Unravelling the Myth of the Synagogue on Delos

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Introduction

The identification of a synagogue on Delos has been problematic ever since it was first made in 1913 because while there is some evidence relating to Jews and/or Samaritans on Delos not one single piece of it refers to a synagogue or association house.

When we come to look at the material relating to how a building on the island came to be identified as a synagogue, we find a surprisingly large gap between what was originally proposed – and widely accepted – and what has been found. To this day, scholarship continues to build upon the original and quite erroneous identification and, apparently, to be unaware of the nature of the material contradicting it.

Delos is a small island in the Cyclades, measuring just 5 km north to south and 1.30 km east to west (Fig. 1). The mythological birthplace of the gods Apollo and Artemis, it was a major cultic centre by the seventh century BC. It is mentioned in Homer’s Odyssey (6.160–169) and in Homeric Hymn 3 to Apollo (Crüdgen 2001).

Delos arrived at its prominent political and economic status by default. According to Thucydides (Peloponnesian Wars, 1.96.2; 6.76.3), Xerxes had...
razed the Athenian sanctuaries during raids into mainland Greece. The Greek city states responded by forming a defensive alliance (478 BC) funded by its member states. To avoid the danger of any one of the city states becoming too powerful, the Athenian-controlled island of Delos was chosen to hold the treasury of what came to be known as the Delian League.

Delos became a hub of commercial, military, maritime trading and slaving activity (the main slave markets were at Rhodes, Delos and Crete; de Souza 1999: 61) whilst continuing to be a major cultic centre. Delos became independent of Athens in 314 BC and, when the Delian League was finally dissolved in the mid-third century BC, its independence continued, along with its economic boom.

Under Roman rule, Athens lobbied for the return of some of her erstwhile territories as Greek power waned. In 166 BC, the Roman Senate returned Delos to Athenian control and it was made a cleruchy of Athens. The Delians were exiled and their land turned over to the colonists. Even so, people were still flocking to Delos from all over the Aegean, many of them establishing businesses, cults and associations on the island (McLean 1996: 189).

The downside of being a thriving and strategically placed cultic, trade and slaving centre was that Delos was often caught between warring factions vying for control of the Aegean. During the first Mithridatic war (88–84 BC), for siding with Rome, Delos was raided by Menophaneses, one of Mithridates Eupator’s generals. According to Pausanias (Description of Greece, 3.23.2) and Appian (Mithridateios 28), some 20,000 of the island’s inhabitants were slaughtered during that incursion. There was a further major destruction during the second Mithridatic war (83–81 BC), and another (led by the pirate Athenodoros) during the third Mithridatic war (74–63 BC) (de Souza 1999: 162–163; McLean 1996: 188). The problem of piracy in the Aegean was so widespread that Cicero complained to the Roman Senate in 66 BC, saying that the friends, allies and subjects of Rome had been at the mercy of pirates until Pompey finally drove them away (Cicero, Leg. Man. 31–35 and 54–57). In 69 BC, Gaius Triarius, Legate to the Roman Consul Lucullus, repaired some of the damage and built a defensive wall round the town centre of Delos (Phlegon of Tralles, FGrHist 257, fr. 12.13; de Souza 1999: 162–163).

By the mid-first century BC, the rise of other trading centres (such as Puteoli and Ostia), as well as the raids and destructions, had taken their toll, and trade routes had altered to accommodate these changes, pushing Delos further and further outside the commercial loop until eventually Athens did not even bother sending its epimeletēs to the island, and the priest of Apollo left to live in Athens, only returning for the annual ceremonial sacrifice of twelve animals.

