

THE THEME OF RESURRECTION IN THE DURA-EUROPOS SYNAGOGUE PAINTINGS

By EDNA GARTE, University of Nebraska at Omaha *

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THE SYNAGOGUE AT THE DURA-EUROPOS, Syria, dated 245 A.D. was first excavated in 1932-1933. It attracted a great deal of attention because of its large-scale figurative murals, unusual among known Jewish art works. It has remained of interest for the insights it provides into the Jewish, as well as the general Roman Near-Eastern culture of the period.¹

The Synagogue's meeting hall was a large rectangular room, with benches running around all four walls. In the west wall, opposite the main entrance, was a niche for the Torah scrolls. The west wall is generally agreed to be the focal area in the decorations.

The four walls, the Torah shrine, ceiling and door jambs were decorated with paintings. These decorations had been painted in two main stages; during the second stage the earlier wall paintings were expanded, and partly repainted. These new murals will be our main concern.

The wall paintings were divided into four horizontal registers, the lowest of which was a narrow band or "dado",

* Now at Texas Tech. University.

¹ Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 21. See also Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, I, 5-32, IX, 197-210.

with ornamental or symbolic motifs belonging to the early decorative phase.² The three upper registers were divided into panels, added in the later scheme. Most of them contain narrative scenes, illustrating episodes from the Bible.

In style, the paintings are similar to those of other religious buildings of Dura. They are relatively two-dimensional, and frontal. Their transcendental quality has been noted by scholars.³

The paintings are only partially preserved. Interpretations of their thematic content differ widely.⁴ The thesis of this paper is that resurrection is an important theme in the paintings. This resurrection is understood as being simultaneously historical, eschatological and spiritual. Illustrations of revivals of the Jewish nation in Biblical history, of the promise of Messianic resurrection and of the spiritual rebirth of the individual all seem to be aspects of the same basic idea—the promise of revival after literal or figurative death.⁵ Discussion here will be limited to the resurrection theme, without precluding the possibility that other themes exist as well.

There are Iranian, Greek and Aramaic inscriptions on the murals and ceiling tiles.⁶ The Iranian are apparently commen-

² On the early decorations see *ibid.*, IX, 48-77; Kraeieling, *The Synagogue*, 41-45. The three upper registers are designated A, B and C, A being the highest.

³ M. Rostovtseff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art*, Oxford, 1938, 120; R. Wischnitzer, "Jewish Art in the Classical Period," *Jewish Art—An Illustrated History*, ed. Cecil Roth, New York, 1961, 206. On a possible relation between the Dura paintings and Byzantine art, see Rostovtseff, *Dura-Europos*, 134.

⁴ See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IX-X, especially X, 197-210; Kraeieling, *The Synagogue*, 340-402. For a review of previous interpretations see *ibid.*, 346-247; J. Gutmann, "Dura-Europos; The Synagogue," *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, 1966, Lieferung 8, Band I, 1230-1240.

⁵ The Biblical episodes seem to have been understood as illustrations of spiritual truths in history. Cf. M. Singh in J. Schwabe, *Mathematics, Music, Mythology and Metaphysics*, Amritsar, India, 1958, Pt. II, 7, 16-17.

⁶ The Aramaic, Greek and Iranian inscriptions are discussed respect-

taries of certain visitors to the synagogue. Directly related to revival of the dead are three on a series of panels showing episodes from the life of Elijah. A painting of Elijah's revival of the widow's dead child (figure 1) has two inscriptions. One celebrates the child's revival; the other praises God for "eternally" giving life. The child's revival is also celebrated in an Iranian inscription on another panel of the Elijah series.

Two Iranian inscriptions are found on a painting of Ezekiel's resurrection of the dead (figures 2 & 3). They include a proclamation of joy and a reference to giving thanks to God. It seems likely that these relate to the resurrection scene on which they were written. The association of resurrection and thanksgiving will also be seen in the use of the *orans* gesture of praise or thanks in the paintings. An inscription "judgement is near" on a panel illustrating the Book of Esther, will be discussed later. These constitute nearly all the Iranian inscriptions apart from those simply recording the visitors' viewing of the synagogue.

Most of the Greek and Aramaic inscriptions are limited to identifications of paintings' subject matter and of the synagogue's "builders" or donors. An exception is an Aramaic ceiling tile, read by J. Oberman as follows:

Thou wilt r[aise . . .] the [. . .] of e[veryone dead] and thou wilt lay everyone dead [in the shadow] of thy [w]ings. Thou wilt bind everyone dead in thy hand: thou wilt cr[ea]te . . . And with mercifulness app[ort]ion thou to [them]. The reward (of) everyone dead is in the li[fe of] the world that is to come for the sake of thy gl[or]y [. . .]. [The] voice [of ev]eryone d[e]ad shall exalt thy name with every praise [. . . O Go]d who is abundant in forgiv[eness, hallowed be thy name. *Amen.*⁷

ively by C. C. Torrey, C. B. Welles and Bernard Geiger in Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 261-276, 277-282, 283-317.

⁷ Quoted in Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 101.

