

Meiron Excavation Project
Volume VI

EXCAVATIONS AT
ANCIENT NABRATEIN:
SYNAGOGUE and ENVIRONS

by
ERIC M. MEYERS
and
CAROL L. MEYERS

with contributions by
GABRIELA BIJOVSKY, JENNIE EBELING, STEVEN FINE, AYSIA FISCHER,
ERIC LAPP, MIRIAM PESKOWITZ, JONATHAN REED, AND JOHN G. YOUNGER

architectural plans, sections, and drawings prepared by
LAWRENCE BELKIN AND LINDSEY BUTE

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3. Architectural Elements and Sculptures¹²*by John G. Younger*

The excavations at Nabratein recovered 103 identifiable architectural elements, all of local limestone. Many others are probably represented by dozens of chips or fragments that were too small to identify. The various types of elements are listed in Chart 3, which presents the number of pieces of each kind by field and area. Most of them come from Field I, the excavation of the synagogue. As expected, some were also recovered in Field II, adjacent to the synagogue and in Field III, used in association with Synagogue 3. Not a single piece was recovered from Field IV, in which part of a domestic complex was excavated. The majority of the pieces were

Chart 3. All Architectural Elements: Types, by Field/Area

Note: UD = undetermined

Most of the pieces listed on this chart are broken, but a few were found intact.

<i>Field/ Area</i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Column</i>	<i>Pedestal/ Base</i>	<i>Molding</i>	<i>Ashlar Block</i>	<i>Pave- stone</i>	<i>Other</i>
I.1	2	6	5	1	2	4	1 pediment; 1 UD
I.2		3	3	6	1	1	1 UD
I.3	1		1			2	1 lintel piece
I.4		5	1			2	
I.5		2	1	1	4	1	1 UD; 1 door-jamb piece (?); 1 window frame piece(?)
I.6		5	1	1			4 lintel pieces
I.7				1			
II.1	1	2	1		1	1	1 decorated ashlar; 1 lintel piece
III.1		1					1 threshold
III.2							
III.3		2	1	1	2		3 sculpture fragments
III.4		3	1	1	1		1 window lintel piece 2 cornice blocks
IV.1,2,3 no pieces							
surface							1 doorway pilaster (?)
Total Pieces 103	4	29	15	12	11	11	21

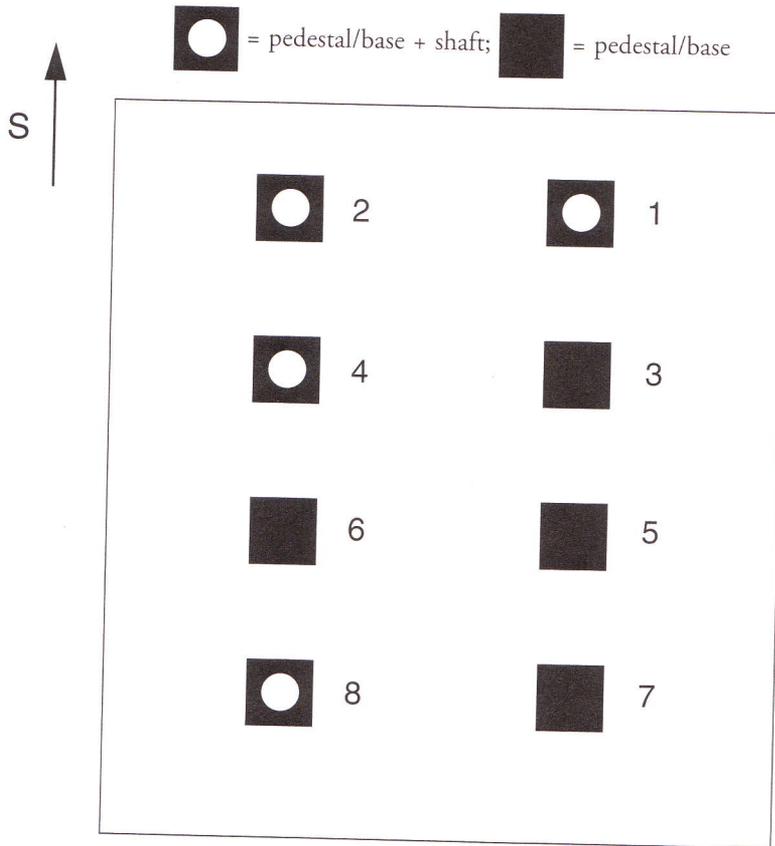
12. I am grateful to Eric and Carol Meyers for the opportunity in 1987 to participate in the excavations of the synagogue at Nabratein and now to contribute to its publication. Finding sculpture at that site was an exciting surprise, and "coming back" to it, some twenty years later, is an even more pleasant surprise.

Chart 4. Synagogue 3 (8-column Synagogue)

Note: not to scale

AF = Architectural Fragment

Numbers in **bold** indicate elements shown on Architecture Plates



<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Shaft</i>	<i>Pedestal</i>
1	I.1, AF 2	I.1, AF 3
2	I.2, AF 6	I.2, no number
3		I.1, AF 4
4	I.2, AF 5	I.2, no number
5		I.1, AF 5
6		I.2, AF 16
7		I.4, AF
8	I.4, AF 5	I.3, AF 3

damaged in antiquity during the collapse of the buildings of which they were part, with only a few being found intact. The ancient village had suffered from at least two earthquakes, which left their mark on the architectural remains.

The discussion in the previous section of this chapter examines stratigraphic and chronological issues relating to the series of synagogues at Nabratein as well as with the overall features—plan and interior installations or furnishings—of the buildings. This section will deal with the architectural elements themselves. Although most of them come from the synagogues and its immediate environs, it is not to be assumed that they were all part of the synagogue itself.

The Catalogue of elements presents the major identifiable pieces. The Commentary that follows should be read in conjunction with the Chapter 2.3.

a. Catalogue Entries

1. Synagogue pedestals/bases and interior columns

These elements are presented in the schematic chart (Chart 4) showing the location of the eight columns of the Byzantine synagogue (Synagogue 3) and the chart (Chart 5) that contains much of the same information and also provides details about the size and features of the pieces. Two of the columns are illustrated in Architecture Plate B, and six of the eight pedestals appear in Architecture Plate A.

2. Other architectural elements, from the synagogue and other buildings

Miscellaneous interior column shafts and bases

I.4, AF 1 (L 4001): bottom drum (H 81; D top 59, D bottom 64) with column base in 3 degrees; flaring quarter round over taenia over torus (D base 60). It was probably placed on the top of the pedestal for Column 5.

I.1, AF 10 (L 1001): broken shaft (pres. H 60, D 61). The dimensions are appropriate for near the top of Column 1 (and found in the same area), near the middle of Columns 7 or 8, or near the bottom of Columns 2, 3, and 6 (?).

II.1, AF 6 (L 1001): broken shaft (pres. H 66, D 61.5). The dimensions are appropriate for near the top of Column 1, near the middle of Columns 7 or 8, or near the bottom of Columns 2, 3, and 6 (?).

II.1, AF 4 (L 1001): bottom of waisted base (pres. W 60, L 60, pres. H 31.5)

Portico elements

I.1, AF 18 (L 1014): unfluted column shaft (pres. H 60, D 43)

I.1, AF 20 (L 1014): unfluted column shaft (H ca. 20, D 38.5)

I.1, AF 19 (L 1014): top of unfluted column shaft topped by a squarish abacus over a flared taenia (D top of column less than 38, D taenia 42, restored L/W of abacus 47). The abacus is decorated with two disks in relief as if bolsters on at least one side (if only one side, then the one facing the entrance). See Architecture Plate C:19.

I.6, AF 10 (L 6001): unfluted column shaft (H 157, D top 44, D bottom 47). See Architecture Plate C:2.

III.1, AF 1 (L 1007): unfluted column shaft (H. 92, D top 42; D bottom 47). The top, now badly eroded, is flared.

**Chart 5. Synagogue Interior Columniation:
Recovered Architectural Elements**

Abbreviations: W = width; L = length; D = diameter; AF = architectural fragment

Note: All measurements are in centimeters.

Items in **bold** print appear on Architecture Plates.

