed for them another cup [of wine], even though [each one] has recited a blessing over the first [cup], he recites a blessing over the second [cup of wine]. [When] they bring in front of them [more] appetizers, even though [each person] has recited a blessing over the first [set of appetizers], he recites a blessing over the second [set of appetizers], but [this time] one [person] recites a blessing for all of them. [A person] who comes after three appetizers [have been served] does not have permission to enter [the dining hall].

*T. Berakot* 4:8’s description of the beginning of Jewish meals mirrors very closely the basic descriptions of the first portion of the Greco-Roman feast found in many non-Jewish texts.33

Guests enter the dining room, wash their hands, and partake of appetizers and mixed wine while reciting blessings over the wine and food.34 When all of the diners have arrived, they proceed to recline while consuming another round of appetizers and more wine.

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33 Rosenblum (*Food and Identity*, 31–32) notes that the order of the meal described in *t. Ber.* 4:8 would have been understood by non-Jews as a typical Greco-Roman banquet. While I generally agree with Rosenblum, it must be noted that this text only describes the beginning portion of a typical banquet.

34 On gentiles’ practice of washing hands before the meal, see Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie Frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996), 47–49; Elaine Fantham, “Purification in Ancient Rome,” in *Rome, Pollution, and Propriety: Dirt, Disease, and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity* (ed. Mark Bradley and Kenneth Stow; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 59–66. Inscriptions also suggest that some groups were fastidious in their ritual cleansing rites throughout their sacrificial banquets. Several associational inscriptions refer to “ritual-purifiers” (καταλουστικοι). See, e.g., *TAM* V 490 (Lydia, Asia Minor, 159/160 C.E.); *TAM* V 351 (Lydia, Asia Minor, 161/162 C.E.).
Many of the rites that followed the meal proper are also explicated in tractate *Berakot*. Immediately after the meal proper, like many Greco-Roman feasts described in non-Jewish literature, we read that hands were to be washed and the floors were swept (*m. Berakot 8:4*). The rabbis also stipulated that Jews were to recite a blessing after the meal with a glass of wine (*m Berakot 6:6; 7:1, 3; 8:8; t. Berakot 5:14*), which was functionally similar to the typical Greco-Roman libation ceremony. Other tannaitic sources speak of rabbis reclining around the table and discussing various facets of halakhah on the Sabbath (e.g., *t. Berakot* 5:2; *t. Yom Tov* 2:12) and during wedding feasts (e.g., *Sifre Deuteronomy* 38). *T. Sukkah* 1:9 records a debate between R. Eliezer and R. Yochanan b. Illai about providing shade for a sukkah while they reclined in the latter’s hut during the feast of Sukkoth. *M. Sanhedrin* 2:4 prescribes how mourners are to recline at funeral meals, and *Sifre Deuteronomy* 53 provides a parable about Israel being happy with its divinely ordained inheritance, where they are called *bene mesiba* (lit. “sons of reclining”). All these texts give the impression that the *fundamental* features of feasts as described by the rabbis—reclining, religious singing, and a benediction—are common to both Jewish and Gentile feasts.

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35 On the removal of tables and sweeping of floors, see, e.g., Athenaeus, *Deipn.*, 15.669f–686c.


37 On the early rabbinic prescriptions that require that Jews consume meals within the sukkah, see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 170–173.
the meal proper, a libation ceremony, table talk in the form of halakhah—were not affected by
the occasions they were meant to celebrate.38 Even some of the more particular aspects of
feasts as recorded in the tannaitic texts (e.g., washing of the hands, the recitation of blessings
before, during, and after the meal proper) find parallels in Greek and Latin literature and
epigraphy about non-Jewish feasts convened for a number of different celebrations.39

The elements of the performance of Jewish feasts as recorded by the rabbis discussed
thus far, therefore, are quite similar to the features typical to the Greco-Roman feast. Even
throughout most of the year, except on Passover, the items on the rabbis’ tables were likely
similar to the items on the tables of non-Jews. Rabbinic feasts appear to have consisted of
appetizers, mixed wine, and dishes based on the Mediterranean triad (wine, bread, and olive
oil) common to many Greeks and Romans.40 Even the lack of pork on the tables of members
of rabbinic circles would not necessarily indicate that Jewish meals were being consumed, for
pork does not appear to have been a common part of the diets of gentiles or Jews inhabiting
Roman Palestine until the fourth century.41

38 See further, Rosenblum, Food and Identity, 31–32; and Dennis E. Smith, From Symposium to
147.

39 See supra n. 34.

40 See Rosenblum, Food and Identity, 17–22. Though we do not know the extent of Plutarch’s
knowledge of actual Jewish feasting practices, it is worth noting that he thought there were some
connection between Jewish Sabbath feasting traditions and those of Greeks of his own day. He writes:
“I believe that even the feast of the Sabbath is not completely unrelated to Dionysus...The Jews
themselves testify to a connection with Dionysus when they keep the Sabbath by inviting each other to
drink and to enjoy wine” (Quaest. Conv. 6.2).

41 See Justin Lev-Tov, “‘Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed...?’ A Dietary Perspective on
Hellenistic and Roman Influence in Palestine,” in Zeichen aus Text und Stein: Studien auf dem Weg zu
einer Archäologie des Neuen Testaments (ed. Stefan Alkier and Jürgen Zangenberg; Tübingen:
Francke Verlag), 420-446. On the rise of pork consumption at Sepphoris during the fourth century
Other foods appear to have been prepared according to Greek customs. We read in *Berakot* 4:11 about נַפְשֶׁךָ, for example, which seems to be a transliteration of the Greek word κολλίκιος, a type of roll or coarse bread.42 *T. Berakot* 4:4 refers to דִּין, a transliteration of δρόγγαμα, which was a type of dried fruit or sweetmeat typically eaten after the main course at some Greco-Roman banquets.43 Many of the food items on the Jewish table, at least according to our rabbinic texts, would not seem to have readily distinguished Jewish meals from those conducted by gentiles. Additionally, *m. Berakot* 8:6 proscribes Jews from saying blessings over the gentile-made spices burnt after the meal. The rabbinic dictum, however, strongly suggests that gentile-produced aromatic spices were present at some Jewish meals.44 We may conclude, therefore, that many of the performances, sites, and aromas of rabbinic feasts were not that distinctive from those that constituted the feasts convened by many non-Jews.

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C.E., see Billy Grantham, “A Zooarchaeological Model for the Study of Ethnic Complexity at Sepphoris” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1996).


43 Ibid, 1695, s.v. דִּין.

44 The presence of aromatic spices produced by gentiles might appear surprising since the rabbis proscribed Jews from deriving benefit from many gentile-produced objects or spaces. Yet the rabbis issued many rulings to mitigate absolute rejection of objects, including food items, and spaces made by gentiles. Indeed, symbolic gestures—such as not blessing the gentile aromatic spices—could function to allow Jews to enjoy gentile-produced items while not giving them any special status. Many of these rulings are laid out in *m. ‘Abod. Zar*. For stipulations regarding the use of gentile spices in particular, see Deborah A. Green, *The Aroma of Righteousness: Scent and Seduction in Rabbinic Life and Literature* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011), 36-37, 139-40, 142, 144, 217 n.71, 220 n. 118.
4.2.2 Rabbinic Feasts and Communality

The similarities between the performance of rabbinic feasts and those held by many non-Jews, however, should not overshadow their significant disparities. A close observer of a rabbinic meal may have noticed that a rabbi and those Jews dining with him avoided non-kosher foods, which, by the rabbinic period, also included several food items produced by gentiles (e.g., wine, vinegar, foods mixed with wine or vinegar, meat sacrificed to idols, grape skins and seeds, cheese, milk, and bread). They may have also noticed the peculiar nature of some tableware thought by many Jews to be impervious to ritual impurity (e.g., chalkstone vessels) as well as some lamps and jars decorated with images of menorahs. Yet perhaps the most telling signs that rabbinic feasts were indeed being conducted would have been if participants were to listen to what was said during and after the meal. As we will presently see, the rabbis attempted to fashion blessings and prescribe rules for table talk that were not only devoted to God but were also entrenched in Scripture. Primarily through the recitation of special blessings and their particular form of table talk, the rabbis distinguished their

45 See recent discussions in David C. Kraemer, Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages (London: Routledge), 25-72; Rosenblum, Food and Identity, 35-102.

dining experience from those of gentiles and even Jews outside their communities, allowing Jews following their dicta to reify social cohesion and their Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{47}

\subsection*{4.2.2.1 Rabbinic Blessings}

Our richest descriptions of blessings offered during the consumption of food and drink come from tractate \textit{Berakot} (“Blessings”) of the Mishnah and Tosefta. We begin with \textit{t. Berakot} 4:1, which states: “A person should not taste anything until he blesses, for it says ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’” (Ps. 24:1).\textsuperscript{48} The Tosefta thus establishes that God is to be acknowledged with a blessing whenever food is consumed, and justifies this prescription with Psalm 24:1. However, because any number of food items may have been present at a single meal, some rabbis argued that blessings were only to be said over those species described in Deut 8:8 – wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (\textit{m. Berakot} 6:4; \textit{t. Berakot} 4:6–7, 13). In addition, to acknowledge the differences among food item, the rabbis prescribed different concluding blessing formulae depending upon the type of food about to be eaten. For example, one describes God as “Creator of the fruit of the vine” before drinking wine and “He who brings forth bread from the earth” before eating bread or certain grain products (\textit{m. Berakot} 6:1). Not all foods fit so neatly into these seven species however, leading some rabbis to creatively categorize some prepared foods in ways that conformed to those listed in the biblical text (\textit{t. Berakot} 4:6–7, 11–14; 5:30).

Furthermore, one need not recite a blessing over every food item before consuming it. We

\footnote{See further, Kraemer, \textit{Jewish Eating}, 5, 77–80.}

\footnote{For a comparison and discussion of the biblical references in both \textit{m. Berakot} and \textit{t. Berakot}, see Alberdina Houtman, \textit{Mishnah and Tosefta: A Synoptic Comparison of the Tractates Berakhot and Shebiit} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 120–28.}
learn that some foods exempt others from further blessings—e.g., bread exempts minor dishes and salted dishes exempt bread (*m. Berakot* 6:4–7; *t. Berakot* 4:15).

Finally, the *birkat hamazon* was to be recited after the meal (*m. Berakot* 6:6). The three benedictions that formed the *birkat hamazon* were based on an interpretation of Deut 8:10, which states: “You shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given to you.” The *birkat hamazon* was augmented to mark meals with special religious significance, such as the Sabbath, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkoth, Passover, Shavuot and Rosh Chodesh (*t. Berakot*, 3:12). On one level, reciting the blessings prescribed by the rabbis could have functioned as a way to transform the acts of eating and drinking into moments of deep reflection into God’s presence in their lives and his past works in creating and ordering the world. We may, however, question if such reflection actually occurred even for those following early rabbinic precepts. Yet as Tzvee Zahavy argues, utterance of prayers before and after the meal at least demarcated the consumption of food and drink, marking these acts off as “special moments of ritual.”

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The concept of the power and importance that these blessings in *Berakot* hold becomes more complex and demonstrative when one recognizes that the above blessings were to be said by everyone, whether they were dining alone or with others. Thus, while rabbinic blessings may have marked Jewish meals as “special,” not all of them were necessarily feasts – events centered on the *communal* consumption of food and drink consciously differentiated from everyday meals. Yet the rabbis appear to have distinguished between quotidian meals and feasts (including religious feasts) based on different performative aspects. *M. Berakot* 6:6 states: “If one was sitting to eat, then each one blesses for himself; if one reclined, one blesses for them all.”

David C. Kraemer helps elucidate the distinction being made in *M. Berakot* 6:6:

The word translated as “recline” is the rabbinic Hebrew word for partaking a formal meal in the fashion of a Greco-Roman symposium (it is the same word that appears in the “Four Questions” of Passover when the child asks “Why on this night do we all recline?”). The distinction being drawn here is thus between a formal and an informal meal, between a *real* meal and the casual taking of food. In the one case, even several individuals eating at the same time are assumed to be eating alone. In the other case, they have formed a collective, a fellowship.

Reclining for the rabbis thus carried a specific and imagistic denotation: that of a group of people socially engaged with each other through the food and drink placed before them, i.e., feasting. In the formal setting of a feast, denoted by reclining, the act of blessing shifts from an individual’s acknowledgment of God’s presence to a public performance that unites the community.

51 Zahavy, Studies in Jewish Prayer, 37.

52 *T. Berakot* 4:8 makes a similar distinction on how one is to say a blessing over wine and other blessings depending on whether they are sitting or reclining.

53 Kraemer, *Jewish Eating*, 80 (emphasis original).
This communality would have been particularly enriched with the public utterance of the invitation and recitation of the *birkat hamazon* (the blessing after the meal). While the *birkat hamazon* must be said even if one eats alone, *m. Berakot* 7:1 states if there were at least three Jews present then one of them must invite the others to say the *birkat hamazon*. *M. Berakot* 7:3 imagines how a group of three, then ten, then ultimately ten thousand utters a slightly different invitation (*zimmun*) to the group: “Let us bless;” “Bless;” “Let us bless our God.” The prescribed invitations could have functioned to concomitantly call the dining group together while audibly recognizing the different size of that community based on the formula used for the invitation. These after-feast blessing practices generally mirror the emphasis on communality in the blessings over food and drink during the meal proper described in tractate *m. Berakot* 6:6. Like the audible recitation of blessings over food and drink during the meal as diners reclined, the invitation and the public recitation of the *birkat hamazon* could have fully enacted a conscious recognition that individuals have in fact dined together as a community of Jews. 

Referring to the blessing over wine associated with the recitation of the *birkat hamazon* on the Sabbath, the final pericope of *m. Berakot* 8:8 states: “They respond ‘Amen’ after a Jew [literally, an Israelite] recites a blessing [over the wine], but they do not respond

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*Catherine M. Bell (Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 110), argues: “Ritual practices never define anything except in terms of the expedient relationships that ritualization itself establishes among things, thereby manipulating the meaning of things by manipulating their relationships.” The invitation and the public recitation of the *birkat hamazon* seems to have been such a practice in so far as they influenced the meaning of the relationships between diners.
'Amen' until the Samaritan recites the entire blessing [over the wine]."\(^{55}\) *M. Berakot* 8:8 requires that, when a Samaritan recites the blessing over wine, Jews wait until he finishes the recitation before saying “Amen” to make sure he has offered the proper blessing. Samaritans, who were assigned an ambiguous status by the rabbis, ranked somewhere between Jew and gentile.\(^{56}\) They might dine with Jews, according to this text, but their socio-religious status within the dining group would have been suspect until a blessing was properly recited. The reservation of the “Amen” functions as a tool in determining socio-religious status at the feast, demarcating at least three levels of status: one for Jews not accountable to this test of recitation, one for Samaritans who passed the test, and one for those who did not. The inability of a Samaritan to properly say the blessing over the wine would have marked him as “Other” within the dining community. Thus, the prescriptions and proscriptions in *m. Berakot* 8:8 about when and when not to say “Amen” would have provided Jews with opportunities to verbally and publically recognize those who did or did not belong to their community.

### 4.2.2.2 Rabbinic Table Talk

The socio-religious function of rabbinic dicta concerning blessings during feasts appears to mirror that of their prescriptions concerning proper table talk. On the most basic level, rabbinic table talk closely resembles the common Greco-Roman practice of convening conversations during or after the meal proper.\(^{57}\) The rabbis, however, transformed this

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\(^{55}\) *t. Berakot* 5:21 states if a non-Jew recites a blessing in the name of God, Jews are to respond “Amen.” It is not clear, however, if the text is related to the blessings over wine or meal contexts. Cf. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 99 n. 230.

common feature of Greco-Roman feasts into a distinctly Jewish practice. *M. Pesahim* 10:5, for example, states:

Rabban Gamaliel said: “Whoever did not declare these three matters related to the Passover did not fulfill his ritual obligation: Passover, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Passover—because God passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. Unleavened bread—because our ancestors were redeemed in Egypt. Bitter herbs—because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt.”

As several scholars have noted, Rabban Gamaliel’s statements serve as a way to replace the actual Passover sacrifice that took place in the Temple with words about the feast.\(^{58}\) Baruch M. Bokser summarizes that the table talk stipulated in the *m. Pesahim* 10 did not require Jews to “admit to any discontinuity with the past…they could still observe the celebration. They could even experience the divine in a more intimate fashion…Accordingly, from this perspective the Mishnah and the etiquette it sets out made some degree of personal and social renewal possible.”\(^{59}\) Table talk as stipulated in *m. Pesahim* 10 could have stimulated, at the very least, feelings of each dining member’s connection with God’s acts in their shared history. Rabbinic table talk on Passover could, therefore, have created for Jews a bond with the past in addition to a sense of communality with their fellow Jews who shared these experiences with them during the feast.


\(^{59}\) Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, 84.
The rabbis did not limit table talk to Passover. The interpretation of biblical texts was, according to the rabbis, to take place whenever three had dined together. *M. ’Avot* 3:3 states:

R. Simeon said: “Three who ate over one table and did not speak words of Torah are as though they ate from sacrifices to dead [idols]. As it is said, ‘All tables are full of vomit and filth without God (יָפַה) [Is. 28:8].’ But three who ate over a single table and spoke words of Torah, it is as if they ate at the table of God, Blessed-Be-He. For it is written, ‘And he said to me, this is the table that is before the Lord [Ez. 41:22].’”

The function of saying “words of Torah,” according to Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, would have placed “natural human activities of convivial eating and drinking in a supernatural, mythic context.”60 He continues by stating that words of Torah were “abbreviated myths, ritual shorthand to evoke the longer biblical myths of creation, revelation, and redemption—of the past, present, and future kingdom of God.”61 The act of speaking words of Torah invokes a historical imagined community and invites participants to engage in a social negotiation and reification of Jewish identity.

### 4.2.3 Rabbinic Feasts and Hierarchies

As previously described, rabbinic feasts shared many similarities with the basic form of the Greco-Roman feast. Yet rabbinic feasts may have also been differentiated from non-Jewish feasts by the food consumed and tableware used. As seen in the above section, fashioning specific blessings and prescribing a particular kind of table talk were exceptionally powerful means for the rabbis to inculcate a sense of social cohesion and Jewish identity. The rabbis, however, were also keenly aware that the table was an important site for maintaining

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60 Brumberg-Kraus, “Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?” See further, Susan Marks, “Rabbinic Grace after Meals and Social Formation.”

61 Brumberg-Kraus, “Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?”
hierarchy. The following section focuses on rabbinic dicta about or descriptions of several commonplace dining practices—but symbolically significant activities—that would have established and maintained different social and religious statuses within rabbinic communities.

4.2.3.1 Maintaining Hierarchy

For many Greeks and Romans, reclining in a particular location relative to other dining members signified one’s social standing relative to others at the same feast. *T. Berakot* 5:5 shows that the rabbis were familiar with the significance of such practices:

> What is the order of reclining (הדבש)…When there are three couches, the most prominent person (לודג) reclines at the head of the middle [couch], the one second to him [in importance] reclines above (הלאה) him and the third [in importance] reclines below him, and they continue to order [the reclining] in this manner.\(^62\)

First, the reference to three couches seems to speak about how diners are to be situated within a *triclinium*.\(^63\) In addition, as noted by Saul Lieberman and Daniel Sperber, the use of the words here translated as “the head,” “middle,” “above,” and “below” equate to the Latin terms *summus*, *medius*, *supra*, and *infra*, which are used in Roman sources to describe the same reclining positions.\(^64\) Furthermore, *T. Berakot* 5:5 is embedded in a series of prescriptions related to Jewish dining practices. Seth Schwartz and Gil P. Klein have argued

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\(^{62}\) Schwartz ("No Dialogue at the Symposium," 208) translates לודג once as “leader” and once as “greatest.” Daniel Sperber (*A Commentary on Derech ’Ereẓ Zuta* [Ramat-Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990], 67) translates the word as “the elder person.” Hezser (*Social Structure*, 305), citing this text, states “in questions of etiquette, the hierarchy envisaged [with the use of the word gadōl] can either be of age or a hierarchy of scholarly or economic or political distinction.” In any case, as Hezser notes, לודג in this context speaks about hierarchy.

\(^{63}\) See further, Klein, “Torah in *Triclinia*,” 336.

that the context in which we find t. Berakot 5:5 suggests that the text was intended to regulate Roman convivial practice of reclining in particular locations to denote one’s status at feasts as Jewish religious law.\(^{65}\)

While an individual’s different social rank would have been signified by where they reclined at the rabbis’ feasts, at least they all reclined at the table together. Those who could not assume this dining posture at all, however, would have been placed at an even lower social station than those who reclined at the lowest position upon the *triclinium*.