The inscription is read differently by Charles C. Torrey, who believes it is a continuation of a commemorative inscription on another tile. Torrey's reading is as follows:

And like all those who laboured [were their brethren . . .] all of them, who with their money and in the eager desires of their souls . . . Their reward, all whatever . . . that the world which is to come . . . assured to them . . . on every sabbath . . . spreading out [their hands] in it (in prayer).⁸

While this reading is obviously less relevant to resurrection than Oberman's, it does refer to the world to come, and has been interpreted by Goodenough, along with the ceiling in which it was placed, as expressing hope of immortality.⁹ Both readings contain a great deal of conjecture. Given either possibility, or a combination of both, the tile either indicated the idea of life beyond death, or, like the other commemorative inscriptions, has no thematic relevance. All the inscriptions that do suggest a theme seem to point to the idea of resurrection.

On register C (the most visible register) of the north wall is a panel in three sections (figures 2 & 3). It shows:

- A. Ezekiel's transportation to the Valley of Dry Bones,
- B. His resurrection of the dead, and
- C. An execution scene.¹⁰

Between the valleys in sections A and B is a double-peaked mountain with a tree on each peak and a dark chasm in the middle. Super-imposed on the left-hand peak are dismembered heads and limbs, on the right, "reassembled" bodies.

Goodenough has called the double-peaked mountain the "Mountain of Transition", the valley to its left the "Valley

⁸ Torrey, in Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 263.

⁹ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IX, 49, 53-57, XII, 160.

¹⁰ Questions of identifications of particular figures cannot be discussed here. See Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 185-194, especially 187.

of Death", and the one to its right the "Valley of Life".¹¹ Interesting in this connection is the Near Eastern tradition of a double-peaked mountain of life and death, cleft in the middle. A. Jeremias has noted its equivalence with the trees of life and death, and equated it with the Mountains of Blessing and Cursing in Deuteronomy 11 and 27.¹²

The transcendent character of the center section has been discussed in detail by Goodenough.¹³ He identifies the light-colored Greek robe, found here and elsewhere in the paintings, with the spiritual "robe of light" in Jewish and Gnostic mysticism.¹⁴ The *orans* gesture by the resurrected is like the thanksgiving in the inscription on the panel.

While Section C has been variously identified,¹⁵ it is clear that like Section A, it shows death, while Section B shows the transcendence of death in resurrection. The relation of Sections A and C is stressed by their common white background, as against the red background of Section B.¹⁶

The Elijah series, on register C of the south and west walls, shows his meeting with the widow of Zarephath,¹⁷ the sacrifice of the Baal prophets (figure 4), Elijah's sacrifice (figure 5) and his revivification of the widow's dead child (figure 1). The revival scene's placement on the west wall, out of its context in the narrative, seems to indicate its importance. Rachel Wischnitzer suggests the child represents a messiah¹⁸ and Goodenough similarly suggests he is a "Divine Child".¹⁹

¹¹ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, X, 180-185, 191-196.

¹² A. Jeremias, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East*, New York, 1911, I, 24. For other views on the cleft mountain, see Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 190-191; Riesenfeld, "The Resurrection," 30-31.

¹³ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, X, 194-196.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 124-176, especially 162, 168-174, XII, 165-1165.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 187-191; Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 198-202.

¹⁶ See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, X, 196.

¹⁷ See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XI, figure 340.

¹⁸ Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 33-34. Wischnitzer suggests that Elijah's raising of the widow's son forecasts resurrection.

¹⁹ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XII, 167.

If the child is a messiah or savior, his revival takes on national or universal significance.

Elijah's meeting with the widow directly precedes the revival in the Bible narrative. The meal jar and oil cruise that yielded an unending supply have a prominent place in the panel. Like the child's revival, this miracle follows the widow's faith in the prophet. The unending supply may also relate to the idea of everlasting life, like the overflowing desert well, to be discussed.

Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal, shown in the next two scenes (figures 4 & 5), brought revival of the nation's faith, together with the renewal of rain ending the drought.²⁰ Another aspect of the episode is the victory of "truth" over "falsehood", which will be seen to relate to Messianic resurrection.

A painting of Moses' exposure and rescue (figure 6) balances Elijah's revival of the child compositionally on register C of the west wall. Wischnitzer and Goodenough have pointed out a principle of symmetry in the subject matter of the paintings on the right and left of the Torah shrine.²¹ They have also noted the correspondence between the Moses scene and that of the child's revival by Elijah.²² Goodenough suggests that Moses, like the widow's son, represents a "Divine Child". Wischnitzer calls him "the Redeemer" who is placed in juxtaposition to the future Messiah. They have both found similarities of dress and gesture in the two paintings. Of striking relevance here is Goodenough's finding that the iconography of the ark from which Moses was taken is that of a small sarcophagus. He has suggested that the scene represents a resurrection. If this is correct,

²⁰ Rain was closely associated with resurrection in Talmudic Judaism; see Riesenfeld, "The Resurrection," 10.