Column Number	Shaft	Waisted (Attic) Pedestal
1	I.1, AF 2 (L1004)	I.1, AF 3 (L 1000), with column base pedestal: W 80 × L 80; H total 66.5 cm (H pedestal 60 cm) column base (D 65; H 6.5): torus over half-ovolo
2	I.2, AF 6 (L 2007) H 150, D top 59.50, D est 61.75	
3	no shaft extant	I.1, AF 4 (L 1000) , with column base pedestal W 75 × L 75, H total 70.5 (H pedestal 43) column base (D 60, H 27.5): torus over taenia over half-ovolo
4	I.2, AF 5 (L 2001) H 138, D top 57, D bottom 59	
5	no shaft extant	I.1, AF 5 (L 1001) W 70 × L 70, H 45
6	no shaft extant	I.2, AF 16 (L 2001), with column base pedestal W 59 × L 59, H total 63 (H pedestal 43) column base (D est. 60, H 20): cavetto over taenia over torus
7	no shaft extant	I.4, AF 8 (L 4000), with column base pedestal W 72 × L 72, H total 71 (pedestal 42.5) column base (D 62, H 28.5): taenia over short cavetto over taenia over cavetto over raking taenia over torus
8	I.3, AF 5 (L 3009) ?	I.3, AF 3 (L3001), with column base pedestal W 76 × L 76, H total 73 (H pedestal 45.5) column base (D 62, H 27.5): raking taenia over short taenia over short cavetto over short taenia over short raking cavetto over short taenia over torus

*Portico pedestal(s?)*¹³

I.6, AF 2 (L 6002): top two-thirds of a column pedestal plus column base (present pedestal H 27, W estimated 63; H column base 10, D column base 47). The pedestal itself is waisted; on

13. The issue of whether the synagogue had a portico, and in what periods, is addressed in Chapter 2.1b, c, and d. The authors argue for the existence of a portico in Synagogues 2 and 3, and perhaps in Synagogue 1.

top, the lowest 3 cm of the column shaft plus base in 3 degrees (flared taenia, torus, flared taenia). An animal, probably a sheep (but called a rabbit in field reports), sculpted in relief, appears facing right on the waist of the pedestal. See Architecture Plate D:2.

I.1, AF 17 (L 1014): bottom third of a column pedestal in 2 degrees (H plinth 9; H waist 13 [total H 2]; W bottom 63, W top 52. The lower waist matches the upper waist of I.6, AF 2 (previous element).

Portico capital

II.1, AF 8 (L 1015): square column capital (top abacus 51.5 square; bottom flared column capital D 42.5, H 31.5); a square abacus (H 7) decorated with zigzags on two (?) sides above a taenia above two squared torus moldings above a flared capital; a deeply grooved annula separates the two squared torus molding. Roughly centered on the flared column capital, and below one of the undecorated sides of the abacus, is an iron ring.¹⁴ Although zigzags are a common design, compare the Mercy Seat depicted on a seventeenth-century copy of an earlier Samaritan scroll case (Leveen 1939: 67–68, pl. 22). See Architecture Plate D:1.

Pilaster elements

I.2, AF 8 (L 2005): wall pilaster (pres. projection 7.5, pres. H 13; the top of the capital receives two horizontal grooves at 3.5 and 6 cm below the top.

Surface Find 1 (outside synagogue, on north): small capital, about half preserved, of doorway pilaster (?) (H 17, pres W 17); in 5 degrees: abacus over taenia over deep cavetto over echinus over taenia over top of pilaster shaft.

I.5, AF 10 (L 5016): tall pedestal (W 60, L 60, H 49), grooved at 15 and 38 cm, incorporating at the top a pilaster [?] base (D 22, H 11; H total 60); pilaster base: bevel over taenia over flaring quarter round. See Architecture Plate D:5.

Door lintels

South Portal¹⁵ in 3 sections (Figure 22 and Photo 31): (1) above the lintel, a relieving opening surrounded by a multi-faceted arch (W arch 34); (2) directly above the lintel is a crowning cyma reversa molding (fragmentary), flanked above and below by a taenia (H total 19); (3) lintel (L 2.80, H 64, depth 72; W of door 1.9; W of pier 45; depth of pier 25? or 35). The lintel is executed in several degrees: torus (H 18.5) decorated with lingual (laurel? acanthus?) leaves above the doorframe, which consists of three sets of framing facets. In the center of the lintel is a wreath overlapping the facets; it surrounds a menorah above an elaborated Herakles knot, which is composed of the lower ends of the wreath. On the underside of the lintel, at each interior corner, is a door socket; and close to the center are two bolt-sockets, implying a double-leafed door of equal widths (W each 95).

14. The ring could have been used for hanging things; the architectural drawing (see Figure 19) of the portico suggests garlands. The sturdy iron ring is more likely to have been intended for something heavier, like curtains.

15. The lintel over the main portal, on the south wall of all the synagogues, was not excavated by the present team. Known by explorers in the nineteenth century, it was removed from the site after it was examined by Avigad in 1959 (see Chapter 2.4). It is illustrated in Renan 1864: 777, pl. 70.5A and B; Kohl and Watzinger 1916: 100, fig. 16; Avigad 1960: 49–51; Meyers, Strange, and Meyers 1981a: 4, fig. 2; Meyers and Meyers 1990: 89, fig. 25.

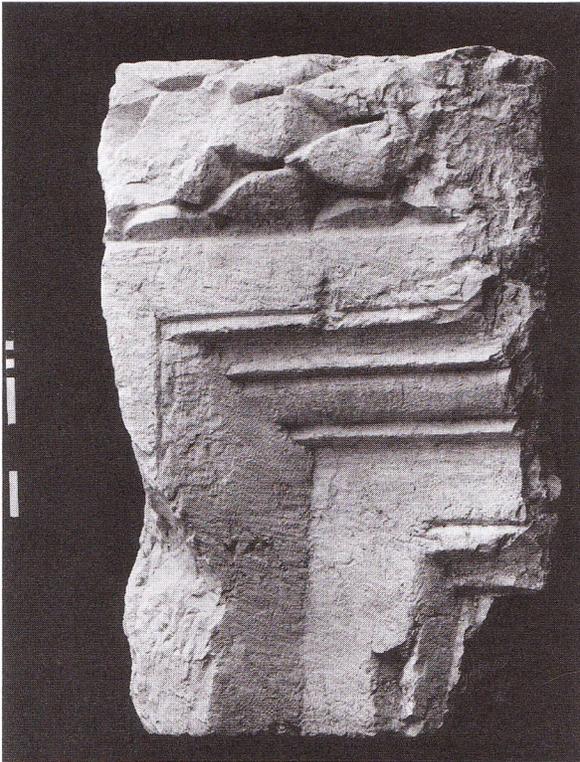


Photo 24. Left fragment of Laurel Lintel, exterior southern façade of synagogue.



Photo 25. Right fragment of Laurel Lintel, exterior southern façade of synagogue; see Architecture Plate E:1.

On the third fascia, spanning the entire inner length of the lintel, on both sides of the wreath, is a Hebrew inscription in raised and sunken letters (reproduced in the next section, Chapter 2.4). It is assumed that the inscription reflects a secondary use of the lintel, thus implying that it was made for Synagogue 2 (second half of the third century CE) and inscribed for the restored Synagogue 3.

Laurel Lintel, I.6, AF 8 (L 6001): right end fragment¹⁶ like the South Portal lintel: torus decorated with diamond-shaped laurel leaves over a doorframe that consists of three sets of framing facets (a broad taenia over a molding [cavetto over torus] over a broad taenia over a short rake; H greater than 68, Th greater than 37). It is possible that this lintel (and one of the window lintels described below) formed part of the original entrance to Synagogue 1. See Architecture Plate E:1 and Photos 24 and 25.

Window lintels

III.4, AF 6 (L 4001): left edge fragment: face (H pres. 45; L pres. 63; Depth pres. 41). On the underside is a raised anathyrosis (H 4-5; W 17-18) at the edges and a mortise (D 5) in

16. Another fragment with a laurel-leaf torus, perhaps the left end, is I.6, AF 15; a badly damaged and worn fragment, I.6, AF 2, may also be part of the Laurel Lintel.

the corner; along the anathyrosis at a distance of 34 from the center of the mortise is a rectangular mortise (max. 2×4 ; for a latch?).

I.1, AF 7 (L 1000): right edge fragment: face (H 40; L pres. 45; Depth pres. 57); on the underside, a raised anathyrosis (W 18) at the edges and a mortise (D 5) in the corner. The preserved face carries a crude lion to left. This fragment may belong to the same lintel as the previous one (II.3, AF 6); if so, the estimated dimensions would be L 140, H 45. See Architecture Plate D:4 and Photo 29 (p. 89).

III.3, AF 1 (L 3006): window (?) lintel; reused block preserving the same kind of molding as the Laurel Lintel (a broad taenia over a molding [cavetto over torus] over a broad taenia over a recessed torus), but at half the scale (W 0.41, H 0.41, Depth 0.52). Above the moldings is an inclined surface that is sculpted with an animal, perhaps a rabbit or sheep, in relief. See Architecture Plate D:3.

3. Ark block (pediment/lintel)

I.1, AF 23 (L 1014); roughly rectangular block (now broken and fractured, especially on the lower right side) with a pediment in relief above a cut-out arch (Photo 26 and Figure 27). The sides slope in slightly towards the top (originally bottom L ca. 136, top L ca. 126; H 58; Th 50); the back corners are roughly dressed; they not only cant toward the back but also incline towards a short, finely dressed taenia that cuts across the top rear corner. On the underside, the outer edges are worked differently, more deeply, and more regularly with the claw chisel (W 10) than the rest of the interior. The front of the block is decorated with a triangular pediment in relief enclosing a half dome carved as a deep scallop shell (D. 21, Depth 15) outlined with a broad curved taenia. Under the raking cornice of the triangular pediment is a crude egg-and-dart (wide spaces surround the eggs) and just below the apex of the pediment is a double quatrefoil rosette, while a single rosette occupies the lower corners of the pediment. The interior of the shell is decorated with ten ribs. Below the central rosette a vertical hole pierces the curved taenia over the shell, presumably for suspending an oil lamp. In the spandrels above the pediment's raking cornice two rampant lions rest their paws on the cornice, their tails lifted onto the upper corners of the block.