In the second century AD, the philhellenic Emperor Hadrian’s attempt to revive the old Delian festivals was unsuccessful (McLean 1996: 189) and by then, according to Pausanias (8.33.2), the island was very sparsely inhabited, although it continued to be cultivated until the last person left, probably during the fifth century AD.
History of the excavations

The École française d’Athènes commenced excavations on Delos in 1873. Between 1904 and 1914, much of the island was excavated. There were further extensive excavations between 1958 and 1975. The École française d’Athènes continues to run excavations on the island in conjunction with the Cycladic Ephoreia, and it maintains a permanent presence there.\(^1\) I will refer to all structures on the island according to their designations in Bruneau and Ducat’s seminal guide to the excavations on Delos, the *Guide de Délos* (*GD*; 1983), and to all inscriptions found on the island according to their designations in the collections of inscriptions from Delos, the *Inscriptions de Délos* (the *ID*; Durrbach 1926, 1929; Durrbach and Roussel 1935; Roussel and Launey 1937a, 1937b). Using this system, the building known as the ‘synagogue’ is *GD 80*.

The original identification of the ‘synagogue’

It was André Plassart, of the École française d’Athènes who, during the excavations of 1912 and 1913, identified *GD 80* as a synagogue. His identification relied on six inscriptions. Rather astonishingly, the principal inscription was found not in *GD 80*, but rather some 90 m north of it, in a complex of residential buildings on the east side of the stadium district, and was not associated with *GD 80* until some time later. This inscription, *ID 2329*, contained the donor names Agathokles and Lysimachos and the word *proseuchē* which, Plassart said, referred to a Jewish ‘house of prayer’ or ‘synagogue’.

Plassart’s other five inscriptions were found scattered around *GD 80* (Plassart 1913: 528), and among these was one which contained one of the donor names found in *ID 2329* above. Three of the inscriptions contained the epithet *Theo Hypsisto*, and one contained the epithet *Hypsisto*. Plassart’s final inscription retained only two legible words, *genomenos eleutheros* ‘... became free’ (Plassart 1913: 528).

In an article written in 1913, André Plassart laid out his argument that the use of the epithets Hypsisto or Theo Hypsisto indicated a tendency towards monotheism and therefore referred to the Jewish deity. However, in the same article, he noted that an inscription had recently been found in Lydia, bearing the epithet Thea Hypsistata, probably referring to the Great Mother Goddess of Asia Minor, and that other similar inscriptions had been found in relation to the Thracian-Phrygian deity Dionysos-Sabazios and to the Syrian Zeus of Heliopolis (Plassart 1913: 529).

So, despite being aware of the non-Jewish uses of the term Theos Hypsistos, and its application to different divinities, male and female, and despite the fact that the inscription on which he was basing his argument was not found in *GD 80*, he proceeded to use it as proof for the existence of a synagogue
(Plassart 1913: 529). According to his argument, since the word *proseuchē* signified a Jewish use and context, he associated the *proseuchē* and *Lysimachos* inscriptions with one another. Considering the use of Theos Hypsistos and Hypsistos in the other inscriptions, and looking at the configuration of the furnishings of the building (arguing that it was similar to later synagogues) Plassart declared *GD 80* to be a synagogue (Plassart 1913: 528).

I am going to show that the word *proseuchē* in the context in which André Plassart found it refers to the fulfilment of a prayer or votive offering, not to a building and, indeed, probably not to a Jewish context. I will demonstrate that the occurrences of the names *Lysimachos* and *Agathokles* are entirely coincidental and that the old, original and modern arguments relating to the form, style, furnishings and artifacts found in *GD 80* are irrelevant to its identification as a synagogue. In short, I will demonstrate that there are no compelling reasons to consider *GD 80* a synagogue.

I will deal first with the limited literary evidence relating to the presence of Jews on the island. I will then turn to the epigraphic evidence and finally to the physical evidence.

**The literary evidence**

There is very little literary evidence relating to Jews on Delos and while what does exist is useful in establishing the presence of Jews in the region, it does not allude to the existence of a synagogue or indeed to any specifically Jewish structure on Delos.