Significantly, conspicuously absent from the tannaitic corpus is any explicit reference to women reclining at feasts. Jordan Rosenblum has recently suggested that there might be one possible exception, however.\(^ {66}\) As he notes, the verb עָבַס in its conjugations that mean “to recline (on a dining couch)” is only used once in the entire tannaitic corpus when a woman is present in the same portion of the text.\(^ {67}\) In *t. Yevamot* 13:1, a woman objects to a betrothal made on her behalf while she was a minor; when she has finished, “R. Yehudah said: ‘If there are guests reclining, and she said to them: I do not want So-and-So to be my husband—there is no protest greater than this!’”\(^ {68}\) Despite the impression that this is a case of a Jewish woman reclining at a commensal gathering, as Rosenblum notes, the text simply states that guests are reclining and she spoke to them. He also observes that in the *baraita* of the

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\(^ {68}\) Cited in Rosenblum, “Inclined to Decline,” 344.
Babylonian Talmud, the same woman is in fact described as standing and serving the guests.69 Rosenblum also demonstrates that the other evidence from later amoraic texts of women reclining is ambiguous at best.70 He concludes that “sometimes an absence of evidence can be evidence for absence. Perhaps women are almost never described as reclining because the Tannaim (and, it would seem, the Amoraim as well) preferred to reserve that dining posture exclusively for men, most likely for reasons of maintaining a gendered hierarchy.”71

If Rosenblum is correct, it seems that women within rabbinic spheres sat or stood during feasts, signifying their marginal status vis-à-vis reclining men. Women’s dining posture would have also required them to be physically positioned outside the dining room’s central space occupied by the *triclinium*’s reclining couches. Cynthia M. Baker has recently argued that, “as for Palestinian rabbinic texts there are no halakhic traditions remotely associated with domestic seclusion of women or the construction of ‘men’s quarters’ and ‘women’s quarters’ in houses, and no terminology or unambiguous images associated with such practices in the aggadic traditions.”72 While I generally agree with Baker’s argument, early rabbinic rulings (and corresponding silence) concerning the dining practices of women, though not evidence for “domestic seclusion,” suggests that rabbis attempted to keep women

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 344–48.
71 Ibid., 349.
at the margins of domestic feasts. This appears to have been the case for other members outside the social circles of the rabbis and their students.73

Rosenblum discounts evidence from *m. Pesahim* 10:1 (= *t. Pisha* 10:1), which states: “On the eve of Passover, close to *minḥah*, a person should not eat until it gets dark. Even a poor person (*בִּיבְשָׁה*) in Israel should not eat until reclining.” Rosenblum questions the common gender-neutral translation of *בִּיבְשָׁה*, suggesting that the masculine-singular form of the word may have been intended to refer to a *poor man*. To support his supposition, Rosenblum cites *y. Pesahim* 10:1 (37b) that shows even the *amoraim* were unsure as to whether *m. Pesahim* 10:1’s statement included women.74 The text states, “R. Yose came before R. Simon [and asked]: ‘Even a slave before his master? Even a wife before her husband?’ He [R. Simon] said to him: ‘Great man, until here I have heard.’” Even if *m. Pesahim* 10:1’s prescription intended for women to recline at Passover, contradictory textual evidence about Passover feasts puts into question this exceptional gesture towards a modicum of gender egalitarianism.

*M. Pesahim* 8:3 states that all Jews are to register with an association/fellowship (הַבְּהֵר) on Passover.75 This idea appears to be based on the Exodus 12:3-4, which states:

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73 The rabbis do prescribe that, if necessary, a servant may join them at the end of the meal proper in order to meet the minimum requirement for a prayer quorum (3) for the *birchat hamazon* (*m. Ber.* 7:1; *t. Ber.* 5:11). The fact that this seems to only arise out of necessity suggests it was not common for servants to eat with the rabbis. Some texts even speak of houses with many rooms that could be used by a number of different groups at the same time. See, e.g., *m. ‘Erub.* 6:6.


75 See further, *m. Pes.* 7.3, 13; 8.7; 9.8-10.
“Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.”

“...”

That is, all Jews, like all Israelites, are to share in the Passover meal with each other. These associations need not be rabbinic associations, indicated by the fact that *m. Pesahim* 7:3 differentiates between an association of priests and an association of Israelites consuming the Passover meal. Regardless, *m. Pesahim* 8:7 proscribes women, slaves, and minors from joining associations on Passover. The Tosefta adds that women, slaves, and minors are not allowed to join associations because their presence could lead to indecency (*t. Pisha* 8:6). These statements are odd at least with regard to minors, since the rabbis stipulate that sons are to ask their fathers about the importance of Passover while at the Seder (*m. Pesahim* 10:4). Furthermore, we read in *t. Pisha* 10:7 that fathers are to help their sons and daughters properly recite the *Hallel* during the Passover meal.

Some commentators have puzzled over the discrepancies between the proscription against women, slaves, and minors joining associations on Passover and the statements made in *m. Pesahim* 10:4 and *t. Pisha* 10:7. Judith Wegner has suggested, following the interpretations in the Bavli and the work of Maimonides, that the tannaitic texts only intended

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to proscribe associations consisting of any *combination* of women, slaves, and children.\textsuperscript{78} And since children are present in what appear to be associations consisting of men (their fathers), Wegner concludes that the tannaitic rabbis may have sanctioned associations of women alone.\textsuperscript{79} By the same logic, it would also seem theoretically possible for women to join rabbinic associations as long as minors *and* slaves were not present. Similarly, slaves could join rabbinic associations as long as women and minors were not present. Wegner, however, hesitates to draw conclusions from the ambiguous text as reinterpreted in later commentaries.\textsuperscript{80} The early rabbinic dicta regarding the participation of women in rabbinic seders are thus unclear. Taken together with the absence of any explicit reference to women reclining with rabbis, we begin to get a picture that the rabbis had little interest in allowing women to fully participate in rabbinic feasts.

This idea becomes even clearer when we return to the pericopae from tractate *Berakot* from the Mishnah and Tosefta describing the order in which guests were served wine during feasts.\textsuperscript{81} In *t. Berakot* 5:7, we read: “What is the order [in which the servants] pour the


\textsuperscript{79} Wegner, *Chattel or Person?,* 75. This interpretation is also attractive since it does not seem to be contradicted by other somewhat ambiguous rabbinic stipulations concerning the activities of women on Passover. *M. Pesahim* 8:1 (= *t. Pisha* 8:1), for example, states that during her first year of marriage a woman is required to dine on either the Passover meal made by her husband or on the meal prepared by her father. This text, however, does not state that the husband or father of the woman were present when the latter actually ate her meal. Elsewhere we read that women were required to prepare *maṣah* (*m. Pesahim* 3:4), but the tannaitic texts only mention men eating *maṣah* and bitter herbs (*m. Pesahim* 2:5–6). Again, men and women are not described as being together at the same meal.

\textsuperscript{80} Wegner, *Chattel or Person?,* 239 n. 217.

\textsuperscript{81} Greek and Latin sources demonstrate that the order in which one received food and drink and how much each diner received signified social standing. See further, Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Feast in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 30-31.
cup of wine? During the meal, they begin with the most prominent person (לדם). The Tosefta stipulates that the order in which diners were to be served wine during the meal was to accord with each diner’s relative social status. *T. Berakot 5:7* continues: “After the meal, they begin [serving cups of wine] with the person who will invite others [to say the *birkat hamazon*]. If he wanted to give honor to his master (לזר) or to someone greater than him [by letting them invite others to say the *birkat hamazon*], he may do so.” In the second pericope of *t. Berakot 5:7*, we learn that the one who invites others to recite the *birkat hamazon* receives the first cup of wine after the meal. Serving this person first seems to have been intended to signify an elevated socio-religious stature that one gains by having the role of inviting others to recite the grace after meals.

The order in which one received wine was thus employed by the rabbis as one way to reinforce hierarchy around the table. Who constituted the upper level of this hierarchy is somewhat vague. Some of who these people were not, however, is clear at least with regard to the wine served during the *birkat hamazon*. *T. Berakot 5:15* states that every Jew must recite the *birkat hamazon*. *M. Berakot 3:3* explicitly obligates women, slaves, and minors to say the grace after meals, while *t. Berakot 5:18* exempts them from the requirement to do so. Their exemption in the latter text, of course, does not disqualify them from reciting the blessing. More significantly, however, *m. Berakot 7:2* states that women, slaves, and minors may not invite others to say the grace after meals. The rabbis thus denied the honor

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associated with the role of inviting others to recite the *birkat hamazon* to women, slaves, and minors, reifying notions of their lower social status vis-à-vis Jewish men.\(^8^3\) *M. Berakot* 7:2’s ruling also means that women, slaves, and minors were not to receive the first cup of wine after the meal, a symbol of status and agency in the community.\(^8^4\)

Standing in the background in these texts, as well as several early rabbinic texts, is the servant who attended to those at their feasts. Yet the rabbis leave traces concerning how servants might have fared within a hierarchy that took shape around the table. *T. Berakot* 5:29 begins with a dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel concerning which hands diners are to hold a cup of wine and perfumed oil brought to them after the meal, in addition to the order in which they recite the blessing over the wine and oil. Beit Shammai argues that diners should hold the cup of wine in their right hand and the oil in their left. They should then recite a blessing over the wine followed by the blessing over the perfumed oil. Beit Hillel argues that diners should hold the wine in their left hand and the oil in their right, saying a blessing over the oil first. Then, according to Beit Hillel, diners are to “smear [the perfumed oil] on the head of the server (שמוח).” Lest we imagine that this is some kind of anointing ritual, the text continues by stipulating that diners wipe excess oil on a wall if their server is a disciple of the sages (לך ו赎回). The reason for wiping the perfumed oil on the

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\(^8^4\) Kraemer (*Jewish Eating*, 80) argues that they may have been denied the role of inviting others to recite the *birkat hamazon* because the rabbis perceived it as a public rite; an activity that took place within a realm that the rabbis typically felt was to be under the auspices of free adult males.
wall in the second instance, we are told, is because it is not praiseworthy for the student to go out in public perfumed.\textsuperscript{85} 

*T. Berakot* 5:29 dramatically demonstrates how the rabbis might use practices associated with feasts to affirm social and religious hierarchies.\textsuperscript{86} The text delineates between three different types of people: simple servants, servants who are students of a sage, and those being served (i.e., the rabbis themselves). Simple servants were degraded by being smeared with perfumed oil so the servant would, at least in the minds of the rabbis, be shown contempt in public. It is difficult to imagine that this form of humiliation served any other purpose than to reinforce these servants’ subordination to the rabbis and to the students who might have also been present. In contrast, the servants who were students of a sage were afforded some respect for their devotion to their rabbis and Torah study by not being smeared with perfumed oil. At the same time, these students still served their teachers during feasts. Their service at the table may have partially blurred distinctions between the student and

\textsuperscript{85} The Tosefta does not itself explain why it would be unseemly to smell of perfume in public. We do know that some Romans believed going out in public perfumed was considered to be effeminate and indicative of homosexual tendencies, an idea shared by Josephus. See, e.g., Pliny, *Nat.*, 12 [trans. Jones]; and Gellius, *Noct. Att.*, 6:2, 5 [trans. Rolfe]; and Josephus, *J.W.* 4.561–562. Significantly, these are the same reasons *b. Berakot* 43b’s offers in its commentary on this text. On this passage from the Bavli and the positive relationship between smelling bad and Torah learning often depicted in early rabbinic literature, see esp. Green, *The Aroma of Righteousness*, 38.

\textsuperscript{86} It is important to note that we do not know if the servant (\textit{vmv}) alluded to in *t. Berakot* 5:29 was a slave (\textit{dbo}) or a hired worker. On the difficulty differentiating between the words \textit{vmv} and \textit{dbo} in the Mishnah, see Flesher, *Oxen, Women, or Citizens?*, 47–48. Presumably if the rabbis meant to speak about a slave, they would have used the word \textit{dbo}. Indeed, we do read about a slave (\textit{dbo}) serving the rabbis their meals in some tannaitic texts. See, e.g., *m. Sukkah* 2:1 and *m. Git.* 3:5. On several aspects of slaves in the rabbinic household, see Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*.

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others who were inferior to the rabbis themselves (e.g., simple servants, slaves, women, minors). 87

4.3 Conclusion

The period examined in this chapter was one of tremendous political and social upheaval for Jews. The Great Revolt and Bar Kokhba rebellion against Roman rule had resulted in destruction of the Second Temple, exile of Jews from their holy city of Jerusalem, and Romanization of what was left of the promised land of Judea. Within this war-torn and desecrated society, groups of Jews migrated north and found ways to maintain social order within their communities. Feasts played a central role in this process. Archaeological evidence from Sepphoris demonstrates that many Jews living on the city’s western summit used distinctive imported dining ware (ESA) to display, at the very least, a shared class membership with their neighbors. The triclinium in the House of Dionysos, its mosaic’s decorations, and the imposing domicile itself, however, likely functioned to differentiate the status and class membership of the homeowner (whether a Jew or gentile) from the rest of the Jewish population on the western summit. Feasting within the house’s confines also provided the host with the opportunity to proclaim his comfort with the ethos and ambience associated with Greco-Roman dining culture.

The interpretations of the physical evidence for feasts from the western summit of Sepphoris have been supplemented by early rabbinic texts. The analyses of tannaitic sources provided insights into some modes of feasting that played a dynamic role in the establishment

87 Alexei Sivertsev (Private Households and Public Politics in 3rd-5th Century Jewish Palestine [Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2002], 125–28) has shown that students’ service to their rabbis is often presented similarly to the service of slaves in many other areas of life as well. On the rabbis’ attempts to equate women, slaves, and minors with one another, see Hezser, Jewish Slavery, 69–82.
and maintenance of the social order at least among rabbinic communities. Within the
framework of the Greco-Roman symposium, rabbis seemed to have employed techniques that
both built social cohesion among Jews as well as reified a social hierarchy within their
communities. There is little doubt that the rabbis’ development of dietary restrictions and
related purity rites, which were observed by Jews prior to 70 C.E., were central to the rabbis’
efforts in affirming boundaries between “Them” and “Others” in an increasingly diverse
cultural environment. The rabbis’ dicta concerning public recitations of blessings before,
during, and after the meal, in addition to their prescriptions about saying “words of Torah” at
the table were also deployed as the rabbis attempted to reify a sense of Jewish identity and
communal bonds. At the same time, other feasting practices were utilized by the rabbis to
buttress hierarchical relationships within their communities. The significance of reclining, the
order of serving wine, the active role in inviting others to bless, and an especially degrading
treatment of servants were powerful socio-religious tools used by rabbis in the public arena
of domestic feasting performance to bolster their elevated status vis-à-vis fellow community
members.
5. Feasts and the Social Order in Synagogues in the Diaspora (ca. Second Century B.C.E.—Third Century C.E.)

The evidence from the Jewish domestic spheres in Palestine before and after the Great Revolt suggests that at least some Jews adopted many of the formal elements of the typical Greco-Roman feast. Regardless of the form, the social functions of Jewish domestic feasts were essentially the same as the functions of feasts convened by Israelites prior to the introduction of Greek or Roman customs. Jewish domestic feasts functioned as arenas for the establishment and maintenance of the social order, allowing individuals and groups to create a sense of communality while also solidifying notions of hierarchies. Expensive imported tableware and wine, elaborately decorated dining rooms, etiquette (e.g., reclining, who was served by whom, relative locations between hosts and guests), prayers, blessings, and table talk were variously employed by at least some Jews during their domestic feasts to build a sense of social cohesion while preserving stratification within their communities. Domestic feasts were essential in shaping the social contours of early Jewish groups.

The following three chapters move beyond the domestic sphere by examining the evidence for feasting practices conducted within synagogues in the Diaspora and Palestine. Synagogues were locations for Sabbath meetings where scripture was read, homilies were given, and prayers were made. They were also sites for study, for political gatherings, legal proceedings and meting out punishments, a place to collect and distribute charity, and significantly, often to hold feasts. We do not know to what extent these various activities overlapped. Were funds for charity, for example, collected after worship activities or at other times completely unrelated to worship? In any case, synagogues were first and foremost communal institutions constituted by individuals from multiple households typically residing
in the same towns or neighborhoods in larger urban centers. Though the evidence is not always clear, synagogues by and large appear to have been attended by individuals with diverse social, economic, political, and religious statuses. Given the communal nature of synagogues on the one hand, and the diverse statuses of their individual members on the other, feasts held within synagogues would have functioned as central arenas for the establishment and maintenance of the social order for communities within particular locales. An examination of the evidence for synagogue feasts will thus supplement the conclusions regarding Jewish domestic feasts examined in the previous chapters.

5.1 Feasts in Diaspora Synagogues ca. Second Century B.C.E. - 70 C.E.

The current chapter examines the evidence for the social functions of feasts convened within Diaspora synagogues. Before turning to this evidence, it is important to note that several scholars have recently argued that Jewish synagogues in the Diaspora should be understood as a type of Greco-Roman association.1 Jews in the Diaspora used common

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associational terms to refer to their own groups and the places they gathered, such as ἁρχισυνάγωγος (head of the synagogue), πρεσβύτερος (elder of the synagogue), ιερέας (priest), πατήρ (father), and μήτηρ (mother). Evidence for Jewish synagogue buildings strongly suggests that Jews living throughout the Diaspora also utilized the architectural techniques employed by associations within a given locale. Finally, Jews in the Diaspora gathered together within their synagogues for the same basic reasons as the members of other associations. Just like non-Jews who met in their associations, Jews came together in their synagogues to worship, collect communal funds, receive local patronage and benefaction from Jews and non-Jews, to participate in intra-governing activities, and often to convene feasts.

The close similarities between associations found throughout the Mediterranean and Jewish synagogues in the Diaspora, as well as early Christian communities, has led John M.G. Barclay to suggest:


Richardson, *Building Jewish*, 207-23; Richardson (207) also argues that the similarity between early Jewish synagogues and non-Jewish association buildings in a particular locale speaks to a shared basic set of practices. He bases this argument on the premise that the activities and customs of any given social unit inevitably govern how their buildings are constructed.

In general, I believe the broad comparative work between ‘associations’ in antiquity should continue to include Jews and Christians in its remit, and, carefully conducted, could help shed fresh light on what made them socially significant…Placing them in the context of ‘associations’ may help provide some additional interpretative keys which could help explain how these remarkable phenomena came to establish themselves, with such significant historical results.6

Barclay’s suggestion that we examine the development of Jewish synagogues in the Diaspora within the context of associations can be applied more specifically to the study of the social functions of synagogue feasts. In addition to examining the social functions of feasts conducted within Diaspora synagogues in their own right, the following chapter also examines the role of synagogue feasts with an eye towards associational feasting practices. Carefully doing so may offer further insights into how synagogue feasts were one of the central practices that led to the establishment and maintenance of the social order for different Jewish communities living throughout the Diaspora.

5.1.1 Egypt

I begin my investigation into the social functions of synagogue feasts by examining the sources from Egypt, for Diaspora synagogues appear to have first developed here. Fragmented inscriptions on plaques from Egypt dated to as early as the third century B.C.E. mention several Jewish προσευχή.7 Many of these inscriptions refer to the benefactors or leaders of these Jewish establishments in formulaic language that has been found in the


inscriptions of many other Egyptian associations. The earliest evidence to suggest that Jews organized feasts within their προσευχή in Egypt comes from a papyrus dating to the first century B.C.E. that records contributions offered by members of a Jewish προσευχή for feasts (πόσεις) in Apollinopolis Magna. As noted by the editors of the text, these contributions appear to have been for Passover celebrations held within the προσευχή because the dates mentioned would correspond to the Passover feast days. If this attribution is accurate, we may assert that the Passover feast held by members of the προσευχή in Apollinopolis Magna established communitas (i.e., an intense sense of commonality and a heightened feeling of togetherness). Coming together at the table to celebrate a seminal moment in their shared past, moreover, would have generated a collective memory that would, in turn, contribute to the maintenance and solidification of Jewish identity.

At the same time, the parchment may offer further insights into the hierarchical organization of the members of the προσευχή as well as how the leading members might have obtained some prestige within the Jewish community as they prepared their feasts. Only

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8 William Horbury and David Noy, Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), passim. Binder (Into the Temple Courts, 242–43) notes that these and many other Jewish inscriptions from Egypt suggest a high degree of social stratification among individual members of each Egyptian προσευχή.


the top portion of the papyrus has survived. From this fragment, names of four members who donated money to the feast of the Jewish group are preserved alongside the collective amount of their contributions (possibly totaling one thousand drachmae). While each individual appears to have had a title associated with their names, only two titles are preserved. One person is referred to as a “sage” (σο[φός]), possibly the Torah teacher in the προσευχή, and the second person is called a “priest” (ἱερέως). The sage and the priest were likely well-respected members of this community.