4. Miscellaneous sculpture fragments (Architecture Plate H:1-4)¹⁷

III.3.11, R81917 (L 3015; Pl. H:1A and 1B; Photo 27): sheep head and part of shoulder (head ~ 0.67×0.67 ; distance from center of pupils 0.35 [half life-size?])

III.3.9, R 81920 (L 3001; Pl. H:2A and 2B); Photo 28): bird (falcon? eagle?); head (pres. H 0.04, W. 0.04; distance from center of pupils 0.25 [life-size?])

III.3.9, R811041 (L 3001; Pl. H:3): large broken fragment depicting feathers? (pres. 0.45×0.45)

III.3.9, R811057 (L 3001; Pl. H:4): small fragment depicting feathers? (pres. 0.15×0.25)

17. These pieces were registered as objects and thus have R numbers rather than AF numbers; many other tiny fragments, too small to identify, were recovered.



Photo 26. Ark block pediment. Note the hole just below the double quatrefoil rosette and at the top of the shell, presumably for suspending an oil lamp.

b. Commentary

1. Synagogue pedestals and columns

Waisted ("Attic") pedestals (shown on Architecture Plate A) seem to be typical of basilical synagogues in the Late Roman period. For comparison, see the similarly deep-waisted pedestals at Capernaum (Loffreda 1993: 293, top), the more shallow pedestals at Gush Ḥalav (Meyers and Meyers 1990: 75, photo 34; cf. 101, Fig. 35), and the pedestals at Ḥorvat ha-ʿAmudim (Levine 1982a: 79, right photos). For the unfluted, single-drum columns, see those at Gush Ḥalav (Meyers and Meyers 1990: 102, Fig. 36). Because no fragments of the interior capitals were found during excavation, they may have been elaborately decorated, like the capitals at Capernaum (Loffreda 1993: 294, upper right photo), and therefore removed for reuse.

The greater elaboration of the base moldings for interior Columns 7 and 8 may reflect a later date, perhaps as additions in the larger, remodeled Synagogue of Period IV. Interior Column 2 (Architecture Plate B:1) preserves a column shaft height of 150 with a diminution from D 61.75 to 59.53 (or 2.22 per 150 or 1.48 diminution per 100 in height). Because the lower column diameters run 60-62 (although Column 1 is 65), and columns are usually about 4-5 meters in height, the upper column diameter would be approximately 54-55 (giving a lower D:H ratio as 1:7.7-1:9).

2. Portico

The reconstruction of the upper and lower diameters of the interior columns allows me to identify the smaller portico columns. The unfluted column shaft I.6, AF 10 (Architecture Plate C:2) presents a diminution of 3 over 157 (or 1.91 over 100). If this fragment were the

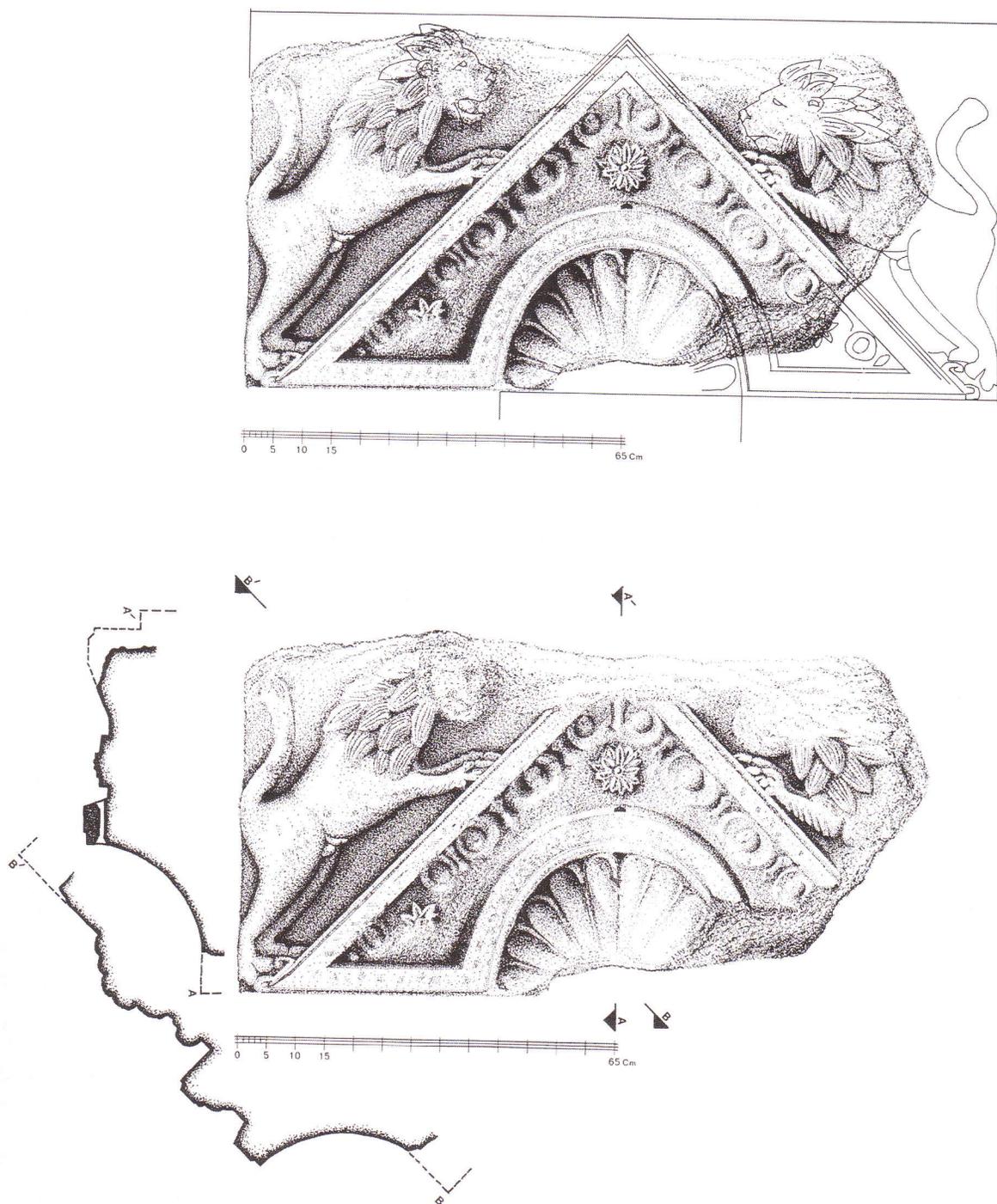


Fig. 27. Ark block, pediment of Torah Shrine of Synagogue 2a.

bottom drum to which I.1, AF 19 (Architecture Plate C:1) was the top, it would take a H of 470 to get from 47 to 38 (diminution 9). A pedestal of ca. 43 would give a total height of 513, rather high for a portico but matching the architect's reconstruction of a portico the same height as the interior (see Figures 13 and 19). The portico column capitals may have resembled Ionic capitals.

The portico was elaborate. Over the central doorway was a carved lintel: the intact South Portal lintel with relieving archway, similar to the one at Baram (Lewin 2005: 179 fig.). Fragments of another lintel—the Laurel Lintel (Architecture Plate E:1 and Photos 24 and 25)—are carved similarly, with an upper bolster of precise laurel leaves. Although the Laurel Lintel's lower moldings are more elaborate, its comparable decoration may mean that it served as an earlier prototype for the South Portal lintel; or it may have served as a doorway to be located elsewhere.

Good parallels exist for the lintels' general layout (see Avigad 1960: 51; Goodenough 1953: 3, nos. 571, 574, 584, 592, 629; cf. the lintel at Gush Ḥalav in Meyers and Meyers 1990: 74ff.) For the sharp style of the leaves and their central ridge, see sarcophagi 97 and 101 ("acanthus" A & B) from catacomb 20 at Beth She'arim (Avigad 1976: 150–153, pls. 47, 47A.1, 48); these date by context from the end of the second to the mid-fourth century CE.

The smaller lintels (with two of the preserved fragments perhaps being the left and right fragment of the same lintel) may be window lintels contemporary with the Laurel Lintel. If the rectangular mortise on III.3, AF 6 is for bolting a shutter (with the other panel locking in behind it) and is placed to one side of the center of the window frame, then the restored width of the shutter is ~30 for a window opening with a restored width of ~55. The crude lion in relief on I.1, AF 7 (Architecture Plate D:4; Photo 29) seems late (third to fourth century CE?); for the hair, compare the terracotta sheep-juglet in the J. Paul Getty Museum (JPGM 77.AE.10), said to be second century CE.

This reconstruction implies that in its earliest stage, in Synagogue 1 or 2a or both, the portico may have had windows and a slightly more elaborate Laurel Lintel.