The earliest reference to Jews on Delos is found in the first book of Maccabees and incorporates a letter from Lucius, a Roman consul:

Then Numenius and his companions arrived from Rome, with letters to the kings and countries, in which the following was written: 'Lucius, consul of the Romans, to King Ptolemy, greetings. The envoys of the Jews have come to us as our friends and allies to renew our ancient friendship and alliance. They had been sent by the high priest Simon and by the Jewish people and have brought a gold shield weighing one thousand minas. We therefore have decided to write to the kings and countries that they should not seek their harm or make war against them and their cities and their country, or make alliance with those who war against them. And it has seemed good to us to accept the shield from them. Therefore if any scoundrels have fled to you from their country, hand them over to the high priest Simon, so that he may punish them according to their law.' The consul wrote the same thing to King Demetrius and to Attalus and Ariarathes and Arsaces, and to all the countries, and to Sampsames, and to the Spartans, and to Delos, and to Myndos, and to Sicyon, and to Caria, and to Samos, and to Pamphylia, and to Lycia, and to Halicarnassus, and to Rhodes, and to Phaselis, and to Cos, and to Side, and to Aradus and Gortyna and Cnidus and Cyprus and Cyrene. They also sent a copy of these things to the high priest Simon.

(1 Maccabees 15.15–23)
In this passage, the Jews, through the High Priest Simon, have made an offering to the Romans of a valuable shield in return for which the Romans have renewed an old alliance and offered their protection. There is an ongoing debate concerning the chronology of this text, but it is not relevant here.

While this text is useful in that it suggests that the Delians may have had some interaction with Jews, it may be that because we have already assumed that there are Jews on the island, we see the text as confirming their presence there. This has the potential of becoming an entirely circular argument.

What the text actually says is only that the Romans have renewed their friendship with the Jews, via a delegation sent to Rome by the high priest Simon, as a consequence of which Rome asked its allies to hand over to the Jewish authorities those who harassed the Jews and ‘scoundrels’ who, having made war against the Jews, fled to the locations listed in the letter. Notably, there is no mention of Jews on Delos, or of any Jewish buildings, houses or associations.

The second text is Josephus’s account of the same event. There are variables in this version in that Josephus identifies the Lucius mentioned in the 1 Maccabees passage as the praetor Lucius Valerius, and the island of Delos is not mentioned at all. The chronology of this passage is also disputed (Bartlett 1998: 93–94):

Lucius Valerius, son of Lucius the praetor, consulted with the senate on the Ides of December in the Temple of Concord. And at the writing of the decree there were present Lucius Coponius, son of Lucius, of the Colline tribe, and Papirius of the Quirine tribe. Whereas Alexander, son of Jason, Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Alexander, son of Dorotheus, envoys of the Jews and worthy men and allies, have discussed the matter of renewing the relation of goodwill and friendship which they formerly maintained with the Romans, and have brought as a token of the alliance a golden shield worth fifty thousand gold pieces, and have asked that letters be given them to the autonomous cities and kings in order that their country and ports may be secure and suffer no harm, it has been decreed to form a relation of goodwill and friendship with them and to provide them with all the things which they have requested, and to accept the shield which they have brought.


While the text is very similar to the text of the Maccabees passage, there is no reference whatsoever to Delos or, again, to the presence of Jews on Delos. Again, past and modern scholarship has assumed that this text refers to Jews on Delos because we assume that, because of its similarity to the passage in Maccabees (above), it must be so. Again, the text actually only notes the renewal of Roman-Jewish friendship and the request made by the Jewish delegation that Jews not be harassed in the autonomous ports and cities of the Mediterranean.
The third text is the most interesting and most substantial. It also comes to us via Josephus, in the form of a letter dealing specifically with the Jews of Delos. This text is thought to date to about the middle of the first century BC:

Julius Gaius, Praetor, Consul of the Romans, to the magistrates, council and people of Parium, greeting. The Jews in Delos and some of the neighbouring Jews, some of your envoys also being present, have appealed to me and declared that you are preventing them by statute from observing their national customs and sacred rites. Now it displeases me that such statutes should be made against our friends and allies and that they should be forbidden to live in accordance with their customs and to contribute money to common meals and sacred rites, for this they are not forbidden to do even in Rome. For example, Gaius Caesar, our consular praetor, by edict forbade religious societies to assemble in the city, but these people alone he did not forbid to do so or to collect contributions or to hold common meals. Similarly do I forbid other religious societies but permit these people alone to assemble and feast in accordance with their native customs and ordinances. And if you have made any statutes against our friends and allies, you will do well to revoke them because of their worthy deeds on our behalf and their goodwill towards us.