For our purposes, it is significant that other papyri of non-Jewish associations from Egypt dating to the same period list the donors who offered the greatest contributions for associational feasts first. These comparanda strongly suggest that the two unnamed individuals, the sage, and the priest of Apollinopolis Magna’s προσευχή collectively offered the largest amount of money for the feast of this Jewish community. Though it is possible that many if not all members offered something for the communal feast, contributing the greatest amount of money would have helped these four members maintain their higher social status vis-à-vis fellow members. These honors were also intended to perpetuate

11 On the title “sage” and its meaning from this parchment, see Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985), 162.

12 Ibid.


14 Moreover, association members (and we will see below, some members of Jewish synagogues) in Egypt and further abroad who received benefits from others were expected to publically acknowledge their benefactors in some form. They might have done so during their meetings and/or feasts by erecting statues or inscriptions recognizing their members’ contributions or bestowing on their greatest donors other symbols of gratitude (e.g., special titles, wreaths, the best dining location, and/or more food and drink). See Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 148–51.
further benefactions from those who already contributed to the group and to encourage others to do the same. It is possible, therefore, that the members of the προσευχή at Apollinopolis Magna honored their community’s benefactors in similar fashion for similar ends. While the feast held by Jews in the προσευχή of Apollinopolis Magna created close bonds, it also appears to have provided some individuals with the opportunity to establish and/or maintain their elevated social status among the group.

Literary evidence for feasts convened by Egypt-based Jewish groups provides a similar picture concerning the social functions of their feasts. In On Drunkenness, Philo states that it is good to bring contributions (συμβολάς) to maintain membership in an association (ὄνοδος) if one does not indulge in too much alcohol or food (20–22). He then complains that some members all too often are given and take more wine and food during feasts than is necessary, and in doing so “wound, lacerate, and cut to pieces souls obedient to learning through conversations (φιλήκόους)” (23). Philo seems to be alluding to some Jewish associations participation in at least one common dining practice: the distribution of different portions of food and drink to various members of a feasting party to signify their social

15 For more on Philo’s allusions to Egyptian-based associations, see Torrey Seland, “Philo of Alexandria and the Clubs and Associations of Alexandria,” in Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World, 110–27. One account of Egyptian-based Jewish synagogue feasts in Philo is not discussed above: in Embassy to Gaius, 311–313, we read that Jewish synagogues (συναγωγαί) in Alexandria were synods (συνόδους) “not based on drunkenness and carousing to promote conspiracy…but were schools of temperance and justice.” Philo’s statement does not appear to deny that food and drink were consumed at Jewish synagogues in Alexandria; rather, Jews did so with an eye toward “temperance.” In any case, his comment is clearly apologetic, having been directed to Gaius Caesar during his visit to Rome in 40 C.E. in defense of the participation of Jews in the Alexandrian riots of 38 C.E. Moreover, his account in Embassy to Gaius contradicts what seems to be a more realistic portrayal of at least some Jewish synagogue feasts depicted in On Drunkenness. On the apologetic nature of Embassy to Gaius, see Joan E. Taylor, Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo’s ‘Therapeutae’ Reconsidered (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 39–41. For a comprehensive examination of Philo’s work and life, see esp. Adam Kamesar, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Philo (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
statuses. Philo disapproved of such practices because he believed that they impeded the ability of members to gain knowledge through conversation during an association’s gathering. In any case, Philo’s account seems to reflect feasting practices that were employed by at least some Jewish associations in Alexandria to establish and maintain social hierarchies within their communities. Yet while Philo appears to have had a severely critical view of the unequal distribution of food and drink at Jewish associational feasts, his instructions rest on the idea that his audience indeed contributed to their associational feasts despite the portions of food and drink they received. Philo’s comments may suggest that they did so because some sense of communality was generated as they shared tables with their fellow association members.

Even when Philo turns to the feasts of the Therapeutae, a Jewish ascetic group based in Upper Egypt, as an example of proper associational feasting practices, it is still evident that the performance of their feasts generated a sense of community alongside hierarchy. According to Philo, the association (συνόδος) of the Therapeutae came together on the Sabbath for a general assembly in the daytime before convening feasts in the evening (On the Contemplative Life, 36–37). He calls these feasts “sacred symposia” (ἱερός συμπόσιον) (71).

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16 For the distribution of different amounts of food and drink within associations, see AGRW 280 (Alexandria, Egypt, 5 B.C.E.); AGRW 295 (Arsinoites, Egypt, 69–58 B.C.E.); AGRW 287 (Lower Egypt, 67/64 B.C.E.); AGRW 310 (Lanuvium, Italy, 136 C.E.); AGRW 322 (Campus Martius, Rome, 153 C.E.); AGRW 8 (Attica, ca. 150 C.E.); and AGRW 22 (Attica, ca. 200 C.E.). For such practices at domestic feasts, see Martial, Ep., 1.20, 3.49, 3.60; 4.48, 6.11, 10.49 [trans. Bailey]; and Pliny, Ep. 2.6 [trans. Melmoth and Hutchinson].

They begin when the members of the Therapeutae enter their dining hall and recline on course mats according to the order “by which they have arrived at the theoretical portion of philosophy” (ἐνακμάσαντας τῷ θεωρητικῷ μέρει φιλοσοφίας) (67). He continues by noting that women dedicated to the contemplative life also recline with the group, albeit separately from the men (68). Moreover, according to Philo, the novices of the community (οἱ νέοι τῶν ἐν τῷ συντήματι) serve those more advanced in wisdom. He emphasizes that they freely choose to do so out of their love for virtue and devotion to their companions (69–72). Philo then states that the Therapeutae consume salted bread, hyssop, and water in silence during the meal (73). At the conclusion of their feasts, a “president” (πρὸεδρὸς) expounds on Scripture and answers Questions (75–80). When he has done so sufficiently, all of the members praise God by singing hymns and saying prayers together (81–83).

Notably, Philo describes the Therapeutae’s feasts in terms of the basic format of the Greco-Roman symposium (reclining, eating the meal, then “table talk”/symposium). Although these feasts take on the basic form of the symposium, they are also spartan and incontrovertibly Jewish. They are convened on the Sabbath and the table talk is defined by exposition of Torah and praise of God. Their performance would therefore facilitate the entire association’s development of a sense of communality and solidify a sense of their Jewish identity as they dined together. At the same time, hierarchy marks the Therapeutae’s feasts: members are differentially located within the dining hall based on their knowledge; women recline separately from men; and neophytes serve those who are more learned.

Philo’s description of the Therapeutae’s feasts supplies our richest description of how one Jewish association in Egypt convened feasts to establish and maintain socio-religious order within its community.
5.1.2 Delos

The earliest archaeological evidence for a building that may be identified as a Jewish synagogue comes from the prosperous merchant island of Delos, located southeast of the Greek mainland, where communities of Italians, Samaritans, Egyptians, and both Tyrians and Berytians from Syria all founded associations.18 The synagogue, which dates to the late second to first century B.C.E., appears to have been adapted from a private domicile. One of the additions to the main structure may be identified as a triclinium modeled on those found in non-Jewish association buildings built prior to the synagogue.19 For example, a similar dining hall has been found at Sarapieion A (ca. 220 B.C.E.), a house that was converted into a temple to Sarapis in which an association of Sarapis worshippers gathered for meetings, meals, and worship.20 Similar evidence comes from the meeting place of the Berytian Merchants Devoted to Poseidon (Poseidonistai) at Delos, whose foundation dates to 153 B.C.E. or earlier.21 The design of the courtyard located southwest of the merchants' meeting place appears to be a long-room-type dining room that would have accommodated several

18 Philippe Bruneau, *Recherches sur les cultes de Delos a l'epoque hellenistique eta l'epoque imperiale* (Paris: de Boccard, 1970), 457-96, 585-630. For more on how associations may have functioned to create a sense of identity for these immigrant communities, see Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 110-14.


dining couches. The Delian Jews thus likely fashioned their synagogue to accommodate practices similar to those convened by other immigrant communities in their associations on Delos; namely, worship and feasts.

With regard to the social functions of the Delian Jews’ synagogue feasts, we may confidently assert that members reclined together in typical Greco-Roman fashion like other members of other associations on the island. Simply sharing food and drink with their fellow Jewish immigrants would have allowed them to generate a sense of social cohesion. Feelings of their Jewish identity would have been further heightened as they separated themselves from other immigrant communities on Delos during their feasts, communities they likely had contact with on other occasions. We may speculate, however, that the Delian Jews also used their feasts to honor particular members of their synagogue. Significantly, we know how other associations on Delos used their feasts to signify the social status of some of their members. An inscription coupled with the Berytian merchant association’s building, for example, states that the benefactor of the association was assigned “the foremost dining couch among the rest of the members” during their sacrificial feasts. An inscription belonging to those who called themselves “The Association of the Ninth-Day Celebrators” (τὸ κοινὸν τῶν ἐναπτῶν), dating to ca. 200 B.C.E., states that their members crowned the

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23 On the likelihood of daily contacts between different communities on Delos, see esp. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 112-13; and Monica Trümper, “Where the Non-Delians Met in Delos. The Meeting-places of Foreign Associations and Ethnic Communities in Late Hellenistic Delos,” in *Political Culture in the Greek City After the Classical Age* (ed. Onno M. van Nijf, Richard Alston, and C. G. Williamson (Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2011), 49–100.

24 *IDelos* 1520 = PH63956, line 34.
society leader (ἀρχιθιασίτης) and their secretary (γραμματεύς) during at least one of their feasts.\textsuperscript{25} The feasts of the merchants and the Ninth-Day Celebrators thus functioned, in part, to reify the benefactor’s social standing vis-à-vis fellow association members. While the available evidence from the synagogue itself only allows us to conclude that the Jewish synagogue members dined with one another while reclining, the comparanda leaves open the possibility that Jews living on Delos performed similar rites during their synagogue feasts as other associations on the island in order to denote the social status of individual members within their community.

5.1.3 Berenice

While the evidence from the synagogue at Delos only allows us to confidently conclude that their feasts built social cohesion, inscriptions made by a Jewish community in Berenice (Cyrenaica), located in North Africa, demonstrate that their synagogue feasts functioned in at least two ways. One inscription dating to the end of the first century B.C.E. honors one Decimus Valerius Dionysios for his benefaction to the repairs of the Jewish community’s building.\textsuperscript{26} The inscription states that Dionysios is exempt from any further liturgies paid to the Jewish community. In addition, he is to be honored during their assemblies and the feasts held on each new moon by being crowned with an olive wreath and given a decorated wooden staff. A second inscription from the same community dating to 24–25 C.E. speaks of the decision of the same community’s nine archons, announced during the feast of Sukkoth, that one Marcus Tittius was to be honored for some unspecified

\textsuperscript{25} PHI 63714

\textsuperscript{26} AGRW 306. See further, Levine, The Ancient Synagogue, 97.
benefaction. Like Dionysios, he was to be presented with a crown made of olive branches and a decorated wooden staff at their assemblies and new moon feasts.\textsuperscript{27} Although the decorated wooden staff appears to be peculiar compared to other honorary decrees made by associations, crowning benefactors with an olive wreath crown (or crowns made of other material), as we have seen, during feasts was a common practice among associations throughout the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{28} The inscriptive evidence from Berenice thus demonstrates that Jews concomitantly honored their benefactors while signifying these individuals’ elevated status vis-à-vis some members of the community during their synagogue feasts like many other Greco-Roman associations. At the same time, the inscriptions indicate that feasts were also held on dates significant for Jews (the new moon and Sukkoth). The latter evidence indicates that the feasts held within the synagogue of Berenice also functioned to reinforce Jewish communality and identity as these Jews dined together on dates that were significant to Jews throughout the Mediterranean.

5.1.3.1 Discussion

Some Diaspora Jews by at least the first century B.C.E. were using feasts as arenas for the creation of social cohesion and order. All the evidence above strongly suggests that a sense of communality would have been created among Jews living in the Diaspora as they shared food and drink with one another within their synagogues. This sense of unity would

\textsuperscript{27} AGRW 307. See further, Levine, \textit{The Ancient Synagogue}, 101.

\textsuperscript{28} See further, e.g., AGRW 14 (Piraeus, Greece, and Macedonia, 302–299 B.C.E.); GRA I 28 = IG II\textsuperscript{2} 1314 (Piraeus, Greece, and Macedonia, 213/212 B.C.E.); AGRW 297 (Ptolemais Hermou, Fayum region, Egypt, ca. 269–246 B.C.E.); PHI 256413 (Ionia, Asia Minor, 158 B.C.E.); AGRW 287 (Psenamosis Delta region, Egypt, 67 and 64 B.C.E.); GRA I 48 (Athens, Greece, and Macedonia, 37–35 B.C.E.); GRA I 45 (Piraeus, Greece, and Macedonia, 71 B.C.E.).
have been strengthened when their feasts were held on occasions marking seminal moments in Jews’ collective history or on days holy to them. Such feasts are evidenced from the papyrus from Apollinopolis Magna, Philo’s description of the Therapeutae, and the inscriptions from Berenice. Feasts held in synagogues in the Diaspora also provided Jewish communities with the means to reify social hierarchies, as shown from Apollinopolis Magna’s papyrus, Philo’s instructions and descriptions of the Therapeutae’s feasts, possibly from the reclining benches at Delos and comparanda from other associations on the island, and the honorary ceremonies at Berenice. As we will see in the following section, these general insights tend to hold true for the members of synagogues in the Diaspora after the Great Revolt.

5.2 Feasts in Diaspora Synagogues Post-70 C.E. – ca. Third Century C.E.

Following the Great Revolt, displaced Jews from Roman Palestine contributed to the growth of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Social turbulence in the Diaspora and Palestine did not cease with the end of the Great Revolt, but instead continued with multiple uprisings by Jews in the Diaspora against gentile neighbors as well as Roman authorities, with the main theatres of disturbance concentrated in Cyrenaica, Egypt (Alexandria), and Cyprus. These revolts were followed by the unsuccessful Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 C.E in Roman Palestine. In the midst of such upheaval, any promotion of the reestablishment of


cohesion and order would have been essential. Jewish synagogues and their associated practices, including feasts, were perhaps even more important to the (re)construction of individual Jewish communities as they were before 70 C.E.

5.2.1 Stobi

At Stobi, Macedonia, excavations have revealed a Jewish synagogue dating to the second through the fourth century C.E.\(^{31}\) Although the architectural form of the synagogue is not entirely clear, several related inscriptions dating to the second or third century C.E. were found associated with the synagogue.\(^{32}\) The first is a large Greek inscription on a column that measures approximately 9.8 cm. in diameter and 248 cm. high, though the top portion is missing.\(^{33}\) The inscription on the column states that Claudius Tiberius Polycharmos, the “father (πατήρ) of the synagogue at Stobi,” added portions of his house, including his triclinium, to the Jewish community’s synagogue.\(^{34}\) First, we learn from this inscription that Jews who belonged to Stobi’s synagogue dined together in their synagogue while reclining in typical Greco-Roman fashion. While it is possible that they ordered one another on the *triclinium* according to their extant social status in accordance with Greek and Roman customs, we do not have evidence from the synagogue or comparanda from Stobi to suggest


\(^{34}\) *CIJ* I.694.
that they did so. The reclining benches in the synagogue, at the very least, demonstrate that
the Jewish synagogue members dined with one another while reclining, allowing them to
develop a sense of communality as they shared food and drink with each other. Second, the
inscription informs us that at least one of their members, Polycharmos, was a leading member
of the synagogue’s social organization. We may speculate that he reclined at the highest and
most honored position on the triclinium to mark his status and/or to commemorate his
benefaction to the community. Yet this idea, too, is conjecture.

Even if members of Stobi’s synagogue did not overtly recognize the status of
Polycharmos during their feast(s), however, the large inscription set up by Polycharmos was
very likely intended to continually remind those reclining on his former triclinium that their
dining experience was made possible by his beneficence.35 In other words, his inscription
would have informed the synagogue members that they could not enjoy the feasts in the way
that they were if it was not for Polycharmos’ munificence. Accordingly, notions of the
generosity of Polycharmos may very well have lingered in the minds of the synagogue
members as they dined, reifying ideas of his elevated status vis-à-vis fellow diners.
Polycharmos’ status may have been further substantiated during feasts by the introduction of
one inscription found on the synagogue’s fresco floor and four on the walls that may have
been a part of the triclinium itself.36 These inscriptions simply read “Polycharmos, the
father.” If these inscriptions were part of the synagogue’s dining room, the festive landscape


of the synagogue would have been permeated with notions of Polycharmos’ elevated socio-
location.

5.2.2 Ostia

The evidence from a synagogue located outside the walls of Ostia, a port city south of
Rome, depicts Jewish communal customs similar to those practiced at Stobi. This synagogue
appears to have been built from a preexisting private structure that contained a kitchen and
storage area. During the earliest phase (ca. second century C.E.), reclining benches lined
three walls of the synagogue’s main hall to form a *triclinium*. In its later phase (third through
fourth centuries C.E.), the building was monumentalized, a Torah shrine was installed, and
the reclining benches were removed from the main hall. At this time, a new dining hall with
reclining benches lining two of its walls was annexed to the building; the kitchen and storage
spaces from the earlier phase remained in use. 37

The general features of Ostia’s synagogue are similar to most of the approximately
twelve positively identified association buildings located within the city’s walls dating
between the first through the third century C.E. 38 An association of builders in Ostia (ca. early
second–third century C.E.), for example, consisted of a central room surrounded by ancillary
rooms. The central room served as a sanctuary in which rituals were performed in honor of
the guild’s patron deities. A kitchen was located in the southwestern corner and four other

37 L. Michael White, “Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic

38 Very similar architectural characteristics can be identified with at least eight other association
buildings. See *AGR* W B11–B19 for images and references to secondary literature. The actual number
of associations was very likely much higher, suggested by inscriptional evidence found in Ostia. See
55–89.
rooms on the east were *triclinia*.\(^{39}\) Evidence from Ostia’s synagogue suggests that Jews came together similarly to members of other associations found within the city walls: they performed religious rites particular to their community while reclining at meals held within the confines of their synagogue. A sense of social cohesion would have been generated as they participated in worship, as well as when the synagogue members dined with one another. Feelings of communality were likely enhanced as they performed these activities away from other associations within Ostia’s city walls.\(^{40}\)

At the same time, it is possible that the feasts convened within Ostia’s synagogue helped establish and maintain hierarchies. A sense of the Jewish community’s hierarchy may be derived from three inscriptions (ca. second through the third century C.E.) related to the synagogue at Ostia.\(^{41}\) One inscription, found within the synagogue’s remains that date to the third century, refers to one Mindius Faustus who rebuilt portions of the synagogue and commissioned the construction of an ark for the Torah from his own funds. The inscription’s customary Latin invocation reads: *pro salute Augusti* (“for the well-being of the Emperor”).\(^{42}\) The inscription demonstrates that Mindius Faustus was someone of some means and suggests

\(^{39}\) Hermansen, *Ostia*, 65-6

\(^{40}\) It should be noted that the Jews of Ostia appear to have chosen to establish their synagogue near the flowing waters of Ostia’s port for purposes of ritual cleansing, not because of any sense of rejection by non-Jews in Ostia. See Anders Runesson, “Water and Worship: Ostia and the Ritual Bath in the Diaspora Synagogue,” in *The Ancient Synagogue of Ostia and Jews of Rome* (ed. Birger Olsson, et. al; Jonsered, Sweden: Paul Aströms Förlag, 2001), 115-29.

\(^{41}\) Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 276, 278.