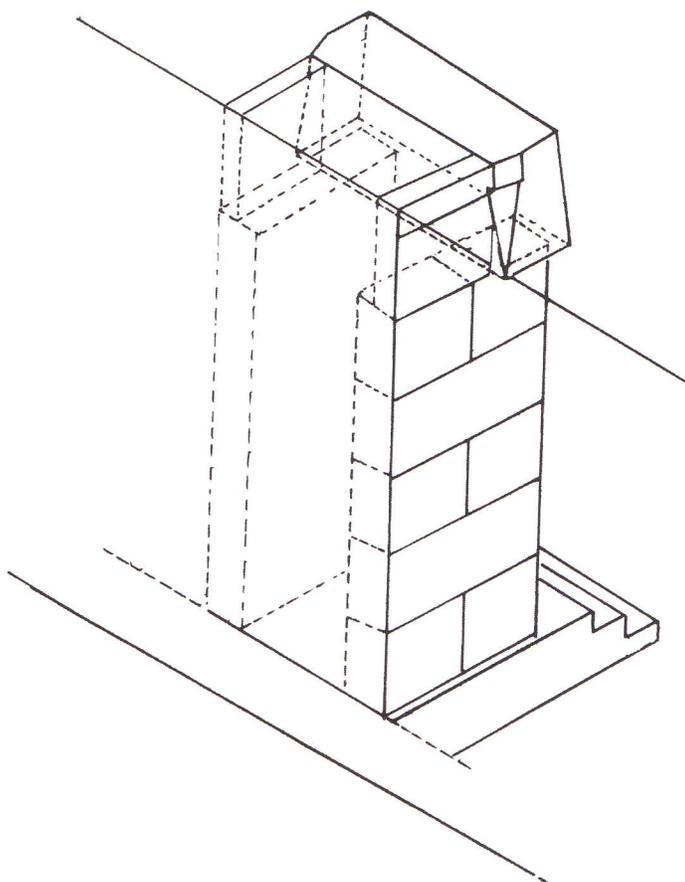


Fig. 28. Reconstruction of Torah Shrine from rear, showing placement against south wall. Courtesy of John Younger.



Photo 27. Sheep head sculpture fragment; see *Architecture* Plate F:1A and B.

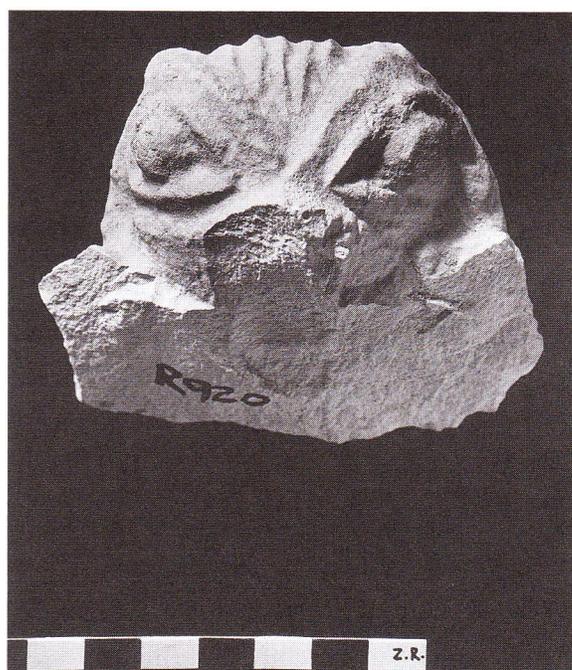


Photo 28. Bird head sculpture fragment; see *Architecture* Plate F:2A and B.

3. The Ark block (Photo 26 and Figure 27)

The Ark block was probably in use on the western *bema* of Synagogue 2a over a Torah Shrine/Niche. As suggested above in this chapter, after its damage in the earthquake of 306 CE, the block was deposited upside down in the western *bema* (see also Meyers and Meyers 1981; Meyers, Strange, and Meyers 1981a: 42–43; Younger 1982). It is possible that the Ark block may have originally served Synagogue 1. Its small size (see Chart 6, p. 89) and the slightly off-center hole in the shell (as if deliberately drilled so as not to mar the central rib) may imply that the block was originally created for a window; compare the Capernaum windows discussed below and also Baram (Kohl and Watzinger 1975: 14, ill. 21, 22). The precise treatment of the lions may also support an earlier, second century date.

The Ark block, a front lintel over the Torah Niche (or Torah Shrine), is of Syrian type with pediment and arch cut into its base. From the catalogue description, it should be clear that side walls probably supported the block;¹⁸ these walls were stepped in slightly from the edge of the Ark block (the width of its anathyrosis), leaving a slight 10 cm overhang at the front sides of the Ark block. Because the side walls were stepped in slightly to allow for the Ark block to overhang them, the blocks backing onto the Ark block and resting on the side walls were also recessed from the edge of the Ark block, thus accounting for the rake of its back cor-

18. Supporting the lintel solely on two columns would have required some kind of stabilizing support (like a strut added to the top of the lintel; no signs of such a strut occur on the top of the Ark block. Side walls would have supported the Ark block more securely.

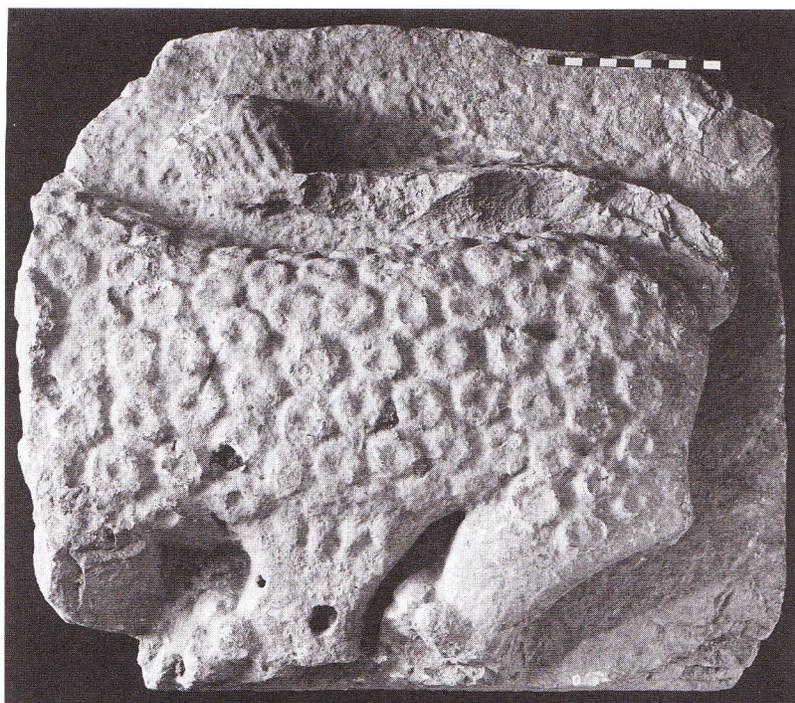


Photo 29. Lintel with crude relief of lion; cf. *Architecture Plate D:4*.

Chart 6. Comparative Sizes for the Ark Block^a

	<i>Nabratein</i>	<i>Capernaum windows</i>	<i>Arbel</i>	<i>Dikke</i>
Length	av. 131	206	150	148
Height	58	72	80	65
Length:Height	2.26	2.86	1.875	2.28
Thickness	50	42?		22
Radius of Shell	36	39	30	32

a. Compiled by Lawrence Belkin.

ner, inclining to the top in order to join the top of the backer blocks. The taenia cut across the back top corner of the Ark block probably joined a taenia at the top of the backer blocks atop the sidewalls. For a reconstruction of this unusual but logical arrangement, see Figure 28 (as reported in Younger 1982).

At the sides of the Ark block there is no room for acroteria that could have protruded like those that appear in several depictions of Torah shrines such as Beth She‘arim, catacomb 1, Hall 1 (Mazar 1973: 111–12, fig. 11; cf. Goodenough 1953: ill. 25), although such acroteria could have surmounted the roughened top surface. From the backer blocks, however, oil lamps could have been suspended as depicted on the Beth Alpha synagogue mosaic and on the fragments of the Byzantine bowl found at Nabratein itself (see Chapter 5.6).

For the small size of the Torah Shrine and its triangular pediment, compare the well-preserved shrine (Torah Niche) at Dura Europos (Depth 41; see Gutman 1975: 228; Kaploun 1973: 80 top fig.; Levine 1982b: 175 fig.) and the depictions of similar shrines in the catacomb under the Villa Torlonia in Rome (Wischnitzer 1964: 16, fig. 8) and on a Coptic funerary stele (Badawy 1978: 102, fig. 2.67, no. 8687; 213, fig. 3.196, 3.197).