²¹ Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 19-21; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IX, 236-237; X, 3-4, 42-43, 98, 136-139. On other relevant interpretations see Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 132.

²² Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XII, 167-168; Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 49.

we have another revival scene on Register C of the west wall. However, even following the Biblical narrative literally, Moses' rescue comes close to resurrection.

Above Elijah's revival of the child is a painting of a miraculous well (figure 7). Twelve streams flow from it to twelve tents grouped around it. At the entrances of the tents are figures whose hands are raised in the *orans* gesture of thanksgiving. Moses stands near the well and gestures towards it. Behind is a building, probably representing the Tabernacle, and a large candelabrum with other ceremonial instruments.

Most recent interpreters agree that the scene portrays a miraculous well that supplied the Jews in the wilderness.²³ They disagree as to the particular well represented and its significance. Kraeling finds its meaning historical and non-symbolic;²⁴ Wischnitzer sees it as an allegory for Moses giving the Law;²⁵ Goodenough believes it analagous to spiritual wisdom and, at the same time, the divine power sustaining the universe.²⁶ It will be seen that these views are not as mutually exclusive as they appear.

The symbolism of the well in connection with the "waters of life" is familiar in Jewish, as in much other religious literature.²⁷ Perhaps as familiar in Judaism is the equivalence

²³ On literary sources for the miraculous desert well, see Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, VI, 185-186, X, 33-39; Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 122-124; C. O. Nordstrom, "The Water Miracles of Moses in Jewish Legend," *Orientalia Suecana*, 1958, 98-109. C. Hopkins and Count du Mesnil du Buisson interpret the panel as representing the water drawing in the Feast of Tabernacles (cited in Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, p. 55). For a review of earlier interpretations see *ibid.*, 55-57.

²⁴ Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 118-125. The general principle of historical rather than allegorical or symbolic interpretation is stated in his introduction of the decorations as a whole (*ibid.*, 350-351, 357).

²⁵ Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 55-58.

²⁶ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, X, 27-41, XII, 170-171.

²⁷ The spring of immortality is found in Babylonian, Indian and Persian tradition (*The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isaac Landman, New York, 1939-1943, X, 475). Gertrude Jobses notes that water of life is a "world-wide folklore motif connected with Quests" (G. Jobses, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols*, New York, 1961, II, 1168). She also mentions the symbolic association of the

of water of life with wisdom or the "Divine Word".²⁸ References to water of life and the fountain of wisdom are frequent in the Old Testament and later Hebrew works.²⁹ Goodenough has pointed out the symbolism of the wilderness well, "which represents the Water of Life, Wisdom, Light and Law" in post-biblical Jewish literature.³⁰ Especially striking is a passage from the Pirke de Rabbi Eleazer, identifying the desert well with the waters of life prophesied to issue from under the Temple in the Messianic age: "In the future the waters of the well will ascent from under the threshold of the Temple, and will overflow . . . and issue forth and become twelve streams corresponding to the twelve tribes".³¹ In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the desert well was a "well of living waters"; living waters were also equivalent to the Law.³² The ceremony of drawing water in the Feast of Tabernacles was also associated with the symbolism of water of life.³³

It can be seen from these examples that waters of life, wisdom and law are essentially the same in Jewish, as in other traditions. Eternal life would intrinsically imply wisdom and holiness. So understood, the idea of water of life seems primary in the panel. If Biblical episodes, such

well with "baptism, eternity, life, purification, rebirth, refreshment, truth, youth" (*ibid.*, II, 1172). Jacob Leveen notes the portrayal of the "Fountain of Life" on the floor of the fifth century synagogue at Hammam Lif (J. Leveen, *The Hebrew Bible in Art*, London, 1944, 65).

²⁸ It has been noted that the Torah and its wisdom are compared to water in Jewish tradition. See *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, X, 475.

²⁹ See Prov. 13:14, 14:27, 16:22, Psalms 36:10 (cited in Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, VI, 191-192); Zech. 13:1, 14:8, Joel 4:18, Jer. 2:13, Gen. 26:19 (cited in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, X, 475, 499); Prov. 8:35. Goodenough notes frequent references to the fountain of wisdom in the Bible and Apocrypha (*Jewish Symbols*, VI, 193). On the fountain of wisdom as water of eternal life in the works of Philo, see *ibid.*, VI, 204.

³⁰ Goodenough, *ibid.*, VI, 193.

³¹ Cited *ibid.*, X, 33.

³² Cited *ibid.*, X, 34, VI, 194.

³³ *Ibid.*, IV, 151-152; *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, X, 475.



Fig. 1. Gute copy, Dura synagogue mural, *Ezechiel Revives the Widow's Child* (Yale University Art Gallery).



Fig. 2. Gute copy, Dura synagogue mural, *Ezekiel's Vision*, left section (Yale University Art Gallery).



Fig. 3. Gute copy. Dura synagogue mural, *Ezekiel's Vision*, right section (Yale University Art Gallery).



Fig. 4. Gute copy, Dura synagogue mural, *Sacrifice of the Prophets of Baal*, (Yale University Art Gallery).