This text is clear. At some point in the middle of the first century BC, the Jews of Delos (and other Jews) were being prevented by the magistrates, council and people of Parium ‘from observing their national customs and sacred rites’. They were not being allowed to meet for religious purposes, to collect religious tithes or to pay for common meals, and assembly by religious societies in Rome had been forbidden, *except for the Jews* who were not forbidden ‘...to do so or to collect contributions or to hold common meals’. The letter asked that the religious prohibitions against the Jews of Delos (and other neighbouring Jews) be revoked.

We can hypothesize, based on this letter, that the Jews on Delos (and some of the neighbouring Jews) were for some time not permitted the same privileges as Jews in Rome. Thus, at the time of this letter, the Jews at Rome could assemble, collect contributions and hold common meals, but the Jews on Delos (and some of the neighbouring Jews) could not. This does not suggest to me that the Jews on Delos were in a position to have had an identifiable synagogue to use for their traditional practices, given that their religious practices were forbidden by the magistrates, council and people of Parium.

So, it is evident that for at least some unknown time there was a statute of some sort in place forbidding Jews to live in accordance with their native customs, to assemble and to contribute money to communal meals and sacred rites, and it is apposite to note that the prohibition against Jewish practices mentioned in it relates to precisely the period when *GD 80* is said to have functioned as a synagogue, that is from the middle of the first century BC.

Despite the lack of corroborating evidence, Plassart used the foregoing passage as support for his identification of *GD 80* as a synagogue. He said
that the text ‘undertook to repeal the decree’ by which the Jews had been forbidden from observing their ancient customs and, in particular, from organizing communal meals that would have taken place ‘in the vast premises of the synagogue’ (Plassart 1913: 529). This was the first in a long line of imaginative interpretations of the available evidence, since there is not one shred of evidence connecting GD 80 with a reading of the letter about the Delian Jews in Josephus other than Plassart’s original assumption (based on his association of the inscriptions mentioned above and in more detail below) that it was a synagogue.

The passage in Josephus does not allude to a synagogue or house being used as a synagogue, and then being prevented from being used as a synagogue. Indeed, it only says that Jews on Delos (and other neighbouring Jews) were being prevented from following their traditional practices and that the Romans thought it desirable that this should change, in line with Roman administrative leniency relative to Jews.

At best, therefore, we have one direct reference to Jews on Delos (and other neighbouring Jews, either on the island or elsewhere in the region either in the Cyclades or the Dodecanese, or even Aegina, Crete, Rhodes or Cyprus; and not necessarily on Delos at all), in the first century BC, suggesting that they were, for some unknown period of time, prevented from following their traditional practices.

As this text provides the only clear reference we have to the presence of Jews on the island of Delos, it must be examined in that context. So, what we do have is what appears to be a reliable and plausible reference to the presence of Jews on the island of Delos, albeit one that is wholly dependent on Josephus. What we do not have is a reference to a synagogue or association house or community building of the Jews on Delos.

The inscriptions

As stated above, Plassart’s evidence for the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue consisted of six inscriptions. The principal inscription was found in house IIA of GD 79, some 90 m north of GD 80 at the southeastern side of the stadium district in the densely packed residential area. This inscription contained the names Agathokles and Lysimachos and the word proseuchē which, Plassart said, referred to a Jewish ‘house of prayer’ or ‘synagogue’ (and following Plassart most scholars have agreed with this interpretation).

Inscription 1 (ID 2329)⁵
‘Αγαθοκλῆς καὶ Λυσίμαχος ἐπὶ προσευχή
‘Agathokles and Lysimachos for an offering/prayer’⁶
This inscription was found in house IIA of GD 79 beside the stadium, 90 m northwest of GD 80. It has been dated to around the first century BC and is carved on a plain rectangular marble stele with a cut on the top side containing the remnants of a lead fixing, indicating it held a statue or votive offering, which is not part of any known Jewish custom. The presence of the lead fixing is strong support for the argument that this inscription cannot be a Jewish one. Moreover, as there is no definite article used in the wording of the inscription, the words ἐπὶ προσευχὴ in this context cannot refer to a building and must be translated as reading ‘for an offering’ or simply as a ‘prayer’ (in the sense that a prayer to a deity is always an offering) and not ‘for the synagogue’ (as Plassart translated it in his 1913 article and as others have continued to do). This basic point is often ignored in the scholarship on the subject or dismissed as irrelevant. Quite clearly, it is not.