The Syrian pediment over a half-dome represented as a shell was a common feature in Galilee. As noted above, the second century synagogue at Capernaum employs this pediment type for the windows in its façade, second zone (Kohl and Watzinger 1975: 14, figs. 21 and 22; Hoppe 1994: 33–40, ill. 9; and for the general placement of the windows see Avigad 1982: 42 fig.); florals appear in the spandrels above the pediment. And Syrian pediments are depicted in mosaics like those from the Beth Alpha synagogue, where birds flank the pediment and lions flank the shrine (Leveen 1939: pl. 18; Goodenough 1953: ill. 9 and 10 [the whole mosaic]; Kloner 1982: 15, lower right fig. [plan of synagogue with mosaic]; Meyers and Meyers 1981: 32 fig. [top panel]) and from Beth Shean (shown in Meyers and Meyers 1981: 33, fig.). The Beth Shean mosaic (Photo 30) evokes the general appearance of the Nabratein shrine: an aedicula with suspended oil lamp encloses a small, curtained shrine surmounted with a shell, which is a popular design, perhaps metonymically standing for the Torah Shrine itself. Note that at Beth She'arim, the shell is incised on the wall of catacomb 4 (Avigad 1957: 249, fig. 3) and on a sarcophagus (Avigad 1957: 185 fig.).

The rosettes in the pediment are also a common design and appear (for instance) throughout the catacombs at Beth She'arim (Avigad 1976: figs. and pls. *passim*).

The egg-and-dart molding is also a common decoration for moldings and cornices; the wide spaces around the eggs give a distinctive openness that seems datable to the second and third centuries CE (cf. the cornice from Chorazin). On the Capernaum windows (Kohl and Watzinger 1975: 14, ill. 22), the lower frieze of open egg-and-dart supports the pediment; and a frieze on the interior of the building has a similar egg-and-dart molding below the projecting dentils of the cornice (Kloner 1982: 14 fig.). Similar open egg-and-dart friezes occur on the carefully carved "acanthus" sarcophagi A and B (nos. 101 and 97 respectively) from Beth She'arim catacomb 20 (Avigad 1976: 150–53, pls. 47.1 and 48.1), although the crude carving of the Nabratein molding more resembles that on the "shell" sarcophagus (no. 117) from the same catacomb.

It is the lions, of course, that constitute the most distinctive element of the Ark block. In general, they look small and domestic, like house dogs (e.g., spitzes or shelties), especially in their raised wavy tails and their misplaced genitals. The genitals of male lions, like those of domestic cats, are placed below the base of the tail; thus the penis drops vertically from its root and is not housed in a sheath connected to the base of the stomach, as a dog's penis is. The penises of the Ark block lions are rendered as if they were canine organs.

The antithetic, flanking position of the lions is common in Late Roman Galilee. They can flank a menorah as on a doorway relief from 'En Neshut (Ma'oz 1982: 102) and in the Ma'on synagogue mosaic (Kloner 1982: 17 fig.).¹⁹ They flank a man on a long relief from 'En Neshut (Ma'oz 1982: 111, 112 lower fig.). Or they can flank something simpler or nothing at all as on several sarcophagi from Beth She'arim (Avigad 1976: pls. 40.1, 41.1, and 41.2) or on the walls

19. Perhaps also in the damaged mosaic from the Beth-Shean synagogue, north doorway (Bahat 1982: 84 fig.).



Photo 30. Beth Shean mosaic depicting Torah Shrine. Note elements similar to those of the Nabratein Ark block: hanging lamp inside the gable, and shell motif. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

of Hall A, catacomb 4 (Mazar 1973: 177, pls. 32.3 and 34 [unfinished]; cf. Mazar 1973: pl. 32.2) as well as on a lintel from Ḥorvat ha-ʿAmudim (Levine 1982a: 81 fig.). A single salient lion (as if suggesting a pair of antithetic lions) also leaps up on a column from Zumimra (Maʿoz 1922: 105, lower left).

The undramatic flame-locks that articulate the manes should be diagnostic, but the pattern appears as early as the Classical period²⁰ and runs into the Late Roman period.²¹ Variations on this type of lock occur as well; some can be drilled (perforated and dramatic in their ability to admit light),²² but most are simple. These simple flame-locks can also date early.²³ However, a couple are contemporary with, and very close to, the Nabratein lion manes; see

20. Cf. the schematic flame-locks on #1762, by the Heidelberg painter, in Boardman, Palagia, and Woodward 1988, and the curvy locks on #1764, a Laconian black-figure cup (late sixth century BCE) in Boardman, Palagia, and Woodward 1990.

21. Cf. the terracotta sima from Salamis, Cyprus (Karageorghis 1966: 256 no. 92, pl. XII.1 and 2, fig. 9), dated fourth–fifth century CE, and a Late Roman relief bowl (fourth–fifth century CE), #1964 in Boardman, Palagia, and Woodward 1990.

22. Cf. a stone relief depicting Herakles fighting the Nemean lion (ca. 170–180 CE), #1929 in Boardman, Palagia, and Woodward 1990, and the relief in Grossman 2003: 95 below fig., datable to the late fourth century CE.

23. Cf. a bronze handle attachment, #216, and a bronze mirror cover, #1825 (both fourth century BCE), in Boardman, Palagia, and Woodward 1988.

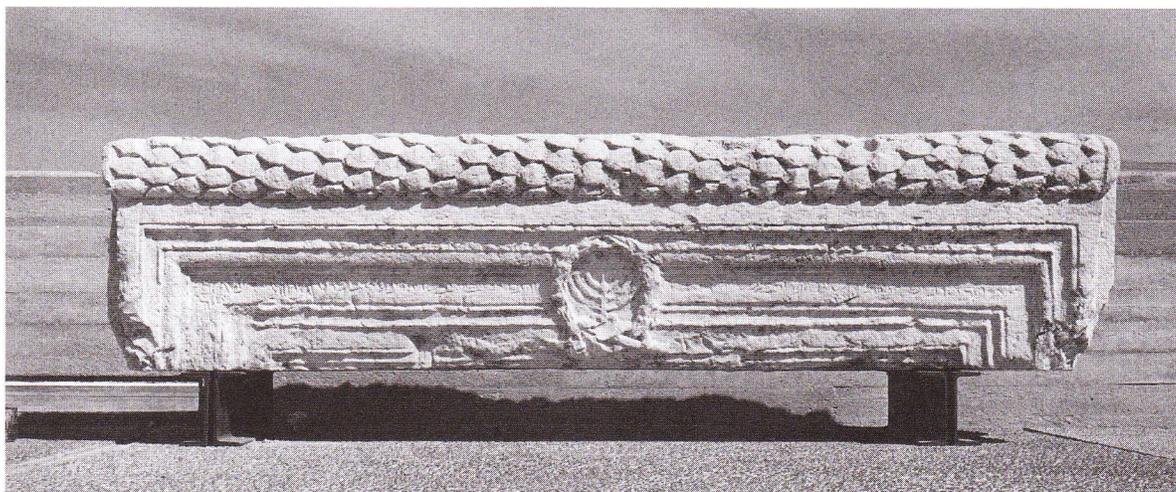


Photo 31. Door lintel of the main southern entryway of the Nabratein synagogue (cf. Figure 22), which has been on display at the Israel Museum for many years. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

the lion on the front of sarcophagus 101 (“acanthus” A) from catacomb 20 at Beth She‘arim (Avigad 1976: 150–53, pl. 47.1, 47A.1) and the relief of a recumbent lioness from ‘En Neshut (Ma‘oz 1982: 110, middle fig.).

4. Miscellaneous sculpture fragments

The other surviving pieces of sculpture, shown on Architecture Plate H (and Photos 27 and 28), depict animals. Two views of the head of a sheep appear on Architecture Plate H:1A and 1B. The other (H:2A and B) is a bird, meant to be imposing, like a falcon or an eagle. Two additional fragments (H:3 and 4) are too small to be identified but seem to be bird feathers.

All the pieces are carved carefully enough to be contemporary with the lions on the Ark block. Like the lions and sheep on the window lintel and the sheep on the portico pedestal, they probably decorated elements of the (early?) portico where they could be seen to advantage in the sunlight. Because the heads here are in the round, they probably protruded from relief bodies; such would be appropriate for column capitals (compare the exuberant Corinthian capitals at Capernaum mentioned above) or lintels. The lintel of the main entrance at Capernaum (e.g., Loffreda 1975: Fig. 27; cf. Figs. 5, 6, 11, 69) preserves relief floral decoration (palms on the bolsters and garlands on the lintel itself); but at Gush Ḥalav and at Dabbura, lintels carried displayed eagles with projecting heads (Urman 1982: 155 fig.). For the thick striations of the “feathers” of the eagle, compare the wreath on the “daughters” sarcophagus (no. 25) from Catacomb 20, Beth She‘arim (Avigad 1976: pl. 39.1).

4. Note on the Lintel Inscription

The synagogue lintel from Nabratein (Photo 31) was known already in the nineteenth century. It was first mentioned by Renan (1864: 777, Pl. LXX, 5A–B) and is mentioned regu-

larly in subsequent literature (e.g., Kohl and Watzinger 1916: 103, ill. 19). The long inscription on the lintel, however, was considered an enigma until Avigad published his reading of it nearly a century after Renan's work (Avigad 1960). Avigad visited the site in 1959 and found the lintel face down about two and a half meters south of the main entrance to the synagogue, just as Kohl and Watzinger depicted it.²⁴ He noted that the inscription, which is incised on the front of the lintel, was in fairly good condition (1960: 49) because it lay buried in the dirt. Avigad made a squeeze of the inscription at the site so that he could study it later. Soon afterwards, when the lintel had been transferred to the Department of Archaeology at the Hebrew University, he arranged for proper photographs and completed his analysis of the inscription and decorative elements. The lintel was subsequently transported to the Israel Museum, where it was placed outside on the walkway leading to the building; it has remained there for decades, with the inscription subject to weather and pollution, and is barely legible today.