ELIJAH'S SACRIFICE

Fig. 5. Gute copy, Dura synagogue mural, *Elijah's Sacrifice* (Yale University Art Gallery).

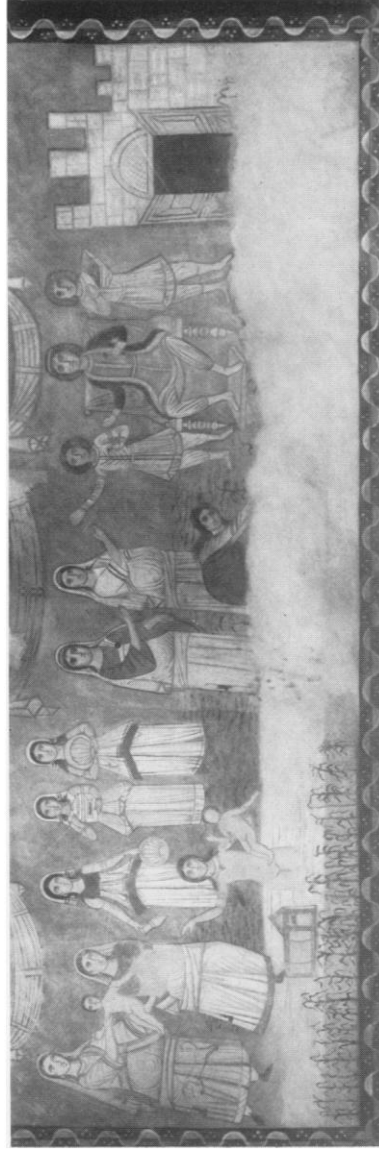


Fig. 6. Gute copy, Dura synagogue mural, *Moses' Exposure and Rescue* (Yale University Art Gallery).

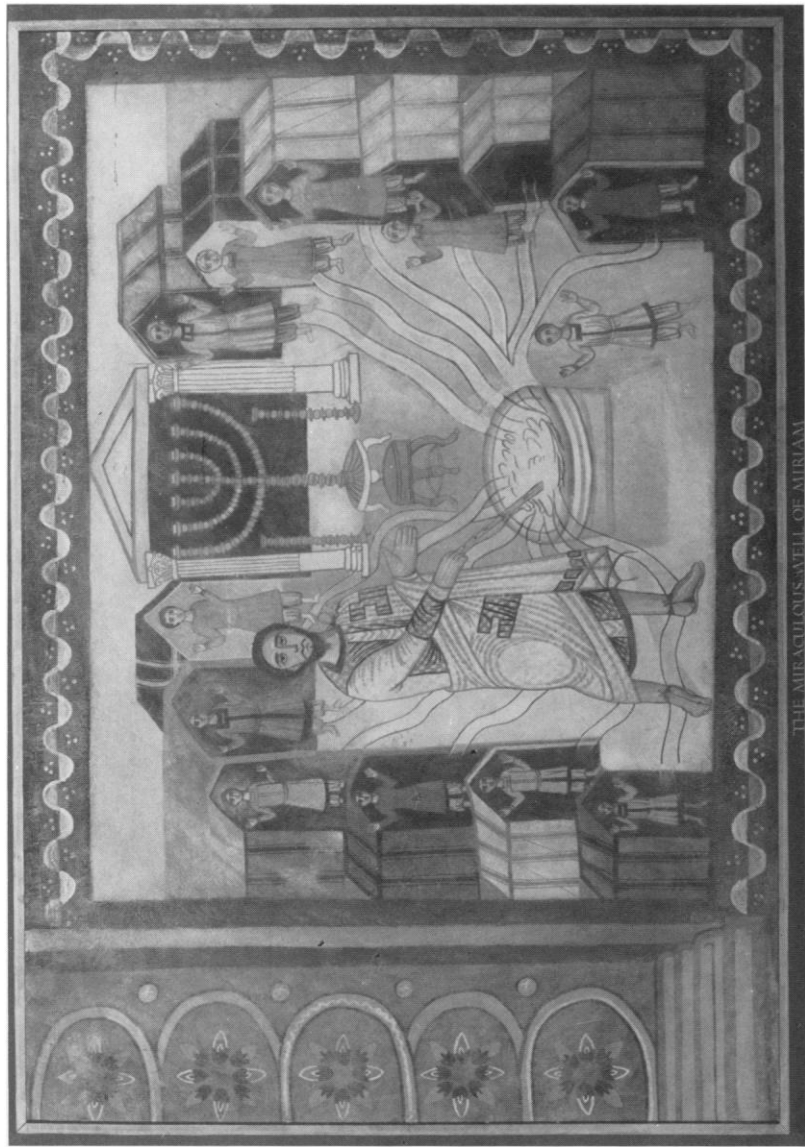


Fig. 7. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *The Miraculous Well* (Yale University Art Gallery).



Fig. 8. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *West Wall, Central Area*
(Yale University Art Gallery).



Fig. 9. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *Samuel Anointing David* (Yale University Art Gallery).