On the basis of his presumption that ID 2329 indicated the existence of a synagogue, Plassart identified the two names listed on it as Jewish and, as a direct consequence, the names Agathokles and Lysimachos on Delos have been listed in the Lexicon of Greek Personal Names (the LGPN) as Jewish. This has created an entirely circular argument for anyone looking for external corroborating evidence concerning these names.

In addition, there are other contemporary instances of the name Agathokles from Delos that are not identified as Jewish, including one from the Agora of the Competalists (ID 1760); one from the Portico of Antigone (ID 1965); one from a list of donors and subscribers found in and belonging to Sarapeion C (ID 2618); one from an Ephebium list (ID 2598); one on a decree of the Athenian cleruchy (ID 1497) in honour of the musician Amphikles; and one on a white marble stele found in the Sanctuary of the Syrians (ID 2263). Despite these other instances of the name Agathokles on Delos being roughly contemporary with ID 2329, they are not listed as Jewish in the ID or the LGPN.

**Inscription 2 (ID 2328)**

Λυσίμαχος ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ ὶεω Ὑψίστω χαριστήριον

‘Lysimachos for himself [to] God Most High [for a] votive/thank-offering’

This inscription is carved on a small piece of white marble. It was found lying at the foot of a wall in GD 80. This inscription is also dated to the first century BC. It was the use of the name Lysimachos in this inscription that caused Plassart to associate IDs 2329 and 2328 together, resulting in the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue.

Again, the identification of the name Lysimachos as Jewish in the LGPN was made solely on the basis of Plassart’s original identification and, again, there are other contemporary inscriptions from Delos containing the name
Lysimachos that are not identified as Jewish. The name appears on \textit{ID} 1764,\textsuperscript{15} relating to the Association of Competalists and again on \textit{ID} 2616:\textsuperscript{16} a list of donors and subscribers to Sarapeion C.

The fact that the names \textit{Lysimachos} and \textit{Agathokles} both appear in lists of donors and subscribers to Sarapeion C is interesting, and it is well worth mentioning here that the internal configuration of \textit{GD} 80 (our supposed synagogue), \textit{GD} 91 (Sarapeion A) and \textit{GD} 100 (Sarapeion C) is very similar indeed – with benches placed around the internal walls. What these commonalities and similarities mean is, of course, open to interpretation, but it is clear at least that the names \textit{Lysimachos} and \textit{Agathokles} themselves are no indicator of Jewishness on Delos and that the existence of benches around walls does not, in and of itself, imply synagogue use.

\textit{Inscription 3 (ID 2330)}\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Λαώδικη Θεώ Ψίστωι σωθέισα ταῖς υφ οὕτωθς θαραπήσαις εὐχήν}

‘Laodike to God Most High for healing him of his infirmities, an offering’\textsuperscript{18}

This inscription is carved on a rectangular base of white marble. It was found in \textit{GD} 80, and has been dated to around 108/107 BC. It is a healing inscription in the style of a Greek votive rather than a Jewish dedication. The name \textit{Laodike} is identified in the \textit{LPGN} as possibly being Jewish, but this is again only on the basis of Plassart’s identification. There is one other instance of the name \textit{Laodike} from Delos, \textit{ID} 2628,\textsuperscript{19} among a list of donor and subscriber names on a marble plaque, which was discovered in the Theatre of the Syrian Sanctuary. However, only Plassart’s \textit{Laodike} inscription is identified as Jewish.