\(^{42}\) *JIWE* 1, 13; This formulaic salutation has been found in inscriptions linked with associations in Ostia, Rome, and further abroad. See, Harland, *Associations*, 214–28.
he was a Roman citizen.\textsuperscript{43} Two other inscriptions (ca. second—third century C.E.) were found within the city’s necropolis, one in Greek referring to a Jewish synagogue official with the term ἀρχισυνάγωγος, and another in Latin commemorating the life of a “father (\textit{pater}) of the synagogue.”\textsuperscript{44} The use of similar titles in Latin are preserved in three inscriptions linked with associations in Ostia dating to mid to late second century C.E.\textsuperscript{45}

Similarities between the architecture of the dining room of Ostia’s synagogue, the mode of indicating one’s benefaction, and the titles adopted by its officials with that of other associations in Ostia, Rome, and elsewhere suggest that other similarities existed as well.\textsuperscript{46} As we have seen, it was common for associations to honor benefactors and leading figures of their community during their feasts in a number of ways. Indeed, two inscriptions linked with associations in Ostia dating to the mid- to late-second century C.E. show that members of these communities honored the \textit{pater} of each of their associations by providing them with the best place on their respective \textit{triclinia}.\textsuperscript{47} We may conjecture that Mindius Faustus and the two leading synagogue officials were honored and/or their statuses were denoted during feasts held in Ostia’s synagogue in a similar way.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 223.
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{JIWE} 1.14. and \textit{JIWE} 1.18.
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{AGRW} 313; \textit{AGRW} 314a; and \textit{AGRW} 314b.
\item \textsuperscript{46} White ("Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia," 23-58) argues that the archaeological and other inscriptions linked with associations in Ostia dating to mid to late second century C.E. show that members of these communities honored the \textit{pater} of each of their associations by providing them with the best place on their respective \textit{triclinia}.\textsuperscript{47} We may conjecture that Mindius Faustus and the two leading synagogue officials were honored and/or their statuses were denoted during feasts held in Ostia’s synagogue in a similar way.
\item \textsuperscript{47} \textit{AGRW} 313; and \textit{AGRW} 314b.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
5.2.3 Dura-Europos

The evidence from Dura-Europos, located on the Euphrates River on the far eastern edge of the Roman Empire, tells a similar story to what has been discussed thus far. Excavations have revealed three Greco-Roman religious association meeting places, dating to the second through the third century C.E., that are connected to dining facilities and rooms for reclining (the Temple Adonis, the Temple of Zeus Theos, and the Temple of Gadde).48 Like these associations, the synagogue in Dura-Europos had a triclinium throughout its earliest phase (ca. second century C.E.). In its final phase (244–245 C.E.), the synagogue was enlarged and many of the earlier rooms were destroyed to fashion a single building with a forecourt and an assembly hall.49 In addition, the newly built main hall had three tiers of narrow benches for sitting along each of its four walls. This enlarged synagogue, which now included an adjoining house with a triclinium, may indicate a shift toward separating the feasting and worshipping spaces associated with a synagogue.50 Evidence from a small parchment may support the prevalence of synagogue feasts throughout this one’s existence; a prayer in Hebrew that appears on the parchment is very similar to the birkat hamazon recorded in contemporaneous rabbinic texts.51 Although the parchment was found in fill over


a street adjacent to the synagogue, it is possible that the text was used to aid in saying the
grace after meals within the synagogue complex, given other evidence that meals were held there.

The above data from Dura-Europos demonstrate that Jews living there constructed
their synagogue for the same basic purposes as the three religious associations dedicated to
Adonis, Zeus Theos, and Gadde: i.e., worship and for feasts. Also like the members of their
neighboring associations, Jews reclined at their feasts in typical Greco-Roman fashion.
Nevertheless, the feasts held in the synagogue must have constructed a feeling of cohesion
between the Jewish members as they shared food and drink with one another. This solidarity
would have been strengthened if the parchment with Hebrew script resembling the birkat
hamazon was used by members during their synagogue feasts. A sense of Jewish identity not
only would have been fortified as they blessed God while eating, notions of their shared
Jewishness would have been bolstered as they recited their blessings together in Hebrew, the
language of their Israelite and Jewish ancestors and the original language of their holy texts.52

At the same time, like so many other synagogues and associations, the synagogue at
Dura-Europos was hierarchically structured, a social order that may have been reified at
feasts conducted within the building. Two ceiling tiles reveal the titles of those who

51 Kraeling, et al., The Excavations at Dura-Europos, 259; and Fine, Art and Judaism in the Greco-

52 For a recent account on how the use of Hebrew in antiquity fashioned Jewish identity, see David M.
Goodblatt, Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006),
49-70. See also Seth Schwartz, “Language, Power and Identity in Ancient Palestine,” Past &
renovated the synagogue in its final phase (244-245 C.E.). An Aramaic inscription states that renovations took place during the time of “the presbuteros (elder) Samuel, the priest, son of Yedaya, the archon. Now those who stood in charge of this work [were]: Abraham [Abram] the treasurer, and Samuel.” A Greek inscription reads: “Samuel [son] of Yedaya, elder of the Jews founded [the building].” It is not clear if Yedaya the archon was alive at the time of the reconstruction of the synagogue. The inscriptions inform us at the very least that the synagogue community was led by the elder and priest Samuel, and that the reconstruction efforts of the synagogue were undertaken by him with the aide of Abraham the treasurer. We may speculate that the status and benefaction of Samuel and Abraham were recognized somehow. While the feasts convened by members of Dura-Europos’ synagogue helped solidify group cohesion as they reclined on their triclinia, they may have also functioned as a time to recognize the status and benefaction of the leading members such as Samuel and Abraham in some way.

5.2.3.1 Discussion

Although evidence for the occasions on which feasts took place at Stobi, Ostia, and Dura-Europos is lacking, the data from earlier synagogues suggest that feasts would have continued to be held to commemorate seminal moments in Jewish collective history as well as on the Sabbath. Convening such feasts would have worked to solidify social cohesion in these Jewish communities. In addition, evidence has been found at each of these synagogues

53 Translation from David Noy and Hanswulf Bloedhorn, Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis: Syria and Cyprus (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 142. Both Greek words presbuteros and archon are transliterated into Aramaic in the inscription. See further, Noy and Bloedhorn, Inscriptiones, 143-44.

54 Translation from Noy and Bloedhorn, Inscriptiones, 148.
scattered across the Roman Empire of reclining at feasts in the typical Greco-Roman fashion as well as inscriptions demarcating status for social elites in the Jewish communities. These modes of maintaining social order would have aided the larger socio-religious function of the synagogue, which was to maintain and continue Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

5.3 Conclusion

Evidence from the Diaspora demonstrates that Jewish groups, beginning in the third century B.C.E., based the structures of both their groups and their actual buildings upon contemporary Greco-Roman associational models. Nonetheless, preexisting Jewish customs were not displaced by Greco-Roman structures. Jews conducted many rites peculiar to them when they gathered together (e.g., reading Torah and praying to God). Indeed, ancient writers throughout this period often spoke of differences between groups that they still considered to be associations. For example, Aristotle refers to groups of sailors, soldiers, societies, and festal-gatherers as “associations” (κοινωνίαι). He notes, however, that sailors come together to ensure profits and soldiers gather to make war, but the latter two groups meet for pleasure (Nic. Eth. 1160a). Some six hundred years later, Athanaeus refers to the different meal practices of religious groups, brotherhoods, and priests, as well as of different philosophical schools but calls all of them “associations” (κοινωνίαι) (Deipn. 5, 185c–186a).

In fact, the inclusion of any groups’ customs within the basic structure of associations is what allowed individual groups to express their particular identities. Jews came together to worship, to enhance their collective and individual social standing, to regulate communal behavior through quasi-legal rulings, and to share in feasts. Jewish feasts held in synagogues in the Diaspora, much like feasts held generally in associations, would have been a primary
mode of gathering together for the simultaneous purposes of reinforcing social cohesion and identity. At the same time, there is a good amount of evidence to suggest that their feasts also functioned to delineate social status and boundaries within the Jewish communities.
6. Feasts of the Yaḥad at Qumran

In this chapter I emphasize the aspects of the practice of feasts employed by the Yahad in their process of socio-religious formation. My description is based on 1QS (also known as the Serek Ha-Yahad, or the Community Rule), compiled ca. 100–75 B.C.E., as well as archaeological and contemporary literary descriptions.¹ My basic reconstruction of the general aspects of the Yaḥad’s dining practices performed at Qumran is largely in line with scholarly consensus. The discussion in this chapter differs, however, by situating the development of the Yaḥad’s organizational patterns and dining practices within their broader Greco-Roman context. Before explicating the form and function of the Yaḥad’s organizational patterns and dining practices, I shall first provide a brief overview of the archaeological and textual evidence that helps us characterize the Yahad and also of the socio-religious significance of the Jewish group’s dining practices.

6.1 Qumran and the Yaḥad: An Overview

Qumran is situated on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, approximately twenty-one kilometers east of Jerusalem and twelve kilometers south of Jericho. Initially occupied during the eighth or seventh century B.C.E., the site was inhabited until the Neo-Babylonians destroyed the First Temple in Jerusalem along with many nearby sites (including Qumran) in

586 B.C.E. The site was resettled near the end of the second century B.C.E.² More than nine hundred manuscripts, which were discovered in several caves just meters from the site, are collectively referred to as the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). These manuscripts include several versions of books from the Torah written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; several works that were eventually excluded from the Jewish canon, such as the work of Ben Sira; records of commercial transactions; and texts that reflect the central tenets held by a group that referred to itself as the Yahad.

These latter texts include biblical commentaries, liturgical works, apocalyptic visions, and rules and ordinances for communal organization. Collectively, the texts have allowed scholars to come to a general consensus that the Yahad consisted of a group of Jews that initially consisted of the Zadokite line of priests. These priests believed that the Temple’s sacrificial system had become defiled following the usurpation of the office of high priest by Jonathan the Hasmonean in 152 B.C.E. and his initiation of a number of sacrificial reforms.³ Accordingly, some members of the Yahad retreated to the desert east of Jerusalem in order to become a new Israel (1QS II, 21–22; CD XIII, 1), a move seemingly motivated by the religious significance of the wilderness in many biblical texts (e.g., Num 1–2; Exod 18:21–

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This group saw itself as a priestly community that would, at least temporarily, replace the Temple (1QS VIII, 1–16a and IX, 3–11).

Archaeological and textual sources have allowed scholars to paint a rather vivid picture of daily life at Qumran. Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel have argued that between 150 and 200 people may have lived in the area, including in nearby caves and tents. Excluding those who dwelt near the site, others have suggested that between twenty and seventy people may have been able to live within Qumran’s building complex. This low estimate for the population of Qumran, in conjunction with descriptions in the DSS, has led some scholars to infer that elite members of a larger Jewish group that referred to itself as the Yahad permanently occupied the site from the ca. 100 B.C.E until its destruction in 70 C.E.

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8 See, for example, Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*, 69–78; and Taylor, *The Essenes*, passim.
Partial excavations of the cemetery just east of the site’s living quarters suggest that only men inhabited Qumran.\(^9\) The complete absence of decorations such as mosaics, frescos, and architectural moldings implies a community that lived in austerity. In addition, the inhabitants of the site appear to have been engaged in Torah study and scribal activity. A room with narrow built-in benches along its walls has been suggested as a meeting place for the study and exposition of Torah. Remains of long, narrow, low benches (5 meters long, 40 centimeters wide, and 50 centimeters high) and two inkwells (a rare find from this period) have also been discovered at Qumran. The benches and inkwells have led some scholars to suggest that one of the rooms was a scriptorium in which scribes copied many of the manuscripts that were found at the site.\(^10\) Several ostraca have also been discovered at Qumran, including an abecedary and one that likely refers to the Yahad.\(^11\) Relatedly, ink used

\(^9\) As many as eight women and five children may have been buried at Qumran during this period, although the evidence is far from conclusive. For example, Joe Zias (“The Cemeteries at Qumran and Celibacy: Confusion Laid to Rest?” \textit{DSD} 7 [2000]: 220–53), who reanalyzed these skeletal remains, concluded that they were typical of adult male skeletal structures. According to Zias (225–38), the alignment and accompanying burial materials of the remains that are thought to be of five women and children appear to come from a later extension of the cemetery by a group of Bedouin. In any case, the textual evidence does not speak exclusively of male membership in all quarters of the Yahad community. On the one hand, 1QS does not refer to female members and Josephus describes the majority of Essenes as celibate males. On the other hand, the \textit{Damascus Document} describes married members with children living in “camps” and Josephus describes “another order of Essenes” who marry and have children (\textit{J.W.} 2.160–161). For a concise summary of the primary and secondary evidence, see esp. Jodi Magness, \textit{Debating Qumran: Collected Essays on Its Archaeology} (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 113–49; and Brian Schultz, “The Qumran Cemetery: 150 Years of Research,” \textit{DSD} 13 (2006): 194–228.


for the Thanksgiving Scroll (a document associated with the *Yahad*) has recently been shown to contain water from nearby water sources.\(^\text{12}\)

Perhaps one of the most striking features of Qumran is its number of *miqva’ot*. Although ritual baths begin to be common features in towns and cities at this time, the number and size of *miqva’ot* at Qumran is quite unusual and speaks to the members’ heightened concern with maintaining ritual purity. *Miqva’ot* appear adjacent to places throughout Qumran where a resident or visitor could contract or spread ritual impurities: near the exit of the cemetery, adjacent to the latrine, and near the entrance to the dining hall (discussed below).\(^\text{13}\)

This concern with ritual purity is attested in other archaeological features at the site dating to the first century B.C.E. through first century C.E. For example, jars found at the site have been shown to be ideally suited for the protection of foodstuffs and stored scrolls as


\(^{13}\) Ronny Reich, “Miqwa’ot at Khirbet Qumran and the Jerusalem Connection,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years After Their Discovery* (ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, James C. VanderKam, and Galen Marquis; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 728–31; and Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 147–58. Magen and Peleg (“Back to Qumran,”) claim many of these installations were used for the collection of clay-laced water that drained into them from the site’s elaborate water system. More recently, Jan Gunneweg and Marta Balla (“Was the Qumran Settlement a Mere Pottery Production Center? What Instrumental Neutron Activation Revealed,” in *Holistic Qumran: Trans-Disciplinary Research of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* [ed. Jan Gunneweg, A. Adriaens, and Joris Dik; Leiden: Brill, 2010], 39–61) have shown that the clay still found in many of water installations is composed of chemical elements different from those found in the pottery made at Qumran.
described in the DSS. In addition, a low wall (not exceeding 1.4 meters in height) that runs from north to south for approximately 140 meters along the eastern side of the settlement appears to have separated the site proper from the cemetery. One could easily climb over it, however, suggesting that the wall’s function was largely symbolic. Jean-Baptiste Humbert and Joan Branham have argued that this wall was meant to demarcate the pure, holy space of the settlement from the impure space of the cemetery. Branham also notes that a small opening in the wall at loc. 63 provides direct access to the site’s largest miqveh, which would have allowed a burial party to regain ritual purity before entering the living quarters.

Roland de Vaux’s excavations revealed a rectangular room (loc. 77) of approximately 22 x 4.5 meters. Archaeological remains associated with this room support the notion that members of the Yahad used it for communal meals. Along with the discovery of dozens of jars filled with animal bones buried outside the room (loc. 65, loc. 73, loc. 80, loc. 92), the room adjacent (loc. 86) and opening into the rectangular hall contained approximately one thousand dining vessels. A large ritual bath was also located outside the room, an arrangement that matches literary descriptions about features associated with the dining room.


16 Branham, “Hedging the Holy at Qumran,” 130.

17 De Vaux, Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls, 11–14.

at Qumran. As 1QS V, 13–14 states: “They shall not enter the water to partake of the pure meal of the men of holiness, for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness.”¹⁹ According to Josephus: “After dressing in linen, they bathe themselves in cold water. After this purification they assemble in one room to which no one is admitted who does not share their beliefs; they themselves only enter this dining room if they are pure, as though into a holy precinct” (J.W. 2:129).²⁰ Thus both archaeological and textual evidence identifies this room as a dining hall.

More may be inferred from the finds associated with the dining hall. Among the vessels discovered in the pantry (loc. 86) connected to the dining hall, approximately 279 were shallow bowls, 798 were hemispherical cups and 150 deep cups, and 65 were vessels used for serving or storing food.²¹ From the quantity and type of kitchenware, we may conclude that each dining member would have had a complete, identical set of dishes for dining at every meal.²² That each member had dining vessels of the same size suggests that they also consumed the same amounts of food. That members were served the same amount of food may be supported with the statements made by Josephus, who comments that the members consume their meal in silence due to “the fact that they are always sober, and the

¹⁹ Magness (Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 140) also notes that 4Q512, frg. 9 states that Qumran members who suffered a genital flux had to purify themselves before eating and drinking. She also observes, however, that 4Q512, frg. 9 seems to pertain only to individual meals, not communal ones.

²⁰ For more on Josephus’ description, see Magness (Stone and Dung), 140.

²¹ Humbert, and Pfann, The Excavations of Khirbet Qumran and Ain Feshkha, 41, 50.

²² The number of serving vessels were fewer because they were not needed for individual use; food and liquid would have simply been dished out from these vessels into the bowl and cup and onto the plate of each member.
same amount of food and drink is allotted to each of them in a way that they are all satisfied” (J.W. 2: 133).\footnote{23}

The textual and archaeological evidence also strongly suggests that those living at Qumran sat while they ate. The DSS consistently use the verb יָשָׁנָה (to sit) to describe the members’ dining postures (e.g., 1QS VI, 2–5).\footnote{24} Moreover, 1QS VII, 15b states that members were fined if they reclined: “A man who sends forth his left hand in order to recline (נֶפֶל) on it will be punished for ten days.”\footnote{25} Josephus’ account of the Essenes’ communal meals supports this evidence. Despite his frequent mention of Jews as well as non-Jews reclining at feasts (e.g., Ant. 12:96–97, Ant. 15:21. Ant. 15:241), and comments on reclining couches (Ant. 12:96–97), Josephus also remarks that the Essenes “sit themselves down (καθισάντες)” upon entering their dining room (J.W. 2:130).

The archaeological evidence for dining posture at Qumran fits well with these textual witnesses. On the one hand, there is no evidence for stone reclining benches along the outer walls of Qumran’s dining hall, nor would wooden reclining couches have been likely to

\footnote{23} Although his comments are more suggestive, Philo seems to support Josephus. In his description of the Essenes’ daily life, he highlights their remarkable proclivity for communality (κοινονία) based on inculcating equality (ισότητα) among all members (Good Person, 85). Philo comments that the Essenes demonstrated their devotion to equality by sharing a home and drawing from pooled resources to equally share clothes and food. The shared food, Philo states, is consumed at their common meals (συσσίτια) (86). See also Philo, Hypothetica, 11–12.

\footnote{24} See further, Lawrence H. Schiffman, The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Study of the Rule of the Congregation (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 56; and Magness, Debating Qumran, 106.

\footnote{25} Philip S. Alexander and Geza Vermes (Qumran Cave 4. Serekh Ha-Yahad and Two Related Texts [Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1998], 139) suggest that the verb נפל may be problematic and argue that it might be emended to נפלכ [to talk, to hold a conversation]. I see no reason to accept such an emendation. First, נפלכ would result in a sentence with odd semantics. Second, Alexander and Vermes do not provide any reason for why נפלכ is problematic. It seems נפלכ would only be problematic if we assume that those at Qumran were unfamiliar with the practice of reclining. Yet, as I indicate, this is highly unlikely.
survive.\textsuperscript{26} Yet if couches were used, we might expect to find mosaics indicating where they were to be aligned.\textsuperscript{27} On the other hand, there may be evidence for larger, high tables at which diners could have sat to eat their food. De Vaux discovered three square pillars erected in a row in the southeastern half of the room, and a fourth pilaster in the wall of the southeast corner of the room in line with the pillars. Each pillar and pilaster was made of mud brick and covered with plaster. Jodi Magness has suggested that these pillars were bases for wooden beams used to support a second story.\textsuperscript{28} Stephen Pfann rejects this interpretation based on the alignment of the pillars relative to the hall’s entrance, which he argues would weaken the structural support for a second story.\textsuperscript{29} Instead, he suggests, the evenly spaced pillars supported one or more wooden tabletops of mortise-and-tenon construction (\textbf{Fig. 7 and 8}). Some charred wooden remains around the pillars may support his conclusion.\textsuperscript{30} In the end, using the only archaeological evidence (or lack thereof) to prove that reclining couches were not used is largely an argument from silence. Still, the lack of relevant archaeological evidence (with the possible exception for the evidence of high tables) along with the statements made in 1QS and Josephus about the Yahad’s dining posture strongly suggest that dining couches were not used at Qumran.

\textsuperscript{26} Magness, \textit{The Archaeology of Qumran}, 126.
\textsuperscript{28} Magness, \textit{The Archaeology of Qumran}, 122.
\textsuperscript{29} Stephen Pfann, “The Table Prepared in the Wilderness: Pantries and Tables, Pure Food and Sacred Space at Qumran,” in \textit{Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls}, 166.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 166–68.
Figure 8: Locus 77 with Round Tables: Isometric reconstruction by Stephen J. Pfann.

Figure 9: Locus 77 with Long Table: Isometric reconstruction by Stephen J. Pfann
6.2 The Religious and Social Functions of the Yaḥad’s Communal Meals

Many scholars have noted that the Yahad’s communal meals held at Qumran were meant to emulate or replace, at least temporarily, sacrificial meals conducted within the Temple. The ritual bath located just outside the dining hall illustrates the Yahad’s rule that each member must be ritually cleansed before meals, which imitated the requirement that Temple priests consume their portion of sacrificial meat in a state of ritual purity. In addition, 1QS VI, 3–5 states: “Wherever ten men belonging to the party of the Yahad are gathered, a priest must always be present… When the table has been set for eating or the new wine readied for drinking, the priest shall be first to stretch out his hand to bless the first portion of the bread and the new wine.” Once again, Josephus’ remarks are nearly identical: “A priest says grace before the food, and it is unlawful for any one to taste the food before grace is finished.” (J.W. 2:131).