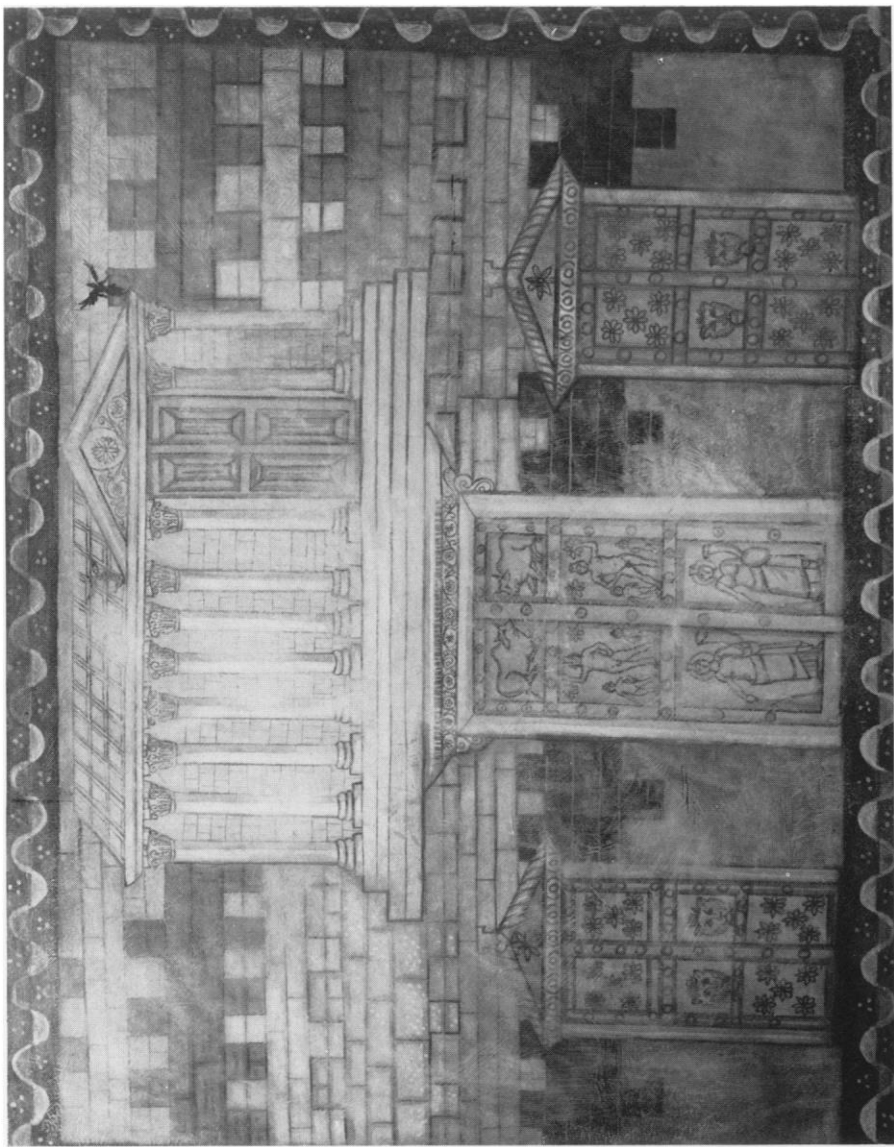


Fig. 10. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *Temple With Seven Walls* (Yale University Art Gallery).

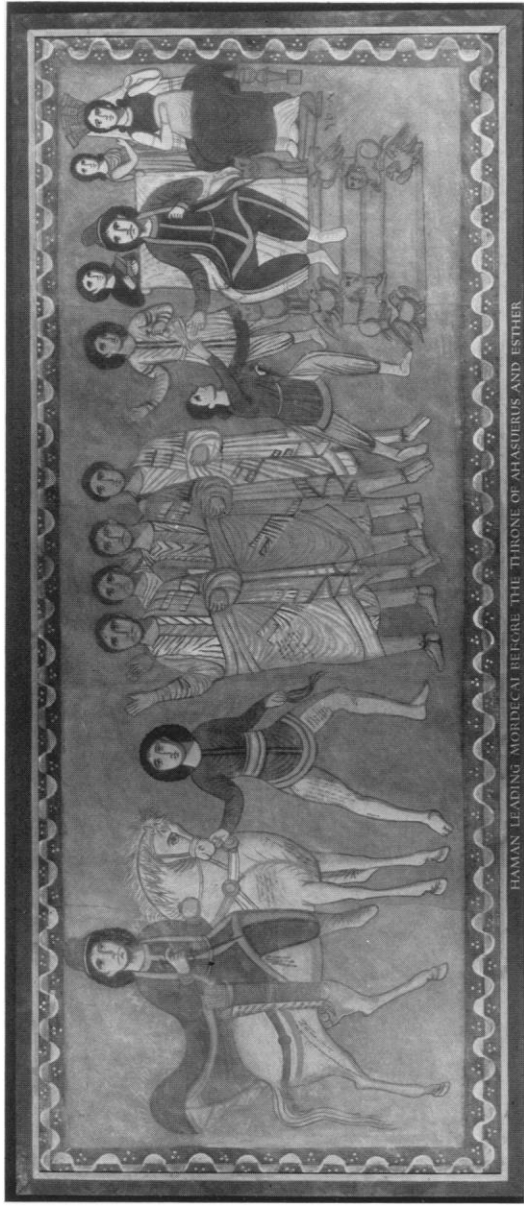


Fig. 11. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *Scenes from the Book of Esther* (Yale University Art Gallery).