\textit{Inscription 4 (ID 2331)}\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Ζωςας Παριῶς Θεώ ψίστω εὐχήν}

‘Zozas of Paros to the God Most High, an offering’\textsuperscript{21}

This inscription was found on a bench in the west of room A in \textit{GD} 80. It is carved on a small base of white marble, in the shape of a horned altar, which Plassart described as ‘slightly pyramid-shaped’ (it is not). It is dated to the first century BC, and the name \textit{Zozas} is identified in the \textit{LGPN} as possibly belonging to a manumitted slave, but not specifically identified as a Jewish name. The style of this base and that of \textit{ID} 2328 is very similar, and there are many of examples of this type of inscribed base all over Delos itself (and indeed all over the ancient Near East). There was no other instance of the name \textit{Zozas} in the \textit{ID}.
Inscription 5 (ID 2332)\textsuperscript{22}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Υψίστω εὐχήν Μαρκία</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘[The] Most High [from] Markia’</td>
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This inscription was found on a bench in the west of room A in \textit{GD} 80. It is carved on a small, white marble base and dates to the first century BC. The name \textit{Markia} is again identified as Jewish in the \textit{LGPN} on the basis of Plassart’s identification. It is the only instance of this name on an inscription from the Delos that I was able to find.

Inscription 6 (ID 2333)\textsuperscript{23}

<table>
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<tr>
<th>γενόμενος ἐλεύθερος</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘... became free’\textsuperscript{24}</td>
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</table>

This inscription is carved on a small rectangular base of white marble and was found in \textit{GD} 80. The marble is very badly damaged and only those two words can be made out. Given the position of Delos as one of the main Aegean centres of the slave trade, it is hardly surprising to find that there are inscriptions relating to the freeing of slaves found there. Furthermore, there were other inscription bases found in \textit{GD} 80 which neither Plassart nor subsequent scholars have chosen to mention, and whose texts are illegible.\textsuperscript{25} It is evident, thus, that other than its proximity to the other four inscription bases found in \textit{GD} 80 (and the one found some 90 m away in the stadium district) and discussed by Plassart, there is nothing Jewish about this inscription and it is merely Plassart’s association of the bases that has linked it with the others.

It becomes clear, when looked at in the light of all of the foregoing, that the inscriptions used by Plassart to identify \textit{GD} 80 as a synagogue are, in fact, unrelated. They, like many of the other pieces of marble on the island have ended up together in building \textit{GD} 80 where there is a lime kiln for melting down marble to make lime, and I will return to this point below.

The Samaritan inscriptions

In 1979, two inscriptions were found by Philippe Fraisse of the École française d’Athènes. They were both found in an unexcavated area just beneath current ground level, on a street where they had fallen from the exterior wall onto which they had been fixed, near the shoreline about 100 m north of \textit{GD} 80. Both are written in Greek, and both are dedicated by the ‘Israelites who offer to Holy Argarizein’ (Mount Gerizim in Samaria).

These two inscriptions do seem to provide evidence of Samaritans on the island, but it is also possible that the dedications were made by Samaritan visitors and traders to the island on behalf of their religious communities at home. It is likely that if there were a Samaritan (or Jewish) community on
Delos that it came there in the same way as the other multinational migrants, to benefit from the free trade status of Delos and to deal in merchandise and slaves from around the Mediterranean region. Unfortunately, other than these two inscriptions, there is no literary, archaeological or epigraphic evidence to tell us anything about Samaritans on Delos. Of course, it is possible to theorize, based on the inscriptions and on the passage in Josephus (AJ 14.213–216) above, that the references to the Jews on Delos could relate to Samaritans and that the building from which the two inscriptions came could have been a Samaritan synagogue.

**Samaritan inscription 1**

Ωί ἐν Δήλῳ Ἰσραηλίται οἱ ἀπαρχομένοι εἰς ιερὸν Ἀργαρίζειν στεφανοῦσιν χρυσῷ στεφάνῳ Σαραπίων Ιασώνος Κυώσιον εὐεργεσίας ἐνεκέν τῆς εἰς εαυτούς

‘The Israelites on Delos who make first-fruit offerings to Holy Argarizein crown with a golden crown Sarapion son of Jason of Knossos for his benefactions on their behalf’

This inscription has been dated to somewhere between 150 and 50 BC (Bruneau 1982: 469–474). There is substantial damage to the upper area of the stele, but it does not affect the text (Bruneau 1982: 474). The inscription honours Sarapion (son of Jason of Knossos) for his benefactions on behalf of the ‘Israelites on Delos’ but does not offer any details as to the presence of a permanent community of Samaritans on the island, and it is not clear whether the Sarapion honoured in the text is a Samaritan, Jew or pagan himself. It does, however, identify the dedicators as ‘the Israelites on Delos’, which indicates a community of Israelites on the island, be it a temporary, seasonal or permanent one.