Jodi Magness suggests that having dishes of the same size may demonstrate that each member could be assured of receiving the standardized measurements specified for terumah (tithes allotted to priests) described elsewhere in the DSS. \(^{31}\) Scholars have also suggested that careful attention to the burial of leftover animal bones outside the dining room demonstrates that Yahad performed sacrifices at Qumran. \(^{32}\) The bone burials, however, do not provide solid evidence of sacrificial practice. First, there is no known Jewish sacrificial custom requiring

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\(^{31}\) Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 84. Magness (83) also argues that the individual sets of dining ware indicate a concern that ritual impurity could have spread through food and drink. If this were the case, individual dining vessels and servings could have ensured that a single member’s ritual impurity did not defile the community’s food and drink.

such burials.\textsuperscript{33} Second, no sacrificial altar has been uncovered at the site. In addition, the incense altar alleged to have been discovered there is too small to have been of any use in communal worship.\textsuperscript{34}

Notwithstanding the difficulty of surmising what the burial of the animal bones may suggest, the \textit{Yahad} was highly motivated to consume its meals in a state of ritual purity and in the presence of a priest. In addition, \textit{Yahad} members appear to have considered their food and drink to be ritually pure [\textit{terumah}]. Jonathan Klawans has recently referred to the evidence for the nature of the \textit{Yahad}’s communal meals (along with the community’s scribal activity, Torah study, a heightened attention to purity, and many cultic terms applied to the community itself throughout the \textit{Yahad}’s texts) as the “sacrificialization” or “templization” of daily life to compensate for the \textit{Yahad}’s self-isolation from the Temple.\textsuperscript{35} The \textit{Yahad}’s communal meals were thus an integral component of emulating and temporarily replacing the Temple’s sacrificial system and priesthood.

In addition to highlighting the \textit{Yahad}’s devotion to living life in a way to imitate priestly activity at the Temple, their communal meals helped to create external and internal boundaries. Accordingly, 1 QS 5:15c–17b states:

\begin{quote}
None belonging to the \textit{Yahad} is to discuss with the wicked matters of Law or legal judgment, nor to eat or drink what is theirs, nor to take anything from them unless
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}


\end{footnotes}
purchased, as it is written “Turn away from mere mortals, in whose nostrils is only breath; for of what account are they?”

The Yahad’s communal meal was the primary site of differentiation between “Us” (the Yahad) and “Them” (those outside the Yahad). Members held conversations and engaged in commercial transactions with non-members but did not share their table with them; those who belonged to the Yahad dined only with one another. Thus, the Yahad’s communal meals allowed the group, as Claude Grignon remarked, “to make itself visible and concrete to itself.” Their meals allowed them to establish “solidarity and a sense of social continuity.”

At the same time, the communal meals served to establish and maintain internal hierarchies. 1QS VI, 13–15 describes a mandatory examination process before admission into the community. If the one being tested was accepted, 1QS VI, 16–17 stipulates: “He must not touch the pure food of the general membership before they have examined him concerning his spiritual fitness and works, and not before a full year has passed.” If the candidate gained sufficient “spiritual fitness and works” after one year, he could consume solid food with the rest of the community (1QS VI, 17–20). However, the initiate was still excluded from drinking with higher-ranking members until a second year had passed (1QS VI, 20–21).


37 Ibid., 24.

38 Josephus reports that the Essenes were so hierarchical that a low-ranked member was forbidden to touch one ranked above him; if such contact did occur, the latter was required to purify himself (J.W. 2.150). The scrolls contain no evidence for such a practice, but 1QS V, 12–14 states: “He will bring against them weighty judgments, eternal destruction with none spared. None of the perverse men is to enter purifying waters used by the Men of Holiness and so contact their purity. Indeed, it is impossible to be purified without first repenting of evil, inasmuch as impurity adheres to all who transgress His word.” “Perverse men” can be understood to include those who had not completed their initiation process (i.e., initiates would be prohibited from physical contact with the Men of Holiness).
VI, 20–21). An explanation in 1QS VI, 22–23 specifies that if the initiate demonstrated appropriate knowledge of God’s Law and jurisprudence after two full years, he was then awarded full membership. As a full member he was welcome to participate completely in the common meal, which meant consuming both food and drink with the “general membership of the Yahad.”

Neither full membership in Yahad nor access to the community’s food and drink were irrevocable. For example, a member caught lying about money was not only denied access to the general membership’s meals for one year but was also deprived of twenty-five percent of his bread ration (1QS VI, 24–25). Restrictions applied to the Yahad’s after-meal meetings could result in partial exclusion from the community and its meals: members were not to speak disrespectfully to each other, voice disapproval of the community’s priest, accuse comrades of sin without evidence, speak foolish words, lie down to sleep, depart without reason, be insufficiently covered, spit, expose themselves, laugh, recline, gossip about fellow members, or deviate from the secret teachings of the Yahad (1QS VI, 26–7:20; VIII, 16–20). If a member did any of these things, depending upon the transgression he would be barred from the community’s meal for a specified time. Thus demotion within the community, like promotion, was actuated primarily through access to the community meal.

Even if a member did not transgress the community’s rules, hierarchies were maintained through one’s bodily location at the table relative to other dining members. According to 1QS VI, 3, at meals “the men shall sit before the priest by rank, and in that
manner their opinions will be sought.”

Benedict Eckhardt is the most recent scholar to note that 1QS VI, 3 is very likely meant to highlight the status of the priests within the *Yahad*. He argues that the passage was meant “to secure for the ‘priests’ (whoever that is) the status which they cannot secure through their role in temple sacrifice… The meal presents an opportunity to display and reinforce hierarchies which does not require the temple cult.”

In addition, the passage differentiated non-priestly members of the *Yahad* from one another at the table, based on their rank within the community. Although priestly status is highlighted, each member possessed his own rank and sat accordingly.

This socio-religious hierarchy affirmed at the table contrasts with the *Yahad’s* valorization of equality. On the most basic level, communal meals provided opportunities for members of different statuses to dine, pray, and deliberate together (discussed further below). In addition, as Dennis E. Smith argues, the simple “act of dining together is considered to create a bond between the diners. In the ancient world this symbolism was carried by various elements of the feast, such as the sharing of common food or sharing from a common table or 

Josephus may be speaking the ranking system when he that states after each member was seated for the meal, “the baker serves the loaves in order (ἐν τὰξι), whereas the cook serves one dish of food to each person” (*J.W.* 2.130).

Eckhardt, “Meals and Politics in the *Yahad* A Reconsideration,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 17 (2010): 207–8. See further, Schiffman, “Communal Meals at Qumran,” *RevQ* 10 (1979): 51; cf. Christian Grappe, “Le repas de Dieu de l’autel à la table dans le judaïsme et le mouvement chrétien naissant,” *Le repas de Dieu* (ed. Christian Grappe; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 102. Martha Himmelfarb, in *A Kingdom of Priests. Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, 126) states of 1QS: “The fact that the priests are singled out for mention is an acknowledgment of their status, but it is ultimately an acknowledgment without content.” Himmelfarb attempts to show that the priestly status was transferred to the community as a whole, which may in part be true but still underestimates the explicit in-group hierarchies attested from this passage. Even priests in Israelite and Jewish traditions could have different statuses (e.g., high priest vs. the rest of the priests; ritually pure priests vs. ritually impure priests, etc.).
dish. But above all it simply derived from the fact that the diners shared the event together.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus, boundaries based on knowledge of God’s Torah may have been blurred, at least for a time, as all members sat together at the table.

\section*{6.3 Similarities among the Yaḥad at Qumran, Associations, and Greco-Roman Feasts}

As I argued in Chapter 3, Jews created associations in the form of synagogues in the Diaspora and Palestine during the Greco-Roman period. For Jews and others in the Greek-speaking world, the word “synagogue” (derived from the Greek word \textit{συναγωγή}) was interchangeable with other well-known words for associations. Philo, for example, states: “There are numerous societies (\textit{θίασοι}) in the city [Alexandria]… Synods (\textit{σύνοδοι}) and dining couches (\textit{κλίνας}) are the particular names given to them by the people of the country” (\textit{Flacc.} 136). Philo also writes that, when defending the gathering of Jewish groups, Augustus decreed that “Judeans alone are to be permitted by them [the governors] to assemble in synagogues (\textit{συναγωγή}). These synods (\textit{σύνοδοι}), he said, were not based on drunkenness and carousing to promote conspiracy…but were schools of temperance and justice” (\textit{Embassy}, 311–13). For Philo, then, the terms \textit{θίασοι}, \textit{σύνοδοι}, \textit{κλίνας}, and \textit{συναγωγή} are transposable. The same is true for Josephus, who uses the term \textit{θίασοι} to refer to outlawed associations in Rome (\textit{Ant.} 14:215–16) but \textit{σύνοδος} to refer to the association of the Jews of Sardis (\textit{Ant.} 14:235). More often, though, Josephus refers to \textit{συναγωγή} when speaking of Jewish associations located in Roman Palestine (see, e.g., \textit{J.W.} 2:285–6; \textit{Ant.} 16:164, 19:300).

\textsuperscript{41} Smith, \textit{From Symposium to Eucharist}, 9–10.
Significantly, Philo uses the same vocabulary to describe the Essenes as forming associations when he remarks that the Essenes gathered in συναγωγαί (Good Person, 81) while they formed θίασοι (85). Although the former term refers to the building in which Essenes assembled, the latter term refers to Philo’s perception that they formed associations. While Josephus does not use these terms to describe the Essenes, he does describe the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes as philosophies and “parties/schools” (αὐτοκτονεῖς) (e.g., J.W. 2:119; Ant. 13:171; Ant. 13:298). Significantly, contemporary textual evidence and inscriptions show that members largely belonging to philosophical associations used the term “αὐτοκτονεῖς” to refer to themselves. Philo’s nomenclature for the Essenes shows that he, at least, thought that the Essenes formed associations. Josephus’ use of terms affiliated with philosophical associations in textual and inscriptional evidence may suggest that he also thought the Essenes formed associations. Evidence of the Yāḥad’s communal organization from the DSS may suggest that Philo and Josephus were correct.

Moshe Weinfeld was the first scholar to produce a comprehensive study that compared the Yāḥad’s organizational features described in 1QS with those in ancient descriptions of other Greco-Roman associations. Weinfeld demonstrated that many of 1QS’s organizational elements were similar to those of other Greco-Roman associations,

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including their appellations, descriptions of leadership organization, procedures for the acceptance of new members, laws and penalties taken on by members, discussions of the probationary period for prospective members, and descriptions of membership renewal ceremonies.\textsuperscript{44}

Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, who has greatly added to Weinfeld’s work,\textsuperscript{45} begins his massive study of all of the \textit{Yahad}’s regulations (collected from their manuscripts) by arguing that the social theories of Max Weber and Georg Hegel, as well as theories found in the philosophical treatises of Plato and Aristotle, indicate that as they form, most voluntary associations within larger societies duplicate the rules, regulations, and even the language of the state.\textsuperscript{46} For Gillihan, the “state” upon which most Greco-Roman associations based their organizational patterns was the local \textit{polis}; for other associations, the “state” was a utopian vision of the \textit{politeiai} crafted within some philosophical schools. In any case, if “associations are formed on real or utopian visions of the state, they will tend to have similar ’state-like’ features, from the names of officers to organization of administrative councils, public cults, or the military.”\textsuperscript{47}

In his exhaustive comparison of rules and regulations in CD, 1QS, 1Qsa, along with associational legal codes and philosophical treatises, Gillihan attempts to demonstrate that \textit{Yahad} adopted the civic ideologies of the Greco-Roman world and associations in particular. In 1QS Gillihan locates a statement of purpose, instructions for new members, general group

\textsuperscript{44} Weinfeld, \textit{The Organizational Pattern}, 10–45.

\textsuperscript{45} Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, “Civic Ideology among the Covenanters of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Greco-Roman Voluntary Associations” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2007).

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 67–77.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 641.
protocol, rules for meetings and for the governing body (the “Many”), regulations for the
initiation process, a penal code (including unseemly behavior, slander, and murmuring during
sessions of the Many), and rules for the Maskil that he claims are analogous to typical
associational and Greco-Roman civic organizations. Again, 1QS’s rules for meetings and
for the governing body, regulations for the initiation process, and the penal code for
communal meetings find no parallels in biblical documents. Gillihan’s conclusions, if correct,
offer strong evidence for cross-cultural influences on the Yahad’s rules and structuring
mechanisms.

A number of rites related specifically to the Yahad’s communal meals found
throughout 1QS also suggests that Greco-Roman associational dining protocol was integrated
into the Jewish community’s organizational schema. Controlling access to food and drink or
the amount of food and drink received according to members’ knowledge of groups’ esoteric
beliefs appear to have been common practices among associations devoted to mysteries. In
addition, several scholars note that a number of the rules listed in 1QS VI, 24–VII, 20 are
also attested in many inscriptions of the rules and regulations of other associations. As
described above, these rules mandate that members are not to speak disrespectfully to each
other; voice disapproval of the community’s priest; accuse comrades of sin without evidence;
speak foolish words; lie down to sleep during meetings; depart without reason; be
insufficiently covered; spit; expose themselves; laugh; recline; gossip about fellow members;

48 Ibid., 371–581.

49 See Bradley H. McLean, “The Agrippinilla Inscription: Religious Associations and Early Church
Bradley H. McLean; Sheffield, UK: Academic, 1993), 239–70.

50 See Weinfeld, The Organizational Pattern, 42–43; Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist, 155–56;
or deviate from the secret teachings of the Yahad. If a member did any of these things, he would be barred from the community’s meal for a specified time depending on the transgression. For comparison, we turn to the regulations described on an inscription of the association of Zeus Hypsistos (ca. 69–58 B.C.E.) in Egypt. There we read that members may not use disrespectful language, disapprove of their priest, accuse fellow members of wrongdoing without evidence, gossip about fellow members during communal meals, or speak about the association’s rites to those outside their group. Depending on the offense, the member was fined or denied access to sacrificial communal meals for a specified period. Numerous other inscriptions explicate very similar rules.

Matthias Klinghardt also claims that the tripartite division of the Greco-Roman feasts influenced the Yahad’s own tripartite division of their communal feasts described in 1QS VI, 2c–3. As previously noted, typical Greco-Roman feasts were divided into the meal proper (deipnon), followed by a libation of wine typically accompanied by a prayer and the singing of hymns, and concluded by an extended period of drinking, entertainment, and/or conversations (symposium proper). In 1QS VI, 2c–3, we read: “They shall eat together, bless together, and deliberate (wxowy) together.” Klinghardt argues that the Hebrew verb “to deliberate” is cognate with Greek verbs used in texts about the symposia of philosophical schools, which often took the form of conversations led by an expert and commonly involved

51 E.g., AGRW 19 (Piraeus, Attica, Greece, and Macedonia, 183–174 B.C.E.); AGRW 299 (Tebtynis, Fayum region, Egypt, 158/157 B.C.E.). AGRW 30 (Physkos, Central Greece, Greece, and Macedonia, 150 B.C.E.); AGRW 121 (Philadelphia, Lydia, Asia Minor, late second century B.C.E.); AGRW 300 (Tebtynis, Fayum region, Egypt, 14–37 C.E.); AGRW 310 (Lanuvium, Campania, Italy, 136 C.E.); AGRW 8 (Liopesi, Attica, Greece, second century C.E.); and AGRW 9 (Liopesi, Attica, Greece, second century C.E.).

question-and-answer sessions. Such sessions are described in 1QS VI, 3b–4b and 1QS VI, 7b–13. According to Klinghardt, it “is obvious that the three communal activities of 1QS VI—even in correct order—relate to this very kind of [meal] assembly.”

Gillihan has recently challenged Klinghardt’s description of 1QS VI, 2c–3. Gillihan argues that because 1QS VI, 4c–5a describes a priest blessing the meal prior to its consumption, 1QS VI, 2c–3 does not refer to the order of the meal but instead “surveys the type of activities in which members typically engaged: eating; worshipping; deliberating.” Moshe Weinfeld has convincingly argued that 4Q434a (dated to the first half of the first century B.C.E.; i.e., contemporaneous to 1QS) presents an early liturgical formula of the grace after meals, once thought to have been developed in later rabbinic literature. In addition, Josephus states: “A priest says grace before the food, and it is unlawful for any one to taste the food before grace is finished. When he [the priest] has finished his meal, the same priest says grace again” (J.W. 2.131). The evidence from 4Q434a and Josephus suggests

53 Ibid. See further, Eckhardt, “Meals and Politics in the Yahad,” 194; and Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist, 153. This sequence may be implied in Matt 26:26–27 and Mark 14:22–23. I shall show in Chapter 7 that a similar sequence is prescribed in early rabbinic texts as well.


55 Ibid., 417. Lest we imagine that saying a blessing before the meal is specific to Jewish communities, it is important to note that many Greek and Latin sources speak of similar practices. See further, Eckhardt, “Meals and Politics in the Yahad,” 195–96; and references in Clemens Leonhard, “Blessings over Wine and Bread in Judaism and Christian Eucharistic Prayers. Two Independent Traditions,” in Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship: New Insights into its History and Interaction (ed. Albert Gerhards and Clemens Leonhard; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 309–26.


57 Smith (From Symposium to Eucharist, 153) refers to the order of the meal blessings described in 1QS VI, 2c–3 and J.W. 2.131, but does not explicitly link the order to that of the typical Greco-Roman symposium. Instead, he argues that the ensuing lines (1QS VI, 6–7) that mention the need for a
that the reference to “blessing together” in 1QS VI, 3 indeed refers to a second blessing over the food, and that this second blessing was offered after the community had eaten together. In this case, the statements in 1QS VI, 2c–3 are meant to denote three consecutive activities. Given the evidence suggesting that the Yahad’s basic communal regulations and those governing their communal meals both were analogous to the regulations of many other associations, it seems at least plausible that 1QS VI, 2c–3 reflects a tripartite division similar to the typical Greco-Roman feast.

The evidence brought forth by Weinfeld, Gillihan, Klinghardt, and others appears to suggest that the Yahad was, at least on the most basic level, one type of Jewish association among others. Although they thought of themselves as a community of priests (which many were) intent on replacing the Temple and its sacrificial system does not negate the idea that they were also shaped by Greco-Roman cultural elements. All this being said, Steven Fraade questions the notion that the Yahad should be considered alongside other associations. He states that although we may find “many similarities between the organization and rules of the yahad and those of the Roman groups,” we must be careful about attributing those similarities to cross-cultural influences. He also notes, correctly, that “the other groups cover such a broad chronological and geographical spread that it is difficult to know what sorts of contacts would have been responsible.” In the following section, I suggest that we need to look no further than Jerusalem itself.

quorum to continually study the Law resemble the philosophical symposium that follows the meal. In this interpretation, 1QS VI, 6–7 is related to a new topic rather than to the preceding lines.

6.3.1 Before Qumran and Necessary Contacts

As noted above, the Yahad was formed from a group within the Zadokite priestly line shortly after Jonathan the Hasmonean usurped the office of the high priest in 152 B.C.E. After taking office, Jonathan instituted a set of reforms to the Temple’s sacrificial system. Shortly after these reforms, we read in several texts about the “Teacher of Righteousness” who opposed the “scoffer,” the “Liar,” or the “Wicked Priest”—presumably Jonathan. Most scholars believe the Teacher of Righteousness was a Zadokite priest alienated from the Jerusalem priestly establishment by Jonathan’s usurpation, and perhaps even the legitimate claimant to the office of high priest. After some years of opposition, the Teacher of Righteousness and/or his priestly group of followers founded the Yahad at Qumran. In short, the founder of Yahad belonged to a long line of priests who had held the office of high priest in Jerusalem. Examining the cultural ambience shortly before the split between the Hasmoneans and the founder of the Yahad may provide evidence for the “sorts of contacts” responsible for the basis of many regulations found within 1QS.

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59 Ibid.

60 I leave aside the issue of whether or not the Yahad formed because they felt that the Hasmoneans did not come from the traditional line of Zadokites. First, Alison Schofield and James VanderKam (“Were the Hasmoneans Zadokites?” JBL 124 [2005]: 73–87) have argued that the Hasmoneans were Zadokites. Second, “proto-Yahad” documents found at Qumran seem to be concerned with matters other than priestly lineage. See, e.g., John J. Collins, Beyond the Qumran Community, 56–67.

61 For references to “Teacher of Righteousness,” see, e.g., CD I, 11; XX, 32; 1QpHab II, 2; V, 10; and 4Q171 I, 27. For the connection between the “Teacher of Righteousness” and “the priest,” see, e.g., 1QpHab II, 8; 4Q171 II, 19; III, 15. For references to “the scoffer” see CD I, 14; for “Liar” see 1QpHab II, 1–3; V, 9–12; for “Wicked Priest” see 1QpHab XI, 4–8; and 4Q171 IV, 8–10.