Fig. 12. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *The Battle of Eben-ezer* (Yale University Art Gallery).

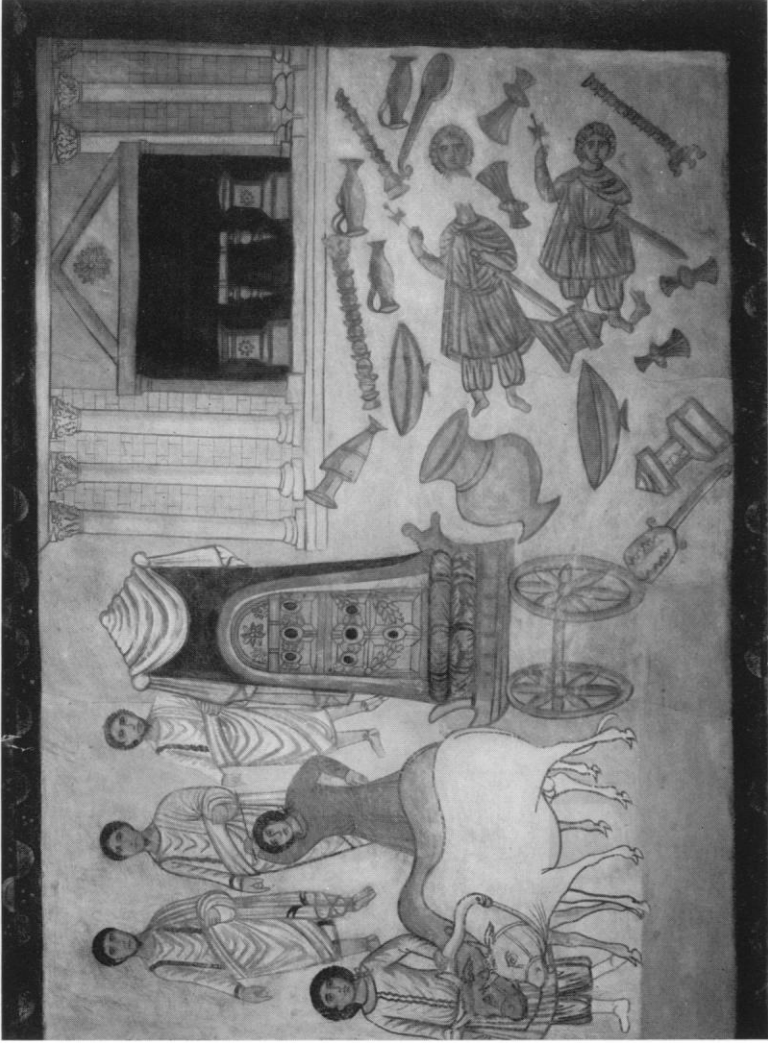


Fig. 13. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *The Destruction of Dagon's Temple and Return of the Ark* (Yale University Art Gallery).



Fig. 14. Gute copy, Dura-Europos synagogue mural, *The Crossing of the Red Sea* (Yale University Art Gallery).

as the desert journey, are understood as illustrations of spiritual truths in history, the miraculous gift of water in the desert would correspond with the spiritual gift of eternal life.³⁴ In this connection, the twelve figures' *orans* gesture, elsewhere related to resurrection, seems significant.

A fragmentary panel, on the south wall, next to the well scene, shows a procession with figures waving branches and playing instruments. It has been interpreted by both Kraeling and Goodenough as showing the Feast of Tabernacles (though in different contexts).³⁵ The ceremony of drawing water in the feast was symbolically associated with water of life. In later Rabbinical literature, the water used in the ceremony, like the desert well, was identified with the "living waters" to come from under the Temple of Ezekiel, and with the future "wells of salvation" in Isaiah.³⁶ The threshing with the willow branches during the festival has also been found to relate to resurrection.³⁷

The Feast of Tabernacles was associated with both the wilderness journey and with the Messianic restoration.³⁸ If the panel does represent the Feast, it is thus associated symbolically with the well scene next to it and with resurrection.

The central area of the west wall, above the Torah Shrine, was redecorated several times (figure 8). Originally it showed a large tree or vine with objects beneath it. Later it was divided horizontally, to fit in with the newly added registers of narrative panels. The area was painted over with scenes showing Jacob blessing his sons and Joseph's, a harpist

³⁴ Cf. Riesenfeld, "The Resurrection", 21-22.

³⁵ Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 116-117; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, X, 146-147, XI, Pl. XVI. For a different view and brief survey of earlier interpretations, see Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 53-55.