**Samaritan inscription 2**

Ἰσραηλίται οἱ ἀπαρχομένοι εἰς ιερὸν Ἁγιον Ἀργαρίζειν ἐτίμησαν υπὸ Μενιττοῦ Αρτεμιδώρου Ἡρακλείου αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν εὐγόνων αὐτῶν κατασκευάσαντα καὶ ἀναθέντα ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἐπὶ προσευχῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ΤΩΝ [- - - - - - - - - ] ΟΛΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ [- - - - ] καὶ ἐστεφάνωσαν χρυσῷ στεφάνῳ ἴσῳ καὶ [- - - - - - - - - ]

KA . . .

T . . .
[The] ‘Israelites who make first-fruit offerings to holy Argarizein honour Menippos, son of Artemidoros of Heraclea, himself as well as his descendants to have established and dedicated its expenses, for an offering/prayer [to God], [---] and [---] and crowned it with a golden crown and [---]’

The second inscription is tentatively dated to between 250–175 BC and is carved onto a white marble stele (Bruneau 1982: 469–474). There is a great deal of damage to the bottom portion of the text, with the second half of the text entirely missing.

The second Samaritan inscription refers to a donation of some unknown thing or act. It is unfortunate that this second inscription, whose damaged portion probably contained the details of the donation, has not survived intact, and thus the two Samaritan inscriptions do not really clear up any of the mystery for us. It is to be hoped that the bottom fragment of the second inscription might at some point be found and the text fully reconstructed so that we might at least know what was offered.

The second inscription is similar to the first and honours Menippos (son of Artemidoros of Heraclea) for his benefactions in establishing something somewhere on Delos (perhaps where the stele fell to the ground where it was ultimately found), and again offers no clues as to the presence of a permanent community of Samaritans on the island. Again, it is not clear whether the Menippos of the text is a Samaritan or pagan himself. It is the ‘Israelites’ who honour Menippos, but the text itself does not say the ‘Israelites of Delos’, despite reconstructions that include it.

The text of the second inscription has been interpreted on the basis that it must be worded like the first. However, it is inscribed on a reused stele with an earlier text blocked out, and whoever inscribed the new text over the old did not include the words on Delos. Nevertheless, Philippe Bruneau of the École française d’Athènes reconstructed it thus (Bruneau 1982: 474).

It is possible that this dedication, like the first, might relate to a non-resident donor or group of Samaritans, or to a group who did not have the same legal status on Delos as those who dedicated the first stele, and its wording and styling is very like that of the first Samaritan inscription.

To add further confusion to the translation and interpretation of the two Samaritan inscriptions, Plassart’s initial translation of the phrase ἐπὶ προσευχή (from ID 2329) as ‘for the synagogue’, has led to a number of scholars translating the same phrase in the second Samaritan inscription in that way, leading them to think that the building from which the inscription came was a synagogue. Also, as White points out, Bruneau translated ἐπὶ προσευχή in the second Samaritan inscription as ‘in ex-voto’, ‘for a vow’, whereas in relation to ID 2329 he accepted Plassart’s reading of it as ‘for the synagogue’ (White 1987: 142).

In any event, the two Samaritan inscriptions provide at least some indication that the texts referring to the Jews on Delos in Josephus and Maccabees
might relate to Samaritans. The dating of the inscriptions is broad (c. 250–50 BC) and it could be that offerings were sent to Mount Gerizim while the temple still stood there; or that offerings continued to be made and sent to Samaria after the destruction of the temple. Or, indeed, it could be that the offerings, in whatever form they took, were made on Delos only, perhaps in the form of votives and dedications by either Samaritan visitors to the island or by Samaritans [Israelites] who lived on the island.