63 See esp. Collins, Beyond the Qumran Community, 69–89.
I begin by returning to the non-canonical book of Sirach. As we saw in Chapter 2, the scribe Ben Sira originally composed Sirach in Hebrew during the early second century B.C.E. (ca. 200–180 B.C.E.). The book appears to have served as a kind of training manual for scribes and possibly priests in Jerusalem about the significance of Torah learning, in addition to ethical instructions on such topics as how to behave at symposia. Among the latter instructions, Ben Sira discusses the correct manner of ranking feast guests (12:12), how to properly carry oneself during the meal (37:29–31), how to act as a good symposiarch in order to justify praise (32:1–2; cf. 31:31), and how to correctly conduct “table talk” during the symposium proper (32:7–12). Sirach thus demonstrates that typical Greek feasting practices and their associated values were familiar to at least some groups living in Jerusalem.

These groups appear to have been scribes and priests, or perhaps priests who were also scribes. While scholars have argued that scribes and priests constituted separate groups at this time, others have argued that scribes and priests were one and the same during the Second Temple period.⁶⁴ In any case, all scholars agree that Ben Sira operated within the

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inner circles of priests. Ben Sira’s social location may best be exemplified by his ardent support for the priestly establishment and his passionate praise for Simon, the Zadokite high priest of his own day.

We also learn that, sometime between 175–172 B.C.E., Jason the high priest supervised the official entry of two Hellenistic institutions into Jerusalem: the gymnasium and the ephebate. The gymnasium was the fundamental educational organ in a Greek city; the ephebate was the body of youth trained in the gymnasium to become Greek citizens. According to Victor Tcherikover: “education in the ephebeion was bound up with no small expense and therefore became in the Hellenistic period more or less the monopoly of the sons of the wealthy.” This group would have included Jerusalem’s priests. Finally, even as the a class of popular lay scribes arose in Second Temple times imply that Ben Sira must have been a priest as well as a scribe. See, e.g., E. P. Sanders, Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E. (London: SCM, 1992), 380–412, 458–90; and Steven D. Fraade, “‘They Shall Teach Your Statutes to Jacob’: Priest, Scribe, and Sage in Second Temple Times” (unpublished paper). I thank Professor Fraade for sharing his work with me.

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66 Two long panegyrics end Sirach. In the one devoted to the ancestors of Israel (45:6–22), Aaron receives more attention than Moses, David, or any other figure. The amount of praise devoted to Aaron is only surpassed by that devoted to Simon, the Zadokite high priest of Ben Sira’s own day.


68 Tcherikover, Hellenistic Civilization, 162.
Jewish priestly family of the Hasmoneans successfully led the revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes beginning in 167 B.C.E., they too adopted many elements of Greek culture. This embrace is apparent in the way they organized their internal political structure; the Hellenistic-style monumental tomb built by Simon in Modi’in described in Maccabees; and the Greek architectural elements at their palaces at Jericho, which included triclinia. Evidence for Rhodian jar handles discovered in Jerusalem dating to mid-second century B.C.E. also demonstrates that some wealthy Jerusalemites, if not the Hasmoneans themselves, drank imported wine.

Thus, in Hasmonean Jerusalem one could find scribes and priests (if not the Zadokite priests themselves) convening symposia, a Greek educational system spearheaded by a Zadokite priest; and Greek-style political structures (among other elements of Greek culture). All of this suggests that the founder of the Yahad, a Zadokite priest from Jerusalem, as well as many of its initial members, had likely been exposed to the Greek dining culture and civic institutions upon which many other associations, including Jewish ones, had modeled their basic organizational patterns. It is possible, and even likely, that the basic organizational patterns and the apparent sympotic-like meal pattern of the Yahad were developed (consciously or not) from contact in Jerusalem with Greek-style feasts and socio-political

69 To be sure, the Hasmoneans appear to have been culturally conservative in some ways. The lack of images of people or animals on their coins or architecture from this period seems to represent determination to reclaim a particular Jewish identity. See, e.g., Steven Fine, Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 60–81.


71 Donald T. Ariel, Excavations at the City of David 1978-1985 (Qedem 30; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1990), 13–25.
structures. At the same time, exposure to these Greek cultural elements may have led to the conscious rejection of some of them.

6.4 Declining to Recline and the Rejection of Opulence

Much textual and archaeological evidence indicates that residents of Qumran sat while they ate. In fact, diners were fined if they reclined (1QS VII, 15b). Lawrence Schiffman and Jodi Magness have argued that those living at Qumran adopted the posture of sitting at meals to identify themselves with a “biblical” meal posture, according to the community’s goal of ridding itself of the corrupting influence of Hellenism. Although it is difficult to determine whether 1QS’s stipulation that all diners must sit was based on biblical precedent, the stipulation would make sense as a rejection of typical Greco-Roman dining practices. As argued in the previous section of this chapter, it seems plausible that the founder and many early members of the *Yahad* were exposed to or aware of typical dining practices of the elite in Jerusalem. Then, when the group formed, it was completely at odds with the new Hasmonean priests who were embracing many features of Greek culture. Here, the members of the *Yahad* associated Greek culture with the Hasmoneans, and one way for them to distinguish their group from the Hasmoneans was to stipulate different behaviors. Allowing those in attendance at the *Yahad*’s communal meals to sit while eating might have functioned to differentiate this group from the Hasmoneans and their way of life.

Finally, as Matthew B. Roller has demonstrated, reclining at Greek and Roman feasts symbolized *otium* and related aspects of pleasure, leisure, and luxury. Significantly, he has

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72 Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community*, 56; and Magness, *Debating Qumran*, 106.

also shown that some generals, statesmen, and Cynics refused to recline as a way of communicating their opposition to the luxurious lifestyle that reclining signified. Refusing to recline during meals, and thus concomitantly rejecting a significant feature of Hellenistic feasting practices may have allowed the Yahad to demonstrate an ascetic lifestyle, albeit this choice of lifestyle may or may not have been directly linked with the Hasmoneans.

The asceticism of the Yahad is readily apparent at Qumran, where there is a complete absence of decorations such as mosaics, frescos, and architectural moldings. This austerity seems to derive from the central tenets of the Yahad; for example, 1QS emphasizes that members were to live a materially egalitarian lifestyle. According to Catherine M. Murphy, offering one’s personal wealth for equal redistribution in the community allowed a member to join “a single entity, a yaḥad, united in fidelity and purpose, no longer torn by the greed and violence that characterized the external economy.” Ultimately, Murphy remarks, this self-sustained economy was a radical attempt by the community to conduct itself as a people bearing witness to “divine munificence and to the possibility that humanity, or at least a remnant of it, could be redeemed.” By sitting at their meals, the Yahad may have also been signifying their devotion to reject the sensual pleasure, leisure, and luxury they, like others in the Greco-Roman world, identified with the external economy.

74 Ibid., 88–92.
75 Catherine M. Murphy, Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
76 Ibid., 449.
77 Ibid., 455.
6.5 Conclusion

As Carol A. Newsom notes, the *Yahad* was involved in dialogue with religious leaders of Jerusalem as well as with broader Jewish traditions. Similarly, as Alison Schofield argues:

Even outlying traditions are never completely isolated from primary cultural centers. Even as the *Yahad* members codified their own traditions—and identity—they were still in a dialogic exchange with the center [Jerusalem]. Literally, we find this conversation spelled out in *MMT* (cf. *Prayer for King Jonathan*), and indirectly, we find they were not shut off from most widely known Jewish literary traditions, as they retained texts such as *Jubilees, Enoch*, *Sirach*, and multiple biblical versions… In the ideological sense, they were increasingly—but never fully—isolated from the religious Other(s) of their day. That the founders of the *Yahad* were in dialogue with their “cultural center” also means they came into contact with elements of Greco-Roman culture. I argue that, in Jerusalem, one could find scribes and priests reclining at symposia, Greek educational systems, and Greek-style political structures. That these were normal features of life in Jerusalem suggests that the founder of the *Yahad*, a Zadokite priest from Jerusalem, as well as many of its initial members, were familiar with Greek dining culture and similar civic institutions upon which many other associations were basing their fundamental organizational patterns. It is possible that these basic organizational patterns, including the apparent sympotic-like meal pattern evidenced in1QS, were developed (consciously or not) from contact with the extant Greek-style feasts and socio-political structures in Jerusalem.

Analyzing the meal practices of the *Yahad* in light of associational and broader Greco-Roman cultural associational practices and dining customs allows us to see how the

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79 Schofield, *From Qumran to the Yahad*, 275.
Yahad utilized the lexical elements that also shaped other Greco-Roman social institutions. While the basic form of the organizational schema and the order of meals appear to be analogous to other Greco-Roman associations, this particular group rejected one major element: reclining. By doing so, the Yahad may have been attempting to reject one pronounced Hellenistic element they associated both with the Hasmoneans and a wealthy lifestyle they abhorred. In any case, by refusing to recline, members of the Yahad were able to express a particular identity during their communal feasts. These efforts speak to a more complicated phenomenon of cultural negotiation and identity formation on the part of the Yahad than the assumption that the group formed in isolation or simply in opposition to Hellenistic culture.
7. Feasts and the Social Order in Synagogues in Palestine (ca. First Century C.E.–Third Century C.E.)

With the exception of the Yahad, the earliest evidence for synagogues in Palestine dates to approximately the first century B.C.E. Much like the Diaspora, as well as the Yahad, textual evidence and some archaeological evidence demonstrates that synagogues functioned as communal centers engaged in quasi-legal rulings, reading and teaching of scripture, and prayer. Additionally, some evidence indicates that feasts were held in at least some of these locales. After the destruction of the Temple, the synagogue continued to function as a communal center with multiple purposes but took on a more central role in community survival, growth, and, eventually, prosperity. Close analysis of the evidence for feasting within synagogues dating from approximately the first century C.E. to the third century C.E. reveals some interesting differences between Diaspora synagogues and those that served Jewish communities in Palestine. Still, these feasts appear to have provided opportunities for the development of communal bonds as well as for the establishment and preservation of hierarchical relationships among synagogue members.

7.1 Feasts and Synagogues in Roman Palestine, Pre-70 C.E.

Synagogues dating to ca. first century B.C.E–C.E. have been excavated or identified at Herodium, Masada, Gamla, Qiryat Sefer, Modi’in, Magdala, and (possibly) Jericho.¹ At

¹ Ehud Netzer, (“A Synagogue from the Hasmonean Period Recently Exposed in the Western Plane of Jericho,” IEJ 49 [1999]: 203–31) argues that the dining room and associated court of John Hyrcanus’ buried palace is actually a synagogue with a triclinium. His view that this portion of the buried palace was a synagogue has gained little traction. Scholarly consensus holds that this was a large dining room associated with the Buried Palace. See discussions by Lee I. Levine, “The First-Century Synagogue: Critical Reassessments and Assessment of the Critical,” in Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches (ed. Douglas R. Edwards; New York: Routledge, 2004), 84–89; and David Stacey, “Was There a Synagogue in Hasmonean Jericho?” at
Jerusalem, inscriptive evidence for a synagogue constructed prior to the Great Revolt has been identified. In addition, Josephus and the Gospels mention synagogues at Dor, Caesarea, Tiberias, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Nazareth, Jerusalem, and elsewhere.\(^2\) It should be noted, however, that the archaeological evidence for some synagogues has been presented only in preliminary reports (Qiryat Sefer and Modi’in)\(^3\) and press releases (Magdala).\(^4\) By contrast, the inscription discovered in Jerusalem and the archaeological evidence from the synagogues of Herodium, Masada, and Gamla have been thoroughly presented in many scholarly articles and books. In the following section, I examine the data from Jerusalem, Masada, and Gamla for evidence of feasts (no evidence of feasts has yet been discovered at Herodium).

### 7.1.1 Jerusalem

Our earliest archaeological evidence that feasts may have occurred in synagogues comes from an inscription that dates to the first century C. E. discovered on the Ophel in Jerusalem. It reads:

Theodotos, son of Vettenus, priest and archisynagôgos, son of a archisynagôgos, grandson of a archisynagôgos, rebuilt this synagogue for the reading of the Law and the

http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Hasmonean_Jericho.shtml. The evidence appears to support the scholarly consensus.


\(^4\) On Magdala’s synagogue’s recent discovery, see the press release at the Israel Antiquities Authority website, http://www.antiquities.org.il/article_Item_eng.asp?sec_id=25&subj_id=240&id=1601&module_id=#as
teaching of the commandments, and the chambers for guests, and the rooms and water installations, for the lodging of those who have need from abroad. His forefathers, the elders, and Simonides established it.\(^5\)

Although the inscription says nothing about feasts being held within the synagogue rebuilt by Theodotos, it does contain several hints that feasts were held within its structure. The fact that the synagogue served not only as a place of worship but also a kind of hostel for travelers from outside Jerusalem, while not conclusive, suggests some Jews used this synagogue for feasts during the pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkoth. During these holidays, Jews were required to offer sacrifices and consume portions of the cooked meat communally in Jerusalem (Deut 16:1–7; 9–12, 13; see also 2 Chron 33:16). Furthermore, Jews who consumed meat sacrificed on the altar at the Temple in Jerusalem were to do so in a state of bodily purity (Lev 7:19–21).\(^6\) To attain this state, Jews would wash in \textit{miqva'ot}.

The mention of water installations in the Theodotos inscription suggests that this synagogue had one or more \textit{miqva'ot} installed for this purpose. This idea is further substantiated by

\(^5\) \textit{CIJ} 2.1404.

Ronny Reich’s excavation of miqva’ot dating to the first century C.E. just south of the cistern at which this inscription was discovered. The mention of water installations and their possible link to the miqva’ot excavated by Reich suggests that Theodotos’ rebuilt synagogue provided travelers with the means to become ritually pure before consuming meat sacrificed on the altar in Jerusalem. In this case, the chambers and rooms for guests could have served as spaces for groups of Jews to gather and eat the sacrificial meat with one another.

If sacrificial feasts were convened in the synagogue built by Theodotos, there is little doubt that they would have generated a sense of cohesion between those Jews sharing food and drink with one another to celebrate seminal moments in the collective history of the Jewish people in their holy city. This sense of cohesion would likely have been strengthened in so far as the sacrificial feasts were the culmination of many participants’ shared experience of journeying to Jerusalem. Philo, who attended at least one pilgrimage feast in Jerusalem, states that God required Jews to travel to Jerusalem to make sacrifices three times a year to test “their temperament most severely” (Special Laws 1.68). Despite the incredible hardships that Jews must experience during their pilgrimages, Philo remarks that “innumerable companies of men from a countless variety of cities, some by land and some by

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8 Also suggested by Eric M. Meyers and Mark A. Chancy, Alexander to Constantine, 209.


10 Philo briefly mentions his own pilgrimage to Jerusalem in On Providence 2.216.
sea, from east and from west, from the north and from the south, come to the Temple as if to some common refuge and safe asylum” (1.68). Philo then states that pilgrims take comfort in one another’s company, and form lasting relationships as they make sacrifices and share in their feasts together (1.69). If sacrificial feasts were convened in Theodotos’ synagogue, they very likely produced a sense of cohesion between Jews based on the events the feasts celebrated as well as the fact that the feasts followed shared acts of pilgrimage. Whether hierarchies were also established during these feasts remains a possibility, yet we have no evidence for such practices.

7.1.2 Gamla

The synagogue in Gamla likely dates to the early first century C.E. This impressive building runs on a northeast-southwest axis and measures 21.5 meters x 17.5 meters; the hall itself measures 19.7 x 15.3 meters. Four rows of narrow benches (each 40 centimeters wide) line all of its walls, broken only by the two entrances on the southern wall. Behind each row

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12 Philo speaks elsewhere of the unifying power of Jerusalem for the Jewish people. In Gaius 36.281, he states: “As for the holy city, I must say what befits me to say. While she is my native city, she is also the mother city not of one country Judea but of most of the others in virtue of the colonies sent out at diverse times to the neighboring lands.”

13 On the possibility of an earlier date, see Levine, The Ancient Synagogue, 54.
of benches were landings measuring 1.7 meters in width. In front of each row of benches was a paved aisle with a row of columns used to support the roof. A small water basin excavated on the eastern landing, was fed by a large cistern about 30 meters east through a plastered water channel. The excavators believe it was used for hand washing. Several ancillary rooms have been found to the southeast, one lined with two rows of narrow benches on its northern and eastern walls. Two of the adjacent rooms appear to have served as service and storage areas; a third seems to have been the synagogue’s reception area. In addition, a miqveh was situated 4 meters west of the ancillary rooms, directly opposite the reception area. Remains of two fireplaces, Herodian lamps, an intact juglet, a complete casserole, and large quantities of household pottery (especially jars and cooking pots) were found within the main hall. These remains suggest that meals were held within the synagogue. It is likely, however, that this evidence points to meals that were consumed within the synagogue only when some residents used the building as a refuge during the very last days of the Roman siege of the town. In other words, these remains should not be considered evidence for common activities enacted throughout the synagogue’s existence.

Possible evidence from outside the synagogue does suggest that meals were held within the building, however, from the first century C.E. until its destruction. Andrea Berlin

15 Ibid., 52–54.
16 Ibid., 55–58.
17 Ibid., 58–59.
18 Ibid., 54.
has demonstrated that the ceramic assemblages from most of the domiciles at Gamla dated to the first century C.E. differ markedly from those in areas dated to the previous century.\(^{19}\)

Tableware and cooking vessels comprised approximately 30 percent and 19 percent of the ceramic assemblage, respectively, from each household in areas B/D (ca. first century B.C.E.). Area R appears to have been built during the first century C.E., whereas Areas B/D were abandoned. The ceramic typologies from Area R are nearly reversed from those of areas B/D. The ceramic assemblage of each of Area R’s households appears to have consisted of approximately 14 percent tableware and 32 percent cooking vessels.\(^{20}\) Berlin suggests that the change in the make up of Area R’s ceramic assemblages points to a change in town residents’ dining habits. The number of cooking vessels in Area R demonstrates that the amount of food that could be prepared by each household would have exceeded the number of household occupants suggested by the amount of tableware and the sizes of the homes. The amount of cooking ware, according to Berlin, suggests that individuals began cooking food for large communal meals. She argues that the only setting large enough to hold such communal meals was Gamla’s synagogue, which dates to the same period as the construction of Area R (ca. first century C.E.).\(^{21}\)

Berlin concludes that the evidence for communal meals convened in Gamla’s synagogue demonstrates that the dining practices of some residents of Gamla living there during the first century C.E. “were completely dissimilar to those of their Greek, Phoenician, and Roman neighbors. The vessels that were used, the manner of serving, and the locale

\(^{19}\) Berlin, *Gamla I*, 146.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 150.
combine to present a mode purposefully and radically different.”  

Yet as has been shown in the previous two chapters, communal dining was one of the main practices conducted within Greco-Roman associations, synagogues in the Diaspora, by the Yahad, and may have taken place within at least one Jewish synagogue in Jerusalem. Jews and non-Jews would not have seen sharing food and drink within Gamla’s synagogue as unusual in any way. And similar to those Jews and non-Jews who joined together to eat and drink within their communal structures, Jews who dined with one another in Gamla’s synagogue—perhaps on dates significant to them and Jews living elsewhere—would have felt a sense of cohesion.

Yet the dining practices of those who appear to have held their communal meals in Gamla’s synagogue would have differed from many of their non-Jewish neighbors in one significant way. The narrow benches used in the synagogue strongly suggest that those consuming food and drink in the communal setting of the synagogue did so while sitting. Those attending Gamla’s synagogue sat at their meal despite their likely familiarity with the typical Greco-Roman dining posture of reclining, for we know that at least one prominent Jew living at Gamla outfitted his home with an andron and another Jew’s dining room contained a triclinium. Sitting at feasts convened within Gamla’s synagogue therefore may have been employed by its members, like those living at Qumran, as a way to signify a unique Jewish identity and ethos vis-à-vis non-Jews and possibly even other Jews who would have reclined during their feasts while living at Gamla.

The idea that feasts held in Gamla’s synagogue differentiated fellow Jews from one another in particular might be substantiated when the seating capacity for the synagogue is taken into account. Chad Spigel has estimated that Gamla’s synagogue could accommodate 22

Ibid., 151.
between 407 to 536 people out of the town’s estimated population of 3,000 to 4,000.\textsuperscript{23} That is, only approximately 10\% to 18\% of Gamla’s residents could participate in any type of event held in the synagogue at the same time. It is possible that several feasts could have been held on special occasions on a rotating schedule to accommodate the entire population.\textsuperscript{24}

Even so, the majority of Gamla’s population would still not share in the same feast at the same time. Moreover, this scenario would seem to require that some members of the community were invested with decision making powers to determine who and when they could attend, effectively establishing a communal hierarchy. Another possibility is that the synagogue was not regularly used by the majority of the population, but rather used primarily if not exclusively by a subset of the population. Dan Urman has argued that the synagogue might have belonged to the Jewish zealot movement that Josephus identifies with Gamla (\textit{Life} 398; \textit{J.W.} 4.10, 7.253; \textit{Ant.} 18.4-10).\textsuperscript{25}

In the end, we may assert that those who feasted with one another in Gamla’s synagogue felt some sense of group cohesion. Their dining posture may also have helped to have reified notions of group solidarity. Yet those who shared food and drink with one

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\textsuperscript{24} Spigel (\textit{Seating Capacities}, 84) suggests that it is possible that there may have been a rotating schedule of seven to nine worship services, though he considers this idea “highly unlikely.” He does not, however, explain why he doubts this possibility.