Like so many epigraphers before him, Avigad was struck by the design of the lintel itself, which measures 2.8 m in length, 0.64 m high, and 0.72 m wide. At its bottom are two door-sockets and two bolt-sockets, indicating that the lintel stood on top of a double-leaved door that was 1.90 m wide. In profile the lintel closely resembles the lintels at Gush Ḥalav and Baram (see Figure 26), which date to the Late Roman period (Avigad 1960: 51; Meyers and Meyers 1990: 89, Fig. 25) and which feature a decorated cornice molding in a laurel-leaf pattern. However, only the Nabratein lintel is decorated in its center, with a seven-branched menorah encircled by a wreath, its ribbons tied in a Hercules knot. Avigad comments that this decorative scheme is unique on a synagogue lintel; but he does cite parallels, published by Goodenough, that occur on architectural fragments from non-synagogue contexts (Avigad 1960: 51; cf. Goodenough 1953: vol. III, nos. 571, 574, 584, 592, 629). On the basis of its design and decoration, Avigad suggests that the lintel is Late Roman. This compares well with the similar Gush Ḥalav lintel, which has been dated to the late third century CE, in the early part of the Late Roman period (Meyers and Meyers 1990: 74ff.).

In examining the letters that are incised into the third fascia of the lintel on both sides of the central wreath, Avigad notes that from a palaeographic point of view the inscription is much later than the decorative elements. He suggests that it dates to the sixth century CE (Avigad 1960: 54). He also notes that, because the inscription features differing techniques and styles of lettering, several hands may be represented in its execution. Avigad's translation, preceded by our transliteration of his transcription, is as follows:

*lmspr 'rb' m'wt wtyš'm w'rb' šnh lhrbn
hbyt nybnh bšrr ḥnyn' bn lyzr wlvly'n' br ywdn*

(According) to the number four hundred and ninety four years after the destruction (of the Temple), the house was built during the office of Ḥanina son of Lezer and Luliana son of Yudan.

24. An anecdote worth recording was transmitted to E. Meyers when he first visited Nabratein with the regional antiquities inspector, Nathaniel Tefilinski, in 1969. Tefilinski recounted the details of Avigad's visit to the site in 1959 when Tefilinski was his guide. After exploring the ruins of the site, they went on to examine the lintel piece. Suddenly a wild boar approached, snorting in a mean temper; and both had to climb a nearby tree. They remained in the tree for some time until the boar left. Both men looked fondly on the experience many years later.

Nearly fifty years later, Avigad's analysis is still very compelling, and we here only emphasize several points of his discussion. First, the use of *bayit* ('house') for synagogue is unusual but has a parallel at Dura Europos, where *hdyn byth* ('this house') appears in the Aramaic synagogue inscription to signify 'synagogue' or 'house of gathering' (*byt hknst*; see Avigad 1960: 52–53; cf. Kraeling 1956: 263). We would add that there are other important similarities between the Nabratein and Dura inscriptions, even though the former is in Hebrew and the latter, which dates to 244/5 CE and is nearly 300 years older, is in Aramaic. Both have a date that refers to another event or date, and both commemorate a building activity associated with the (re)modeling of the synagogue under specific leadership.

Second, Avigad's calculation of the date of the lintel inscription has been borne out by numismatic evidence uncovered in the 1980–81 excavations. In computing the actual date of the Nabratein lintel inscription, he added 494 to the year of the destruction of the Second Temple, 70 CE. The resulting date is 564 CE, which falls during the reign of Justinian I (527–565 CE).²⁵ In relation to that date, we note that two rare coins were found during excavation in association with the final rebuilding of the synagogue: (1) a gold coin of Justinian, dating to 528 CE, was found just south of the synagogue near the cornerstone (see Coin Catalogue no. 81); and (2) a gold coin of Phocas (602–610 CE) was found near the threshold of the synagogue's main entrance on the southern wall (see Coin Catalogue no. 88). Three other coins from the sixth century may be related to activities associated with the rebuilding effort, although one of them—a coin of Justin I—predates the rededication by some time (see Coin Catalogue nos. 80, 82, and 86). The last rebuilding and remodeling of the Nabratein synagogue thus began some time early in Justinian's reign; and the building was rededicated in 564, just as the lintel proclaims, at the end of his reign (Justinian died in 565 CE). The coin of Phocas may be related to some additional refurbishing in the early seventh century.

The chronology of Synagogue 3 and the date of the lintel inscription raise the question of Justinian's ban, passed on March 18, 545 CE and reiterating an earlier ban of Theodosius II (passed on February 15, 423 CE) forbidding the building of new synagogues.²⁶ In such a time of increasing tension between Jews and Christians, the rebuilding of Nabratein seems all the more important. Whether the use of spolia and the re-building of ruins nearly two centuries old rather than constructing an entirely new building came into play is difficult to say; but is a suggestion worth considering as more data from the Byzantine period emerges.

25. At the time of Avigad's publication, only a single funerary inscription using the formula that tied the date to the destruction of Jerusalem was known, and that was from Zoar on the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea (Naveh 1978: 32). Since then, more inscriptions with the formula have been found at Zoar (Naveh 1999–2000: 617–34, especially the full catalogue, on p. 628, of epigraphs using this date formula).

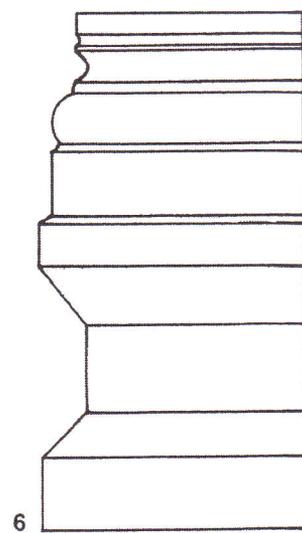
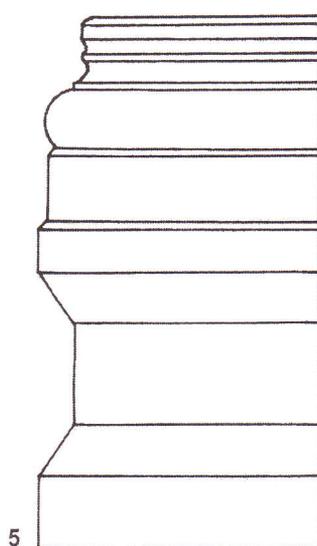
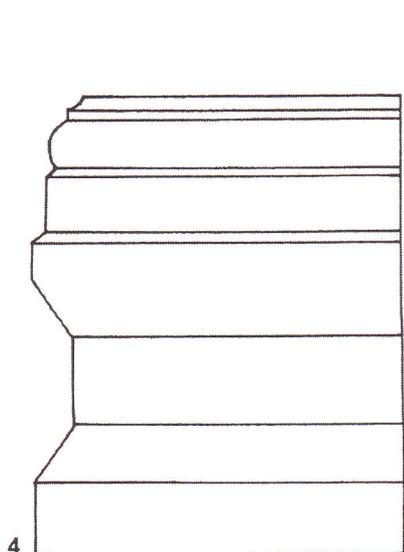
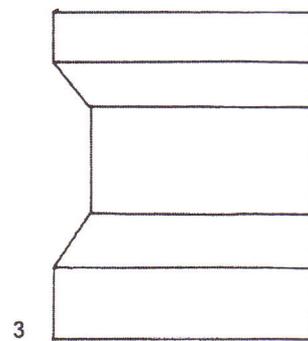
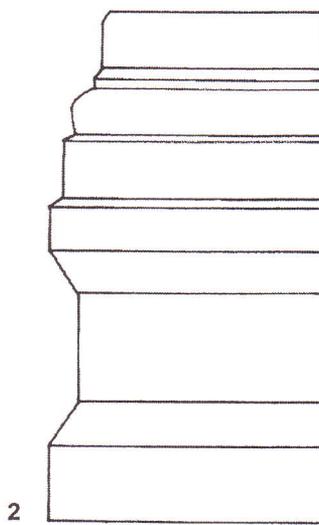
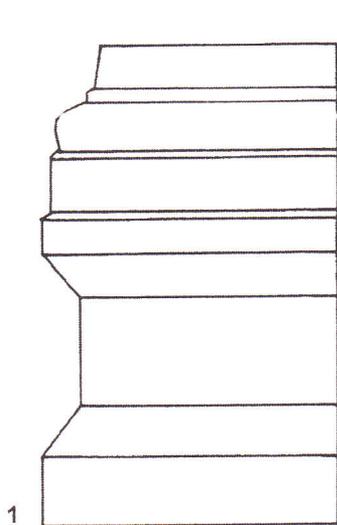
26. The texts of each of these laws are published in the original and in English translation with notes by Linder (1987: 287–89 [Theodosius], 398–402 [Justinian]). Theodosius, however, already accorded protection of synagogues, in 393, on the grounds that "the sect of the Jews is prohibited by no law" (p. 73). In this Arcadius followed him in 397 and Honorius in 412. Under pressure from fanatical Christians, Theodosius in 415 prohibited Gamaliel VI from building new synagogues, turning it into a general prohibition in 423 (so Linder 1987: 74). This datum contradicts Aviam's assumption that "Christian emperors legislated laws forbidding construction of new synagogues . . . during the second half of the fourth century" (2004: 168). To the best of our knowledge, this is in error and should be emended to the "first half of the fifth century." The implications of this for Aviam's theory (2004) about spolia are significant and would push his suggested date for the rebuilding of Baram to the fifth century CE.