³⁶ From the Tosefta and Gemara respectively, cited in Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IV, 152.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 151.

³⁸ N. Ausubel, *A Pictorial History of the Jewish People*. New York 1955, 35; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IV, 145-166, especially 147, 149; Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 117.

with animals, and at the top, an enthroned figure, surrounded by others. According to De Mesnil, the tree was then partly repainted.³⁹

Kraeling and Goodenough both interpret the tree as the tree of life.⁴⁰ Goodenough believes its meaning was kept and expanded in the later version of the panel. Kraeling also connects the tree of life with the later version which, he suggests, shows the Messianic king in paradise.⁴¹

The room's early decorative scheme was relatively simple. According to Kraeling's description, the tree would have been the only painting on the wall, except for those on the Torah Shrine, directly beneath it, and the "dado".⁴² If the tree stood for the tree of life, the idea of eternal life had singular importance in the early decorations. It seems likely that this theme persisted in the later scheme of the room as a whole, as well as in the center panel.

The meeting hall's ceiling was covered with painted tiles, belonging to the early phase of decoration.⁴³ Several are inscribed; the rest show heads, fruit, flowers, grain, animals and other symbolic motifs. A study of their meaning is not possible here. However, Goodenough's suggestion, that the ceiling as a whole symbolizes the heavens and the hope of immortality, is important to note.⁴⁴ He believes that the placement of Tile B in the "heavenly ceiling" expresses

³⁹ Cited in Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 96. For a full discussion of the central area see Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IX, 78-110; Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 215-266; H. Stern, "The Orpheus in the Synagogue of Dura-Europos", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXI, 1958, 1-6. See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XI, (fig. 76).

⁴⁰ Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 63, 65, 227; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IX, 79-83; see also Leveen, *The Hebrew Bible*, 25-27. Leveen and Kraeling point out the identification of the Torah with the tree of life. (*ibid.*, 25-26; Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 63).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 65, 227; see also Leveen, *The Hebrew Bible*, 26-27, 29.

⁴² Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 40, 62-65, 217; see also Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, X, 120, (fig. 76).

⁴³ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XI, (fig. 352).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 54-57, XII, 160.

the donors' hope of life after death. If his interpretation is generally correct, the resurrection theme is given further corroboration.

Geo Widengren, in *The Saviour God*, discusses a form of Jewish-Christian Gnosticism, in which spiritual ascent and enthronement follow a pattern based on the ancient Israelite enthronement ritual.⁴⁵ Several symbols used in this tradition are found in the Dura synagogue.

The main documents discussed are the *Naasene Sermon* and the *Book of Baruch*. According to the former, spiritual rebirth comes with entry through the "gate of heaven", identified with the "gate of heaven" in Jacob's dream. Widengren finds this to be the same as the Gnostic "third gate" in which is the water of life. One who has passed through this gate is anointed "with silent oil from the horn like David".

In the Book of Baruch, Elohim ascends to heaven and enters the "gate of the (highest) Lord"; he drinks the waters of life, puts on a "heavenly garment", and is enthroned at the Lord's right hand. The ascent and enthronement of the Gnostic parallels Elohim's.

In the Dura synagogue, a partly preserved panel shows Jacob's dream at Bethel, with angels or spirits on the ladder between heaven and earth.⁴⁶ The gate of heaven is clearly implied, since upon waking from his dream, Jacob says, "this is the gate of heaven." Widengren's study points up the natural connection between this gate and the waters of life; entry into the spiritual world means spiritual rebirth. A white robe of sanctity is put on by the "reborn" in the Gnosticism discussed, as in much Jewish mysticism. A white or light colored Greek robe appears frequently in the Dura

⁴⁵ G. Widengren, "Baptism and Enthronement in some Jewish-Christian Gnostic Documents," *The Saviour God*, ed. S. G. F. Brandon, New York, 1936, 205-217. The immediately following comments are based on Widengren's analysis.

⁴⁶ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XI, Pl. XIX.

paintings. Goodenough has concluded that it represents this robe of sanctity.⁴⁷ A panel directly right of the Torah Shrine, shows Samuel anointing David with oil (figure 9). Goodenough suggests it represents a mystic initiation, and notes the anointing with oil from the tree of life in Widengren's study.⁴⁸ The panel's Messianic implications have also been pointed out;⁴⁹ "Messiah" means "the anointed". The Messiah's enthronement also seems to be shown in the upper central area, where an enthroned figure is surrounded by two attendants and thirteen more figures, probably representatives of the tribes of Israel.⁵⁰

A panel on the west wall shows a temple surrounded by seven walls of different colors (figure 10). Goodenough has interpreted it as representing the seven spiritual stages in Jewish and other Near Eastern mysticism.⁵¹ As such it may relate to ascent to heaven, though not specifically that in Widengren's study.

The question of a possible Gnostic influence on the paintings, or the existence of a common tradition, must be left to scholars in that field. The paintings clearly do not show these symbols in an order depicting the Gnostic ascent and enthronement; they are scattered throughout the synagogue. However, Widengren's study does bring out their inherent connections and their relation to spiritual rebirth. In particular it is seen how the ascent to heaven, Jacob's dream, the waters of life, the spiritual robe and the anointing with oil relate to spiritual rebirth.