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another at one time was limited to a small percentage of the town’s population. Gamla’s synagogue feasts would thus have concomitantly and continually generated feelings of inclusion and exclusion between the town’s residents. We cannot know if these feelings created sustained divisions. Any divisions may have been assuaged if several feasts were held to celebrate a specific occasion so that all of the residents at least had the opportunity to feast on the same day. Orchestrating several feasts for all of Gamla’s residents, however, suggests the existence of a decision making body. Individuals who made up this body in turn may have accrued some level of social capital by successfully organizing these feasts. If the building only belonged to a subset of the population, possibly a zealot community, it is likely that their feasts would have functioned to generate cohesion among members of their community while differentiating them from the rest of Gamla’s residents.

7.1.3 Masada

While the hypothesis that Gamla’s synagogue belonged to a group of zealots is impossible to verify, evidence from Masada demonstrates that at least some members of zealots built their own synagogue and convened feasts within its confines. Archaeologists have convincingly demonstrated that at least some members among the rebels—who collectively consisted of Sicarii, those from Qumran, Samaritans, and other unknown Jewish groups—converted one of the rooms at Herod’s fortress at Masada into a synagogue, using the building from 66–73/4 C.E. The synagogue’s hall measured 15 x 12 meters and had a single door in the middle of its southeastern wall. The interiors of three walls were lined with four

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tiers of narrow benches; the wall opposite the entrance had only one narrow bench that may have been a place of honor. The synagogue also contained a rectangular room (5.7 x 3.5 meters) jutting out into the northern corner of the hall. Fragments of scrolls from the books of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel were discovered in this room, which were likely used for synagogue liturgy. A *miqveh* has been excavated only a few paces from the synagogue. Significantly, sherds of storage jars, several amphorae used for wine, and bowls have been excavated from the main room of the synagogue as well as the ancillary room.\(^{27}\) In addition, an ostracoon inscribed with the words *ma'aser kohen* (“priest’s tithe”) was found in the main hall. Because the synagogue went out of use after the Roman garrison sacked Masada in 74 C.E., the ceramic assemblage likely demonstrates that, over a period of approximately eight years, at least some of the rebels convened feasts in the synagogue, perhaps during worship services. The choice to use the synagogue for feasting would have been intentional, given that most of the inhabitants appear to have eaten their meals on a more regular basis in their small, makeshift dwellings built into the large casemate walls around Masada.\(^{28}\)

Similarly to the synagogue members at Gamla, the Jewish rebels who feasted in Masada’s synagogue sat while they ate, perhaps substantiating a particular Jewish identity. In addition, the synagogue was capable of accommodating only a portion of the inhabitants of


Masada at one time. Stephen Catto has estimated the seating capacity of the synagogue to be about 210 people while Ehud Netzer has suggested the number to be approximately 250 people. The number of those inhabiting Masada during the years 66–73/4 C.E. has been estimated to be about 1,200. Thus the synagogue could only be used at one time by 18% to 20% of the rebels living at Masada. Like Gamla, we do not know how often and by whom the synagogue was used. We may speculate that the building was used for worship and feasts on a kind of rotating schedule to accommodate everyone. It is also possible that the building belonged to only a few or one of the groups who occupied Masada. We may more confidently assert that at least some of those who convened feasts in the synagogue were from the priestly class based on the ostracon indicating that food tithed to a priest was consumed there. At minimum, the feasts held within Masada’s synagogue would have likely strengthened communal bonds for at least some of those who had already endured war and hardship together.

7.1.4 Discussion

A notable difference between synagogues in Palestine and those of the Diaspora prior to the Great Revolt is that the benches lining the walls in Palestine denote seated posture. The evidence for feasts and the posture indicated by the tiers of narrow benches at Gamla and Masada demonstrate that those who held feasts within these buildings sat while dining. We have seen how this was an intentional statement by the Yahad against Hellenistic culture and the leisure and luxury expressed by reclining; the same may be true of these groups at Gamla and Masada. The Hellenistic cultural norm of the day was to recline at meals to denote status,

29 Catto, Reconstructing the First-century Synagogue, 175; Netzer, Masada III, 412.
30 Bar-Nathan, Masada VII, 385.
and evidence from domestic Jewish feasts shows that Jewish elites adopted this practice, at least for some time. As evidence increases for seated dining in Jewish synagogues, we may be witnessing a conscious effort made by Jews to differentiate themselves from their gentile and Jewish neighbors. Nevertheless, a seated posture does not necessarily indicate an egalitarian philosophy in terms of status markers for diners. Evidence from Qumran, as well as from Mark 12:39, Matthew 23:6, and Luke 11:43, portrays a concern with using seating to indicate social status.

7.2 Feasts and Synagogues in Roman Palestine, Post-70 C.E.–Third Century C.E.

Evidence from some synagogues in Palestine that were built prior to the Great Revolt shows that at least some served as sites for feasts. There is also an ever-growing corpus of evidence for feasts taking place at synagogues dating from the fourth century C.E. onward. The archaeological evidence for feasting at synagogue buildings in use between the Great Revolt and the fourth century C.E., however, is quite limited. The enactment of feasts

31 Preliminary reports from excavations at Modi‘in appear to demontrate that at some time during the Hellenistic period, a synagogue was built with wide benches lining two walls (1.5–1.7 m) and another wide bench (3.5 m) lining the third wall. The width of the benches, combined with the fact that they lined three walls, suggests that the synagogue also functioned as a triclinium. Significantly, some time during the latter part of the first century B.C.E., narrow extensions were added to each bench. These additions seem to suggest a conscious effort to shift the posture of those who met in the synagogue from reclining to sitting. For the preliminary report, see A. Onn and S. Weksler-Bdolach, “Umm-Al-Umdam Ruins: A Jewish Village and a Synagogue Dating back to the Second Temple in Modi‘in, Qadmoniot 38 (2005): 107–16 (Hebrew). Because the final report has not been published, I do not include these discoveries in the body of my dissertation.

32 Rabbinic texts from the fourth century strongly suggest that meals were commonly convened within synagogues. For rabbinic references to communal meals held within synagogues during the Amoraic period, see Ben-Zion Rozenfeld and Joseph Menirav, Markets and Marketing in Roman Palestine (trans. Chava Cassel; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 225–26; and Levine, The Ancient Synagogue, 369. Jordan Rosenblum (Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 179 n. 168) comments: “Apparently, amoraic literature understands the concept of ‘if you can’t beat them, join them,’ as several text clearly allow dining in the synagogue.”
notwithstanding, the limited evidence for synagogue structures in Palestine dating to first
century C.E. to the third century C.E. is not evidence for the absence of this Jewish
communal institution.33 Several early rabbinic references to synagogues demonstrate that
these buildings were common features of many towns and cities of Palestine before the third
century C.E.34 Additionally, many towns and cities in Palestine became more prosperous and
rapidly expanded during the second through the third century C.E. As Lee I. Levine and Eric
M. Meyers have noted, the destructive nature of dismantling and/or (re)constructing new
buildings in towns and cities as well as erecting new monumental synagogues would
decimate much of the evidence from previous periods.35 Although evidence for Jewish
synagogues—and, by extension, feasts held within their confines—between the first and third
centuries C.E. in Palestine is limited, the prospect that Jews held feasts within synagogues
from the first through the third centuries C.E. is supported by evidence in rabbinic texts and
archaeological remains from synagogues in Caesarea-Maritima and Nabratein.

33 Seth Schwartz (Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E [Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 2001], 215–39) has taken the lack of evidence for synagogue structures as evidence
for the dissolution of most Jewish life after the Great Revolt until the fourth century C.E. Only during
the fourth century, according to Schwartz, did Jews reclaim their Jewish identity (with the help of the
rabbis) in response to the Christianization of the empire. One response involved building monumental
synagogues. A similar argument has been made by Daniel Boyarin, Border Lines: The Partition of
Judaico-Christianity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Several scholars have
convincingly refuted Schwartz’s and Boyarin’s basic claims. See esp. Stuart S. Miller, “Roman
Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society: Belayche’s Iudaea-Palaestina, Schwartz’s
Imperialism and Jewish Society, and Boyarin’s Border Lines Reconsidered,” AJS Review 31 (2007):
1–34; and Goodblatt, Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism, 204–10.

34 See the references in Yael Wilfand, “Appendix of Tannaitic Sources That Mention Beth Hakneset
(bth hknst),” in “Follow the Wise”: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine

35 Levine, The Ancient Synagogue, 194–95; and Eric M. Meyers, “The Problem of the Scarcity of
Synagogues from 70 to ca. 250 C.E.: The Case of Synagogue 1 at Nabratein (2nd–3rd Century C.E.),”
in “Follow the Wise”: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine (ed. Zeev
7.2.1 Rabbis on Feasting in Synagogues

While the vast majority of evidence strongly suggests that the tannaim’s direct
control over synagogue affairs was limited well before the third century C.E., the early rabbis
acknowledged that the synagogue was a place where certain religious duties could and should
be fulfilled, particularly the reading of Scripture. Moreover, by the second century C.E., the
rabbis regarded the synagogue as a holy place (m. Megillah 3:1-3). Accordingly, Jews were
not to show disrespect for the synagogue by performing profane activities within it: the
consumption of food and drink was one such activity. In t. Megillah 2:18, we read:

Synagogues — one does not behave in them irreverently [קְפַלְקַלְתָּם]. One should not enter
into them when it is hot simply because of the heat, nor when it is cold simply because it
is cold, nor when it is raining because of the rain. And one does not eat or drink in them,
or sleep in them, or amble through them, or enjoy oneself in them. Rather, they read
[Scripture] and repeat and expound on them [כָּעַשׁוּ וְשָׂמַחֵו וְהָדַרֵו בָּהָם].

The above text is important for our purposes given the idea that the rabbis tended to hold
little authority over what actually could transpire in synagogues in Roman Palestine. Indeed,
Lee I. Levine has concluded that t. Megillah 2:18 “indicates what was actually happening in
the synagogue and that to which the rabbis objected; whether or not the sages were effective
in influencing this objectionable behavior is another issue.” As we will see below, material
evidence from two synagogues suggests that the anonymous injunction in t. Megillah 2:18
was not followed by at least some Jews.

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36 Levine, The Ancient Synagogue, 466-98.

37 See esp. Steven Fine, This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman

38 Levine, The Ancient Synagogue, 194.
7.2.2 Caesarea-Maritima

By the third century C.E., Caesarea-Maritima had become a bustling metropolis. The city prospered economically for being a major hub for imports and exports as well as from its thriving local agriculture and its own assorted industries. And as the Roman provincial capital of Judea, the emperors Vespasian, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, and Diocletian adorned the city with new aqueducts, public buildings, and imperial visits.

Archaeological and textual remains from this period also demonstrate that the city’s gentiles, Christians, and Jews flourished as they lived and worshipped next to one another. Archaeological evidence provides insights into the social functions of feasts convened by at least one Jewish community living at Caesarea-Maritima during the third century C.E.

Early excavations suggested that there were a number of synagogue buildings built and rebuilt on the same spot at Caesarea. The evidence from these buildings include an inscription of priestly courses, three or more capitals decorated with menorot, fragments of a chancel screen decorated with a lulav and ethrog (cultic items associated with the Feast of Tabernacles), and dedicatory inscriptions. Only one inscription, however, dates to a period...

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39 Joseph Patrich, Studies in the Archaeology and History of Caesarea Maritima: Caput Judaeae, Metropolis Palaestinae (Leiden: Brill, 2011); and


41 We should also note that while living in Caesarea (ca. 230 C.E.), Origen told his community members not to eat meals in both churches and synagogues (Sel. Exod. 12, 46). I am reluctant to include Origen’s comments above since we do not know the extent to which he was actually familiar with Jewish synagogue practices in Caesarea. It is possible that he was projecting what seems to have been common Christian practices onto those of Jews.

prior to the fourth century C.E. \footnote{See the recent reanalysis of Avi-Yonah’s excavations in Marylinda Govaars, Marie Spiro, and L. Michael White, \textit{Field O: The Synagogue Site} (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2009).} This inscription is quite valuable for our purposes, for it mentions the donation of funds from one Beryllos, the “father of the synagogue” and ἀρχισυνάγωγος, to synagogue members so they could adorn their building’s \textit{triclinium} with a mosaic. \footnote{Clayton Miles Lehmann and Kenneth G. Holum, eds., \textit{The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima} (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000), 92–95. Significantly, evidence from the Mishnah and Tosefta demonstrate that the rabbis assumed Jewish synagogues in Palestine were overseen by the rosh knesset, a cognate of \textit{archisynagogos}. This synagogue functionary was understood by the rabbis to be a prominent member of the community, just as the \textit{archisynagogos} was thought to hold a special status among synagogues throughout the Greco-Roman world. See Levine, \textit{The Ancient Synagogue}., 420–22.} The reference to the decoration of the synagogue’s \textit{triclinium} demonstrates that Jews living in Caesarea-Maritima came together in their synagogue and assumed the dining posture symbolic of pleasure and leisure associated with prestige throughout the Greco-Roman world. Not only would they have developed a sense of communality as they dined with one another, their bodily posture would have allowed them to exhibit a shared taste in pan-Mediterranean dining culture.

At the same time, the inscription also informs us that at least one of their members, Beryllos, was a leading member of the synagogue’s social organization. We may speculate that he reclined at the highest and most honored position on the \textit{triclinium} to mark his status and/or to commemorate his benefaction to the community. This idea, however, must remain only conjecture. That being said, Beryllos’ inscription was certainly intended to continually remind those reclining in the synagogue’s \textit{triclinium} of the idea that their dining experience was enriched by his beneficence. \footnote{45} Feasts convened in the synagogue at Caesarea-Maritima
provided Jews dining around the newly decorated mosaic with the opportunity to ruminate over the munificence of Beryllos, the “father of the synagogue” and the ἀρχισυνάγωγος.

### 7.2.3 Nabratein

Four other sites from Palestine—Nabratein, Khirbet Shema’, Gush Ḥalav, and Khirbet Qana—possess archaeological remains of synagogues dating prior to the fourth century C.E. The evidence from Khirbet Shema’ and Gush Ḥalav is too limited to be helpful for the present discussion, and the final report on the synagogue at Khirbet Qana is forthcoming. The material remains published from the village of Nabratein, however, provide for a rich description of its synagogue. Significantly, as we will see, the archaeological evidence also strongly suggests that feasts were convened in the synagogue at least during its earliest phase.

Nabratein was located in the Upper Galilee near the main north-south road in the Jordan Valley. Coins found at the site dating to the first through third centuries C.E. originated from Tiberias, Sepphoris, Tyre, and Antioch, which shows that the village had regional and interregional economic ties. Nabratein underwent dramatic growth during the second and third centuries; similar prosperity may be observed at other regional villages and

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During this time of expansion and affluence, Nabratein’s residents built their first synagogue (ca. 135 C.E.) and remodeled it approximately one hundred years later (ca. 250 C.E.). The synagogue went out of use between ca. 363 C.E. and 564 C.E. After this two-century hiatus, the synagogue was remodeled again and remained in use until ca. 700 C.E. My focus here is on the architectural features and smaller material remains from the original (“Synagogue 1”) prior to its expansion in the middle of the third century C.E.

Synagogue 1 measures 11.2 x 9.35 meters. The southern wall provided the main entrance, and the façade was oriented toward Jerusalem—a common feature of synagogue buildings before and after this period. The interior of Synagogue 1 consisted of two rows of narrow benches along its northern, eastern, and western walls. An additional doorway situated near the northeastern corner of the northern wall, however, interrupts the continuity of benches along the northern wall. Twin platforms were located along the inside of the southern wall, situated on either side of a central doorway. The excavators have identified the two platforms as bemas (pulpits). The floor of Synagogue 1 was plastered and preserves an imprint of what may have been a lectern or table for Torah reading. The excavators posit that a room sharing the western section of northern wall of the Synagogue 1 was used in

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48 Ibid., 28–29.


51 Ibid., 40–41.

52 Ibid., 30.
connection with the main building. The northern room’s dimensions are difficult to determine, but the finds and plaster floor of this room are very similar to, and coterminous with, the finds and floor of Synagogue 1.

Of primary interest here are the finds excavated from the critical loci within Synagogue 1 and its related structure to the north. Two probes under the plaster floor of the synagogue revealed material dating no later than second century C.E. These finds consisted of numerous cooking vessels, storage vessels, and tableware (bowls, jugs, juglets), as well as glass, bones, coins, charcoal, lamp fragments, a weaving tool, a chalk-stone mug base, and a piece of painted plaster. These finds indicate that the synagogue was built upon a site where a domestic structure had stood. The type of ware directly above the floor within the synagogue is similar to what was excavated below it: vessels for storing food and liquids, as well as several specimens of tableware (large, medium, and small bowls; a chalk-stone mug; and jars and jugs for liquids). The remains from fill directly above the plaster floor in the northern room associated with the synagogue included some cooking ware but mostly consisted of storage jars and tableware (large and medium bowls plus a jug and juglet for liquids).

Using the ceramic assemblage on top of the floor of Synagogue 1 and the northern room to determine that meals were held within Nabratein’s earliest synagogue requires

53 Ibid., 42.
54 Ibid., 41–42. See also fig. 7.
55 Ibid., 38–39.
56 Ibid., 162–66.
57 Ibid., 178.
further explanation. Discarded materials such as broken pottery vessels could be used as fill to create a level surface upon which a plaster floor, for example, could be laid. As such, sherds from cooking and dining vessels on top of the floor may have been brought from elsewhere to level the floor of Synagogue 1 before the construction of Synagogue 2. This does not appear to have been the case, however, when builders laid the foundation for the plaster floor of Synagogue 2 during Phase 2, because the plaster floor of Synagogue 2 is fifty centimeters higher than the floor of Synagogue 1. In order to raise the new floor to this height, the builders appear to have left the accumulated debris alone and added dirt, small stones, and cobbles on top of the original floor with the debris intact. The plaster floor for Synagogue 2 was then spread over these stones and cobbles.\textsuperscript{58} The earlier materials that were found directly on top of the floor of Synagogue 1 can thus be distinguished from fill used during the building’s second phase to create a level surface for its new floor. This distinction allows us to conclude that the earlier ceramic evidence reflects what actually took place within Synagogue 1.

We may conclude that the preponderance of ceramic evidence from Synagogue 1 and the northern adjoining room indicates that some Jews at Nabratein held feasts within one or both of these structures prior to the third century C.E., when Synagogue 2 was built.\textsuperscript{59} On the most basic level, simply feasting together in the synagogue would have generated a sense of

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 46–49.

\textsuperscript{59} Between 90 and 107 people could have occupied Synagogue 1 at one time. Yet the estimates for the population of those inhabiting Nabratein during 135-250 C.E. range between approximately 200 and 600 people. These numbers suggest that between 15% and 54% of Nabratein’s population could have attended Synagogue 1 at one time. See Spigel Seating Capacities, 91-101. As is clear, the uncertainty in the population estimates of Nabratein leads to an incredibly wide range in the estimate of those who could fit in the synagogue at one time. I find this exceptional discrepancy in the number of those who could occupy the synagogue analytically unhelpful for the current discussion given this.
communal cohesion. Moreover, the narrow benches that lined Synagogue 1’s walls demonstrate that those who attended the synagogue must have consumed their meals while sitting. The seated dining posture at Nabratein may have been a way for Jews to experience a particular sense of Jewishness, both through a connection to the prevalent dining posture described in the Hebrew Bible and perhaps the dining posture of the majority of Jews living in Roman Palestine. Sitting at feasts would have been imbued with additional significance if members of Nabratein’s synagogue were familiar with the Greco-Roman practice of reclining at feasts. Such knowledge seems likely given the evidence for regional and interregional connections that Nabratein’s residents had at this time. Accordingly, sitting during feasts held within Nabratein’s synagogue – like the members of the Yahad and those who attended the feasts held in the synagogues at Gamla and Masada – may have signified the rejection of at least one element of Greco-Roman culture, helping them to further embody their collective Jewish identity.