Finally, Avigad's explanation of the difference in date between the lintel's sixth century inscription and its Late Roman, Period III decoration—that is, that an existing and older lintel is re-used and inscribed in a later restoration—is not only still compelling but also has been corroborated by our excavations of the synagogue as described in sections 1.b, c, and d of this chapter. Several important stages of the synagogue's building history and subsequent rebuilding, including Period III (third–fourth century CE) and Period IV (sixth–seventh century CE). Avigad's suggestion, recently taken up by Aviam with respect to Baram (2004: 147–69), that there was a trend in the sixth century for Jewish communities to rebuild or reuse old (or abandoned) synagogues because of Justinian I's ban on synagogues is still relevant. Although Avigad admits that the evidence is not yet conclusive, he points to Umm el-ʿAmmad and Arbel as other prime examples (Avigad 1960: 55). For the stratigraphy of Nabratein proposed in this book, Avigad's theory provides a plausible scenario for the rebuilding of the pre-existing but apparently abandoned Late Roman synagogue, using as many existing architectural elements as possible, some time during the reign of Justinian I. The restoration work may have commenced as early as 528 CE, with Jews returning to the site many years before the completion of the project and the rededication that occurred in 564 CE.

Architecture Plate A: 1-6
Waisted (Attic) Pedestals of Synagogue Interior

AF = architectural fragment; Scale 1:10

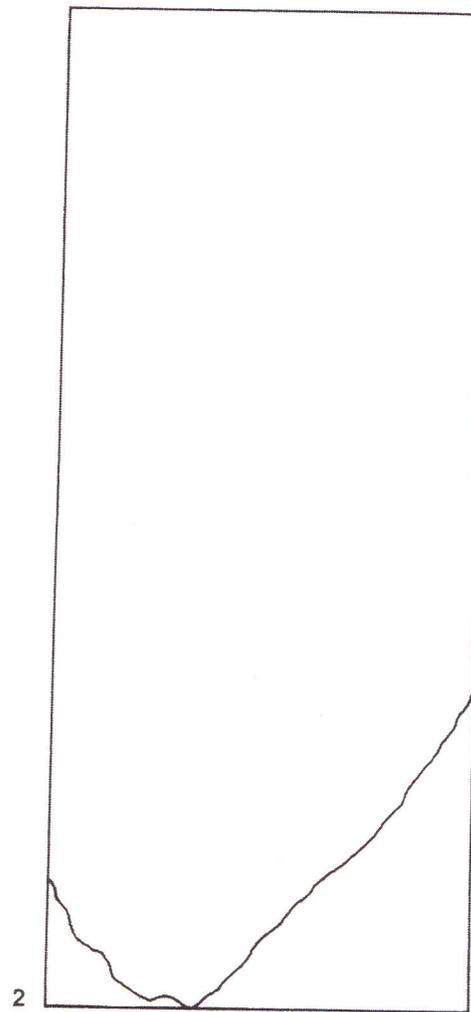
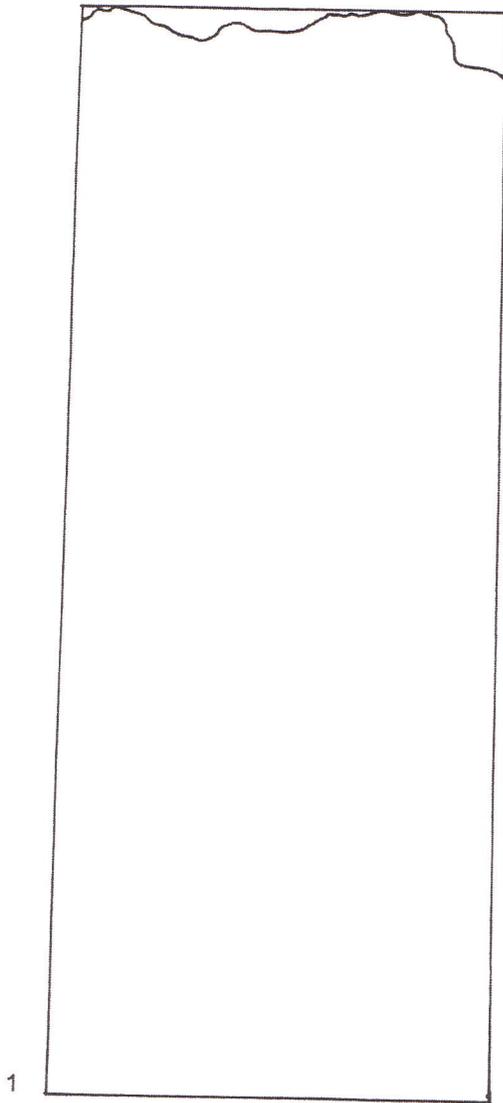
<i>no.</i>	<i>field/area</i>	<i>AF number</i>	<i>locus no.</i>	<i>synagogue column number</i>	<i>description</i>
1	I.1	3	1000	1	pedestal with column base
2	I.1	4	1000	3	pedestal with column base
3	I.1	5	1001	5	pedestal
4	I.2	16	2001	6	pedestal with column base
5	I.4	8	4000	7	pedestal with column base
6	I.3	3	3001	8	pedestal with column base



Architecture Plate B: 1-2
Synagogue Interior Columns

AF = architectural fragment; Scale 1:10

<i>no.</i>	<i>field/area</i>	<i>AF number</i>	<i>locus no.</i>	<i>column number</i>	<i>description</i>
1	I.2	6	2007	2	unfluted shaft
2	I.2	5	2001	4	unfluted shaft

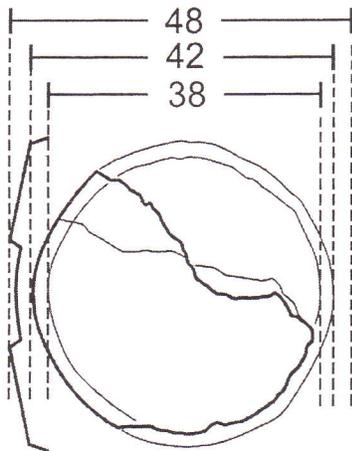


Architecture Plate C: 1-2

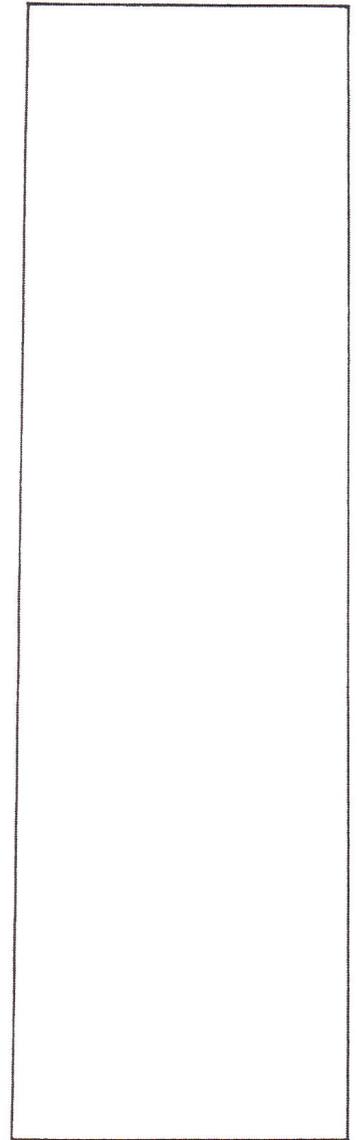
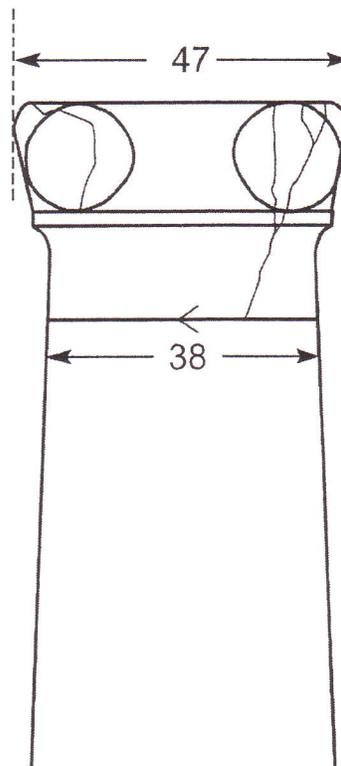
Portico Columns

AF = architectural fragment; Scale 1:10

<i>no.</i>	<i>field/area</i>	<i>AF number</i>	<i>locus no.</i>	<i>description</i>
1	I.1	19	1014	unfluted column shaft with abacus and taenia
2	I.6	10	6001	unfluted column shaft