Wischnitzer has noted that the Messianic "Salvation plan"

⁴⁷ See above 4.

⁴⁸ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XII, 167.

⁴⁹ Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 168; Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 51.

⁵⁰ See Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 226.

⁵¹ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IX, 46-49, 58-60. Kraeling's interpretation of seven cosmic walls (*The Synagogue*, 106-107) does not seem, in essence, to contradict this view; in the Near Eastern traditions on which both interpretations are based, the seven mystic stages and seven planetary spheres are closely related.

in Jewish tradition included the destruction of evil, the establishment of peace and harmony, the restoration of the tribes of Jacob, and the resurrection of the dead.⁵² The concepts of victory of good over evil, and of restoration, may be seen in the paintings.

The inscription, "judgement is near", on a painting of scenes from Esther, was mentioned earlier. The panel shows a court scene, and to the left, Mordecai riding a white horse led by Haman (figure 11). Goodenough has pointed out that the incident was understood by the Jews as the triumph of good over evil, and has suggested that Mordecai was identified here with the Messiah.⁵³ Bernard Geiger noted, in translating the inscription, "The meaning '(last) judgement' is especially preserved in the Iranian loan word in Armenian, *dadastan*".⁵⁴ It therefore seems likely that the judgement referred to is the last judgement, in which good will triumph over evil. This meaning would relate the panel to resurrection, which comes with the last judgement.

Goodenough has interpreted the white horse, here and in other panels, as symbolizing the forces of light (or goodness) as opposed to those of darkness.⁵⁵ It appears again in a series showing the Phillistines' capture and return of the Ark. The battle of Eben-ezer is represented by two combatants on white and black horses, surrounded by others (figure 12, right). The next scenes apparently show the Ark being carried off (figure 12, left), the damage it does to Dagon's temple and its miraculous return to its owners (figure 13). The series as a whole thus shows the temporary defeat and ultimate victory of the forces of righteousness (with which the nation identified itself).⁵⁶ The series may also stand for the temporary

⁵² Wischnitzer, *The Messianic Theme*, 13.

⁵³ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, IX, 180-186; XII, 165-166.

⁵⁴ Geiger in Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 300, n. 126.

⁵⁵ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XII, 165; X, 172-175, 205, 210.

⁵⁶ Cf. Riesenfeld's analysis of early Jewish ritual in which the king (and thereby the nation) is temporarily defeated by Chaos and Death, and then revived. Riesenfeld relates these rites to the Book of Ezekiel ("The Resurrection," 5-6, 13-16).

loss and ultimate restoration of holiness, symbolized by the Ark. In this sense it might also pertain to the idea of the nation's revival after its destruction. These two meanings were also seen in Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal.

The concept of eschatological victory and salvation has a bearing on a panel showing the crossing of the Red Sea (figure 14). F. F. Bruce has pointed out that in the Old Testament, the parting of the Red Sea and victory over the Egyptians were symbolically connected with Yahweh's victory over chaos (associated with the ocean), with later historical deliverances, and with the hope of future salvation.⁵⁷ Riesenfeld notes that in Apocryphal and Rabbinic literature, as elsewhere, the crossing of the Red Sea was "clearly associated with the conquering of death and with revivification".⁵⁸ The association of Moses with the Messiah has been noted. Moses' role as God's agent is emphasized by the Hand of God, which also appears in the Ezekiel panel (figures 2 & 3) and in the scene of Elijah's revival of the child (figure 1). The painting thus relates to the scenes dealing with the Book of Esther, the loss and return of the Ark, and Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal, in showing victory over the forces of darkness; it relates to the revival scenes in showing God's miraculous salvation brought about by a prophet.

The murals discussed constitute nearly all of the preserved narrative paintings. It is seen that many of them relate to the idea of resurrection. The paintings of Ezekiel's vision, the saving of Moses and Elijah's revival of the child, all prominently placed on register C, show revivals of the dead. The last seems to be the culmination of a series showing episodes from Elijah's life, in which others may also relate to revival. The well scene also portrays a miraculous renewal in the desert: the symbolism of the well as the source of water of life, or wisdom, has been discussed. The Feast of

⁵⁷ F. F. Bruce, "Our God and Saviour," *The Saviour God*, 5-60.

⁵⁸ Riesenfeld, "The Resurrection," 22-25.

Tabernacles relates to the miraculous well and to resurrection. The tree of life and the ceiling tiles have likewise been found to pertain to Eternal life. Widengren's findings on Gnosticism have suggested that several of the paintings relate to spiritual rebirth. Some of the paintings seem also to hint at Messianic victory and restoration, in which resurrection plays an important part. Finally, the inscriptions seem to specify the emphasis on revival and the coming End.

The idea of revival, or eternal life coming at the point of death, is widespread in Judaism as elsewhere. A basic purpose of the Dura paintings seems to have been to remind the worshipper of this promise of resurrection.