Even so, it is possible that synagogue members at Nabratein were assigned particular seating locations according to their rank within their community. At least one rabbinic source might support such a practice. In t. Megillah 3:21, we read: “How did the elders sit in session? They were facing the people, with their backs toward the holy (בַּרְכָּא) [i.e., Jerusalem]. The hazzan of the synagogue faces the holy and the entire congregation faces the holy.” The text clearly assigns two different locations for synagogue members to sit; the elders sit in one place while the rest of the congregation sits in another. Significantly, the elders would have been visually coupled with the Jerusalem-facing wall. Being separated from the rest of the congregation and associated with the Jerusalem-oriented wall might have
signified the elders’ socio-religious status vis-à-vis the rest of the congregation.\textsuperscript{60} The rabbinic text that leads to this suggestion does not refer to feasts, however, probably because the rabbis did not believe meals were to be consumed within synagogues (\emph{t. Megillah} 2:18). Thus, we do not yet have a complete picture of the extent to which feasts held in the synagogue at Nabratein reinforced socio-religious hierarchies.

\subsection*{7.2.4 Discussion}

Evidence for Jewish synagogues dating between 70 C.E. and the third century C.E. in Roman Palestine is restricted to rabbinic texts and archaeological evidence from only two archaeological sites. \emph{T. Megillah} 2:18 and the material remains from Caesarea-Maritima and Nabratein demonstrate that at least some Jewish communities held feasts within their synagogues during this period. Evidence from Caesarea-Maritima provides the best evidence for how feasts were used to inculcate notions of hierarchy. The social function of synagogue feasts conducted at Nabratein, however, are not altogether clear. Presumably a sense of communality was established as members dined together, although \emph{t. Megillah} 3:21 may suggest that the synagogue members at Nabratein sat in particular locations during their feasts as a way to denote their status. This idea, however, is circumstantial.

\textsuperscript{60} A second text is more explicit about the status of the elders. \emph{T. Sukkah} 4:6 describes the services that took place in the Great Synagogue in Alexandria during the first century C.E. In one portion, we read: “There were seventy-one thrones there, one for each of the seventy-one elders, each one made of twenty-five talents.” This text, which purports to describe a synagogue in Alexandria that stood during the first century, seems to be hyperbolic. Nevertheless, it might reflect the rabbis’ esteem for the elders in their own time and place. And though the rabbis imagine the elders sitting on thrones of gold, such images might reflect that the rabbis imagined that the elders deserved the most prominent seats within synagogues of their own time.
7.3 Conclusion

Our earliest evidence that might indicate feasts were held in synagogues in Roman Palestine comes from the Theodotos inscription from Jerusalem. Because the three pilgrimage feasts of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkoth may have been celebrated within its confines, it is also possible that those dining together created close bonds as they celebrated their shared history. Evidence from the synagogues of Masada, Gamla, Caesarea Maritima, and Nabratein does not allow us to conclude when their members held feasts. They may have done so to commemorate their Heilsgeschichte and/or on Sabbaths and the New Moon. Even if they did not, the fact that they simply consumed food and drink with one another suggests that a sense of community was reinforced. Cohesion between the members of the synagogues of Gamla, Masada, and Nabratein may have also been established as they sat during their feasts, perhaps symbolizing their denial of at least one element of Greco-Roman culture. The seating capacities at the synagogues of Gamla and Masada, however, demonstrate only a portion of the inhabitants at each site could feast together at one time. It is difficult to determine the effect of this limitation, though it likely created some division with each community.

At the same time, inscriptions from Jerusalem and Caesarea-Maritima demonstrate that at least some synagogue members during this period adopted typical Greco-Roman nomenclature to denote their elevated status vis-à-vis fellow synagogue members. These inscriptions, which would have contributed to the festive landscape, would also have reminded synagogue members of the hierarchical order within their community as they feasted. Although it cannot be proven, it is possible that Beryllos of Caesarea-Maritima reclined in a prominent position within the triclinium of the synagogue to reify his social
status. Similarly, the Gospels and rabbinic texts suggest that only some synagogue members occupied prominent seating positions. We may only speculate, however, that synagogue members maintained these seating positions during feasts. If they did, their locations would have signified the elevated social status of some members vis-à-vis others during synagogue feasts. In the end, Jewish feasts convened in synagogues in Roman Palestine during the first century C.E. until the third century C.E. functioned—as they did for Jews in the Diaspora and for those living at Qumran—as arenas for various enactments of their communities’ social order.
8. Conclusion

Theodore R. Schatzki argues that the study of social life must analyze the context, or “social site,” within which social life occurs. The “mesh of orders and practices” he describes is specific to the site where these social activities evolve. This combination of people, artifacts, things, and practices constitutes an “elaborate, constantly evolving nexus of arranged things and organized activities” that both influences and is influenced by the “site context.”¹ This dynamic approach recognizes the fragmentation of history, the agency of individuals and groups, and the ever-evolving structures that constitute social life. Within a realm as complex as the Greco-Roman world, groups of Jews drew from traditional and site-specific social patterns as well as available institutional patterns to construct social order and identity within a rapidly shifting environment. Analysis of feasting practices throughout various sites provides a socially significant lens for the understanding of how Jews were able to “negotiate relationships, pursue economic and political goals, compete for power, and reproduce and contest ideological representations of social order and authority.”²

Rather than taking a structuralist approach that overemphasizes the systematic socialization of all feasts, or even the more historically specific context of Greco-Roman dining practices, I have attempted in the analysis presented here to highlight details of Jewish feasting practices that were particular to various sites or regions. I have also tried to keep in mind, as Schatzki warns, that with too much of an individualist approach one risks neglecting


overarching patterns that can add to our understanding of social relationships. Therefore, in this dissertation I have attempted to dynamically recognize overarching patterns of feasting practices by analyzing specific practices in various “social sites”–from the home to the synagogue, from Jerusalem to the Diaspora.

8.1 Summary of Evidence and Findings

An examination of the “grammar” and “semantics” of Greco-Roman feasts illuminates a common framework utilized by individual communities throughout the Mediterranean. The order of the feast, physical posture and location of diners, material symbols of wealth and prestige, and distribution of food and drink according to status all appear to have had polysemic functions that produced group cohesion and identity while simultaneously reinforcing social hierarchies. The malleable nature of the Greco-Roman feast encouraged its appropriation by many different groups throughout the Mediterranean. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the basic elements, or at least the functions of its performative features, of the Greco-Roman feast were not entirely new for many peoples. Indeed, similar feasting practices (e.g., allocation of food and drink, physical location and sitting at places of honor, and commemoration of covenants) were present in traditional Jewish culture long before the arrival of Alexander in Palestine. The use of Greek imported dining ware and expensive wines, the adoption of architectural spaces such as andrones and triclinia, the employment of Hellenistic and later Roman decorative motifs, the use of the sympotic tradition, and Greco-Roman artistic styles provided additional practices that could have been incorporated into the Jewish festive landscape under Greek and Roman rule.

In the domestic sphere of at least some Jewish elites, there is evidence that this process occurred to varying degrees. At the end of the third century B.C.E., elites living in
Jerusalem used imported wine from the Aegean Islands and dining vessels as far away as Athens to concomitantly portray a sense of their wealth and social stature to their guests. Around the same time, Ben Sira instructed scribes and priests on how to maintain their honor and status among Jewish elites at symposia. Hasmonean rulers incorporated triclinia and Greco-Roman décor into their festive landscapes even as they made symbolic gestures at their feasts in order to consolidate a degree of autonomy from the Greeks and hegemony among their fellow Jews. Herod’s displays of Roman culture in his architecture and feasting practices were a suitable accompaniment to his role as a client-king within the burgeoning Roman Empire. Renovations in Jerusalem after Herod indicate that some elite Jews adopted aspects of this Greco-Roman feasting culture, such as andrones, mosaics, frescos, stuccoed moldings, and fine imported ceramic ware, to denote a cultural elitism. Similar practices are seen at Khirbet El-Muraq and Gamla, though the picture becomes more complicated for Sepphoris, Yodefat, and Khirbet Qana. Each site contains at least one home with Greco-Roman decorations apparent in the dining room. Diners at the homes in Sepphoris from the first century C.E. do not appear to have reclined, but used fine imported dining ware, while those at Yodefat and Khirbet Qana may have reclined but used mundane dining ware. A “turnstile effect” may be discernible in terms of adopting new symbols of wealth and prestige, although this did not apply universally across objects and locales.

The major upheavals in Jewish society caused by the two revolts in Judea required Jews to find ways to reconstitute their communities. Domestic feasts continued to play a major role in establishing and maintaining Jewish social order at this time. Archaeological evidence from Sepphoris demonstrates that many Jews living on the city’s western summit continued to use distinctive imported dining ware (ESA) to display, at the very least, a shared
class membership with their neighbors. The *triclinium* in the House of Dionysos, its mosaic’s decorations, and the imposing domicile itself, however, likely functioned to differentiate the status and class membership of the homeowner (whether a Jew or gentile) from the rest of the Jewish population on the western summit. Feasting in the *triclinium* also provided the host with the opportunity to proclaim his comfort with the ethos and ambience associated with Greco-Roman dining culture.

Rabbinic texts provide further insight into the evolving Jewish festive landscape after the destruction of the Temple and the migration of Jews to northern Palestine. To meet the needs of their communities, the rabbis attempted to imbue the basic form of the Greco-Roman feast with their own cultural practices in place of the centralizing role and rituals of the Temple. The rabbis refined or began to fashion formulae for public recitation of blessings and expressions of communal history in words of Torah at central moments during their feasts in attempts to reinforce social cohesion and Jewish identity at least within rabbinic communities. At the same time, multiple feasting practices were relied upon by the rabbis to begin to construct a desired social order. The reclining posture, the act of inviting others to recite the blessings, scant evidence of the presence of women at rabbinic Passover feasts, and dicta for the treatment of servants were all means by which rabbis attempted to create a patriarchal social order in which the rabbis could establish and maintain their leading roles within their communities’ socio-religious order.

Assessing the feasting practices in Diaspora synagogues allows us to shift focus to other social sites at which various Jewish groups were constructing and maintaining social cohesion and order. As with Greco-Roman associations and their respective feasts, Jewish synagogues provided a public stage upon which to enact and negotiate social relationships.
Philo’s descriptions of the “sacred symposia” of the Therapeuta paint a picture of the ascetic Jewish group near Alexandria. The polysemic nature of feasting practices is apparent in the description of these Jews, who—much like other Jews—generated social cohesion and identity by feasting on the Sabbath, worshiping their god, and studying the Torah. Simultaneously, the Therapeutae utilized certain practices that distinguished the status of particular members within the group, such as ranking elders by physical location and reclining posture, separating women and men during the consumption of food, and employing novices to serve the elders.

Archaeological remains of a triclinium at Delos indicates reclining at other Diaspora synagogue feasts, and inscriptions at Berenice communicate a reification of social status for individual members in connection with significant feasting events in the Jewish calendar. The evidence from Berenice also suggests a general sense of cohesion was created as these Jews held feasts commemorating significant events of their shared history. After the Revolt, evidence at Stobi, Ostia, and Dura-Europos demonstrate that Jews also reclined at feasts held in these synagogues. Furthermore, inscriptions from each of these sites attest to the use of hierarchical nomenclature to demarcate social status within the communities. The use of these feasting practices common to associations provided Jewish groups across the Diaspora with additional social tools with which to construct social order and cohesion within the Greco-Roman world while continuing to maintain a distinct group identity.

In my detailed discussion of the feasting practices of the Yahad at Qumran, I attempted to illustrate its similarities with synagogues of the Diaspora as well as its peculiarities. For a group widely considered to operate in isolationism and rejection of Hellenistic culture, the rules, regulations, and order of the feasts of the Yahad demonstrate
striking parallels with those of Greco-Roman associations. A study of the *Yahad*’s feasting practices illustrates the dynamic interplay between elements of Greco-Roman culture and the local and traditional needs of a particular Jewish community. The *Yahad* utilized certain aspects of Greco-Roman feasting practices while actively rejecting others, such as reclining and displays of wealth, to demarcate a Jewish identity that would be distinguishable not only from Greeks but also from Jews who were adopting these practices. This “segregative commensality” functioned as a mechanism for group identity and cohesion. At the same time, the *Yahad* used other feasting practices to construct their desired social hierarchy, such as ranking seat order according to status and using the threat of expulsion from feasts to regulate the behavior of individual members.

The *Yahad* presents a unique case; other feasting practices are discernible in synagogues throughout Palestine. Dating from the first century C.E., the Theodotos inscription at Jerusalem suggests that Jews may have held pilgrimage feasts within the confines of the synagogue. Seated posture at feasts in the Gamla and Masada synagogues may suggest that the rejection of the Greco-Roman reclining posture was becoming more widespread throughout Palestine, at least in the public realm of synagogue feasts. Other explanations may include the possibility that the adoption of reclining posture in some elite Jewish homes does not indicate a wider cultural acceptance of the practice in Palestine, and that a continuous tradition of seated dining posture is evident in these more-public feasts. These synagogue members may have been seated according to social status, as evidenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospels.

Rabbinic texts after the Revolt indicate a concern with prohibiting dining in synagogues, which suggests that synagogue feasts were commonly held even though the
extant archaeological evidence is limited. The two synagogues that have been discovered that may date to this period, one in Caesarea-Maritima and another in Nabratein, demonstrate that feasts were held within them. Caesarea’s *triclinium* and inscription honoring the *archosynagogos* demonstrates feasting practices similar to those found in Diaspora synagogues, Greco-Roman associations, and the homes of some Jewish elites. That Caesarea was a cosmopolitan city populated by diverse ethnic communities may be of particular significance here, given the distinction of the only synagogue discovered so far in which reclining posture was used in feasts. The Nabratein synagogue, by contrast, indicates a seated posture for diners that may have been ordered according to members’ social status—a supposition that might be corroborated by contemporary textual evidence.

### 8.2 Areas For Further Research

The intention of this dissertation has been to illuminate the role that feasts convened within private domiciles and synagogues had in establishing, maintaining, and occasionally contesting the social order for different Jewish communities living in antiquity. There are, however, many areas for refinement and additional research. Some of the archaeological evidence used in this study, for example, could be subjected to further scrutiny. This is particularly true of the ceramic dining wares. Though I have on a number of occasions argued that hosts of feasts used finely decorated or expensive dining ware to represent their social standing, we can learn more about the role of Jewish feasts by examining the makeup of tableware assemblages and size of individual vessels used during feasts. Anthropologists and historians studying feasting practices across cultures have shown, on the one hand, that the use of *individual* sets of tableware during a group’s feast tends to correspond to that community’s need to maintain a sense of individuality and status between its members. On
the other hand, the use of a few large dining vessels during feasts typically signifies a group’s desire to blur social boundaries as they pass around food and drink to one another.\(^3\)

The conclusions of these studies appear to hold true for some Jewish communities examined in this dissertation. For example, the feasts convened by the *Yahad* were intended, in part, to reinforce notions of hierarchy within the community. They also used individual sets of tableware. Some Jews living at Gamla beginning in the first century C.E., however, appear to have used larger and fewer vessels for communal dining in their synagogue. This evidence suggests that they shared food and drink from the same vessels, effectively removing notions of individuality as a way to strengthen communal bonds as they dined. The ceramic evidence from Qumran and Gamla invites a comparative analysis into the make up and size of the ceramic assemblages from other Jewish sites that can be associated with feasts, one that is both synchronic and diachronic. Doing so will allow us to say more about the social functions of feasts held by different Jewish communities in antiquity and perhaps changes to the ethos of these communities over time.

The present study has attempted to include an investigation into the social functions of feasts convened by Jews underrepresented in the textual sources—i.e., the non-elite—by analyzing the evidence for feasts held by members of synagogues. Insights into the functions of non-elite Jewish feasts could be further illuminated if archaeologists would pay special

attention to the material remains indicative of feasts from small domestic units as well as courtyards. This might entail publishing diagrams of where individual types of vessels and other material signatures of feasts were found in either domestic or communal contexts. Remains of feasts tend to include an unusual distribution of discarded food remnants, often consisting of rare or labor-intensive plant or animal species and special “recreational” foods and drink (e.g., opiates, alcohol); preparation vessels designed for unusual edible products in unusual numbers; the use of atypically large food preparation vessels and/or preparation facilities; relatively large quantities and variety of serving vessels, sometimes of unusual materials.4

Courtyards, particularly those in Jewish towns and villages, could be especially promising sites to further investigate the social functions of feasts convened by non-elite Jews. Most Jews in ancient Palestine lived in small houses that shared courtyards.5 Yizhar Hirschfeld pointedly states when “reconstructing the routines of daily life, the courtyard and the house should be treated as a single complex.”6 Indeed, early rabbinic texts and archaeological remains demonstrate that members of these individual houses used their courtyards as extensions of their household activities—e.g., food processing, cooking and baking, grinding, raising and slaughtering fowl and small livestock, craft production, the


6 Ibid., 272.
selling of goods, and even sleeping. Significantly, some early rabbinic texts also mention Jews eating (m. Ma’aserot 3:5; 3:10) and possibly feasting (m. Nedarim 5:6) within courtyards. Not only does the textual evidence suggest that feasts were held in courtyards, the material data for food preparation in particular is similar to what ethnographers and anthropologists argue are indicators for the occurrence of feasts.

My research has been focused on how the performance of feasts helped construct the social order within different Jewish communities in antiquity. I have not addressed how feasts could have contributed to innovations in the production of food, for example, or the burgeoning of new industries that were required to satisfy the special needs of Jews who would engage in repasts. Brian Hayden succinctly states: “In the past, archaeologists have studied such things as prestige technology, regional exchange, domestication, and many other material domains; but archaeologists have neglected the study of one of the most critical causal phenomena capable of tying changes in all these domains together: namely, feasting.” Recently, some scholars examining the transformation of Israelite society have taken Hayden’s remarks about feasting to heart. Nathan MacDonald, for example, has argued that early Israelite feasts directly led to technological innovations to produce agricultural surpluses. Those who controlled the surpluses could then in turn reinvest them into feasts in order to further bolster their social and political capital, a process that eventually contributed

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to the rise of the Israelite monarchy. Evidence for the pervasiveness of Jewish feasts convened during the period under investigation in this study suggests that scholars examine how feasts were intricately linked to changes in technology, trade, and a myriad of other domains of daily life.

Finally, we could benefit by moving away from interpretations of the realia of feasts and into the realm of rhetoric about feasts to further our knowledge of the formation of Jewish identity in antiquity. Several scholars have demonstrated how non-Jewish authors used descriptions of feasting practices as a way to delineate boundaries between “Us” and “Them.” These ancient authors employed dining scenes to portray a sense of “Our” refined characteristics in opposition to “Their” barbaric tendencies. Those depicted in these texts as “Other” might belong to sub-sets of those living within the authors’ own communities as well as those belonging to a completely different ethnos. A few scholars have offered in depth studies into the rhetorical function of feasts in, for example, the books of Esther, Judith,

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9 MacDonald, Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 135-65; One session at American Schools of Oriental Research’s annual meeting in November, entitled “Archaeology of Feasting and Foodways,” is intended to discuss

Daniel, and in some works by Philo. The feasting rhetoric examined in these texts has by and large been studied with an eye towards the literary tropes used by Greek and Roman authors. Other early Jewish texts could benefit from similar analyses, such as the Letter of Aristeas, the works of Josephus, and many midrashim. Examinations into these texts should also take into account the relevant tropes employed by their non-Jewish contemporaries as well as the socio-historical contexts in which they were produced. Doing so will provide an additional perspective into how even the concepts of “proper” or “improper” feasts helped Jews living in antiquity fortify their identity vis-à-vis non-Jews.

The above suggestions for further investigations into Jewish feasts in antiquity, combined with my own work, will help scholars maintain a focus on one of the central arenas where the social lives of Jews unfolded. Feasts were constituted by a host of practices through which Jews determined their relationships with one another as well as with non-Jews, advanced their economic and political agendas, sought power, and established, maintained, or contested broader tenets of the social order in antiquity. Examinations into the performance of Jewish feasts will move us closer to understanding the various ways Jews in antiquity constructed and reconstructed their communities, as well as how feasts functioned as a catalyst for the transformation of economic, political, and religious institutions that shaped Jewish society in antiquity and beyond.


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Maps

Map 1. Hasmonean Kingdom (copyright Access Foundation)
Map 2. Herodian Kingdom (copyright Access Foundation)
Map 3. Roman Galilee and Road Network. AWMC (www.unc.edu/awmc)
Map 4: Select Diaspora Synagogues (Second Century B.C.E. – Third Century C.E.).

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Biography

Alan Todd was born in Phoenix, Arizona on April 23, 1978. He earned a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson in 2000, majoring in History. After traveling and living in Seattle for two years, he returned to Tucson. Alan was accepted into Duke University’s Graduate Program in Religion’s terminal master’s program in 2005 and earned his M.A. in 2007. Most recently, he has been in enrolled as a doctoral student at Duke in the Graduate Program of Religion (2007–2014). While in North Carolina, Alan and his wife, Sara, have welcomed one son, Owen Richard, into their family. While writing this dissertation, Alan has been a visiting instructor at Duke and an adjunct faculty member at Meredith College, in Raleigh, North Carolina.