

Zeev Weiss

# THE SEPPHORIS SYNAGOGUE

Deciphering an Ancient Message  
through Its Archaeological and  
Socio-Historical Contexts



The Israel Exploration Society  
is proud to announce the publication of

**The Sepphoris Synagogue:  
Deciphering an Ancient Message through Its  
Archaeological  
and Socio-Historical Contexts**  
by Zeev Weiss

(with contributions by Ehud Netzer, Katia Cytryn-Silverman, Leah Di Segni, Orna Eliahu-Oron, Judit Gärtner, Yael Gorin-Rosen, and Ya'akov Meshorer)

Sepphoris was a major urban center in the Lower Galilee in the Roman and Byzantine periods. Architecturally, artistically, and culturally, it was not very different from the pagan cities of ancient Palestine, and its exposure to and assimilation of Greco-Roman culture did not hinder Jewish life. Like other major cities with Jewish, pagan, and Christian populations, Sepphoris boasted residential areas interspersed with public buildings.

In 1993, the expedition team of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem unearthed one such public edifice—a complete synagogue dated to the early fifth century CE. The synagogue was graced with a richly colored mosaic floor featuring a plethora of Jewish symbols, biblical scenes, and dedicatory inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek. This mosaic and other synagogue remains are considered among the most important and exciting finds in Jewish art since the discovery of the Dura Europos synagogue in Syria seventy years ago.

The present volume is the final excavation report of the Sepphoris synagogue. This comprehensive and multifaceted study presents a full description and thorough analysis of the archaeological data (architecture, mosaics, epigraphy, and small finds) as well as an extensive discussion of the evidence in its socio-historical context. The author maintains that the message in the central mosaic carpet of the prayer hall focuses on the main themes characterizing the Judaeo-Christian controversy at the time and, via the mosaic's illustrative biblical motifs, serves as a response in which the Jews claim that they are the Chosen People.

376 pages, 58 color photos, 258 b/w photos, hardcover. ISBN 965-221-057-9

Price: \$80 (\$60 after 25% discount for members of Israel Exploration Society) + \$13 postage

Please send your orders to: The Israel Exploration Society, P.O.B. 7041, 91070 Jerusalem, Israel

Fax: 972-2-6247772. E-mail: [ies@vms.huji.ac.il](mailto:ies@vms.huji.ac.il)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures and Plates . . . . .	IX
Preface . . . . .	XIII
1. Introduction . . . . .	1
2. The Architecture of the Synagogue—Zeev Weiss and Ehud Netzer . . . . .	7
3. The Synagogue Mosaics . . . . .	55
A. The Mosaic Carpet in the Nave . . . . .	55
B. The Panels and Their Significance . . . . .	61
C. Other Mosaics in the Building . . . . .	161
D. Iconographic Sources . . . . .	165
E. Stylistic Analysis and Technical Study . . . . .	169
4. The Synagogue Inscriptions . . . . .	199
A. The Hebrew Inscriptions . . . . .	199
B. The Aramaic Inscriptions . . . . .	202
C. The Greek Inscriptions—Leah Di Segni . . . . .	209
D. Donors, Donations, and Community: Discussion . . . . .	216
5. The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic: Sources, Interpretation, and Significance . . . . .	225
A. Use But Not Abuse: The Role of Talmudic Sources in the Study of the Sepphoris Mosaic . . . . .	226
B. Grouping Symbols into Conceptual Themes . . . . .	228
C. The Fusion of Diverse Themes into a Single Programmatic Layout . . . . .	239
D. Biblical Depictions Signifying Redemptive Motifs: Alternative Approaches . . . . .	245
6. Small Finds . . . . .	263
A. The Coins—Ya'akov Meshorer . . . . .	263
B. The Pottery above the Synagogue Floor—Katia Cytryn-Silverman . . . . .	266
C. The Pottery beneath the Synagogue Floor—Zeev Weiss and Orna Eliahu-Oron . . . . .	277
D. The Glass—Yael Gorin-Rosen . . . . .	295
E. The Lamps—Judit Gärtner . . . . .	300
F. The Artifacts—Zeev Weiss . . . . .	302
7. Epilogue . . . . .	315
List of Loci . . . . .	317
Abbreviations . . . . .	320
Bibliography . . . . .	322
Source Index . . . . .	345
Subject Index . . . . .	349

I would like to order a copy of this book. Price: \$80 (\$60 to members of the Israel Exploration Society); postage \$13

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**By check** (made payable to *Israel Exploration Society*)

Please charge to my **credit card**. Card no. \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_