1



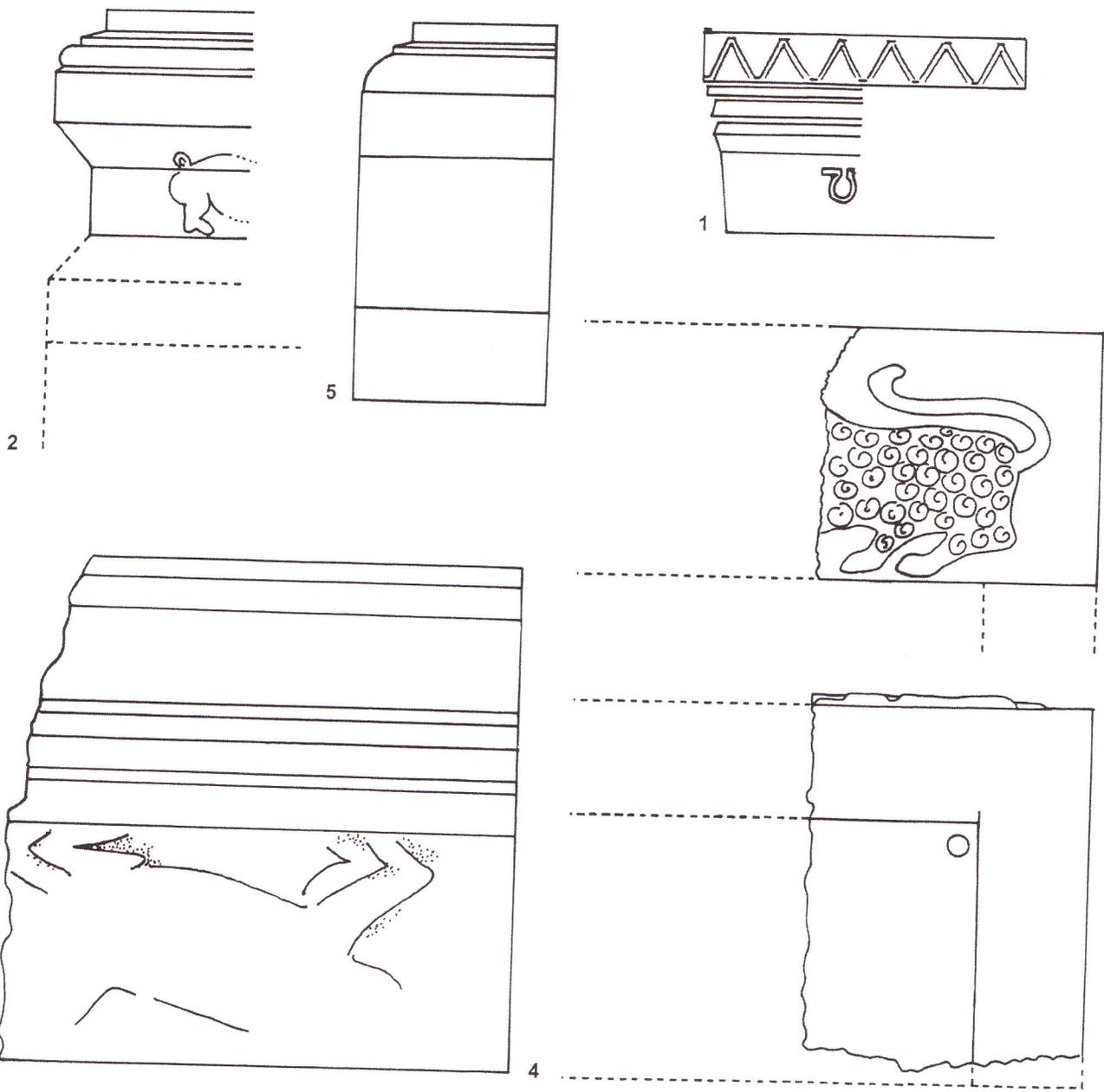
2

Architecture Plate D: 1-5

Portico Elements

AF = architectural fragment; Scale 1:10

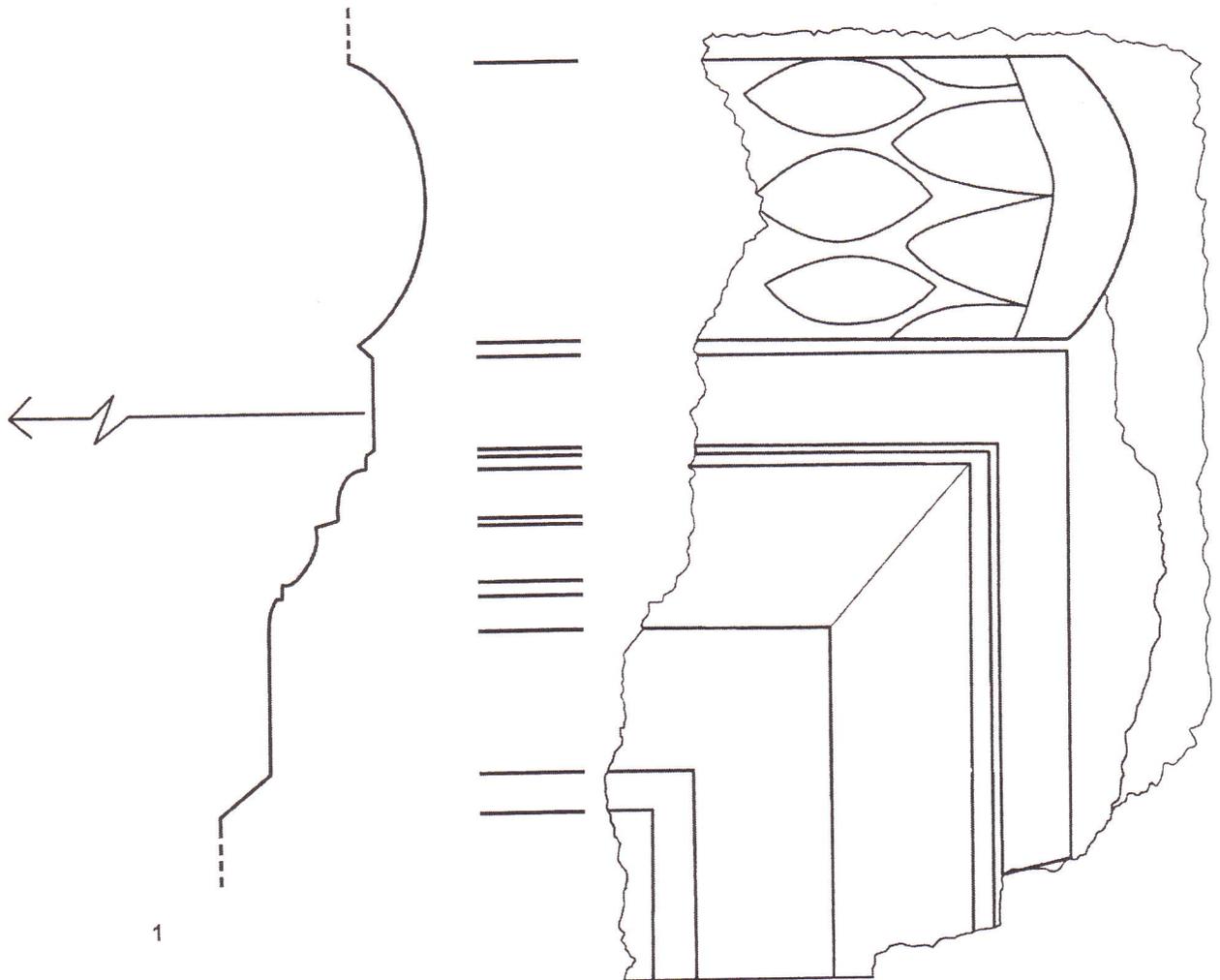
no.	field/area	AF number	locus no.	description
1	II.1	8	1015	column capital with zig-zags and iron hook
2	I.6	2	6002	pedestal with base and sculpted animal (sheep?)
3	III.3	1	3006	window (?) lintel with sculpted animal (rabbit or sheep?)
4	I.1	7	1000	window lintel, with carved lion (goes with II.4, AF6?)
5	I.5	10	5016	pedestal with column base



Architecture Plate E: 1**Laurel Lintel**

AF = architectural fragment; Scale 1:10

<i>no.</i>	<i>field/area</i>	<i>AF number</i>	<i>locus no.</i>	<i>description</i>
1	I.6	8	6001	door lintel, torus decorated with laurel leaves



Architecture Plate F: 1-4
Stone Sculpture Fragments

Scale 1:1

no.	registration number	field, area, bucket	locus number	description
1A	R81917	III.3.11	3015	stone sculpture fragment, sheep (?); front view
1B	"	"	"	same; side view
2A	R81920	III.3.9	3001	stone sculpture fragment, bird (falcon or eagle?)
2B	"	"	"	same; front view
3	R811041	III.3.9	3001	stone sculpture fragment, with feathers (?)
4	R811057	III.3.9	3001	stone sculpture fragment, feathers (?)