In the light of the discovery of two Samaritan inscriptions, it has been suggested that there were communities of both Jews and Samaritans on Delos, and that the letter recorded in Josephus refers to both (White 1987: 153), and I agree it is possible that this is so. However, while the reference in Josephus (AJ 14.213–216) to the ‘Jews in Delos and some of the neighbouring Jews’ does indicate that there was more than one ‘Jewish’ community in the area, as I have already said, it is possible that these ‘neighbouring Jews’ may have been on other islands, either in the Cyclades or the Dodecanese or indeed other larger islands in the region, such as Crete, Rhodes or Cyprus. Since we know of the Jewish population on Delos only from Josephus, and of the Samaritans only from the two Samaritan inscriptions, it is difficult to see how this conundrum can be resolved without substantial excavations of the area immediately east of the stadium.

At any rate, the names associated with the Samaritan inscriptions – Jason of Knossos and Menippos, son of Artemidoros of Heraclea – are not specifically identifiable as Jewish or Samaritan names.

**Theos Hypsisto/Hypsistos**

Writing in 1913, Plassart (1913: 529) outlined his belief that the use of the epithets *Hypsisto* or *Theo Hypsisto* indicated ‘a tendency towards monotheism’, and Jewish monotheism in particular. However, the inscriptions that refer to *Hypsistos* may also refer to the Greek deity *Zeus Hypsistos*, whose cult (a healing cult, and a more likely association given the physical form of the inscription bases) also used these epithets to describe their chief deity. The sanctuary of the cult of *Zeus Hypsistos* was located on Mt. Cynthus, less than 500 m from GD 80.

Plassart only identified the names from the group of inscriptions he considered to be related (see above) as being Jewish without looking at other occurrences of those names on Delos. Additionally, as I have already stated, he noted an occurrence of the term *Thea Hypsista*, which he acknowledged as referring to a Near Eastern female deity, possibly the Great Goddess of Asia Minor (Plassart 1913: 529). Taking this together with the recurrences of the names contained in the inscriptions (as outlined above) Plassart’s argument is considerably and correctly diminished. Furthermore, the names on the two Samaritan inscriptions may or may not be Jewish and could be the names of non-Jewish Cretan donors. If it were
possible to relate the two names (Menippos and Jason) from Crete to a Jewish family there, it would be a significant advance in the scholarship on the subject.

Belle Mazur (1935: 21–22) noted that the style of the inscribed bases was inconsistent with Jewish practice, in particular the proseuchê and the Lysimachos inscriptions which had lead fixings in place for votive offerings or statues. She made the first connection with the Greek cult of Zeus Hypsistos, in whose sanctuary on the Athenian Pnyx were found similar inscribed bases, and to the cult of Theos Hypsistos from Asia Minor. Mazur was the first to note that Plassart’s translation of the phrase ἐπὶ προσευχῆ as meaning ‘for the synagogue’ was incorrect because the definite article is absent from the inscription. She correctly translated it, as I also do, as ‘for a prayer/votive’ (Mazur 1935: 21–22). There is no other way to translate the phrase, and to attempt to do so is to manipulate the evidence to fit a preconceived idea of what it is ‘supposed’ to mean.

Interestingly, there is another cult that used the epithets Hypsistos and Theos Hypsistos: the Hypsistarians who, while they recognized other gods, considered theirs as being above all. Part of their ritual is described in an inscription carved on one of the blocks of the Hellenistic inner face of the city wall of Oenoanda in northern Lycia:

Born of itself, untaught, without a mother, unshakeable, not contained in a name, known by many names, dwelling in fire, this is god. We, his angels, are a small part of god. To you who ask this question about god, what his essential nature is, he has pronounced that Aether is god who sees all, on whom you should gaze and pray at dawn, looking towards the sunrise.

(Mitchell 1999: 193–4)

According to descriptions of their practices, the Hypsistarians stood in the open air facing east, looking up to heaven and offering their prayers. Lamps and fire were an essential part of their cult, which was associated with heaven and the sun (Mitchell 1999: 91), and, by the dedication of light, it was thought possible to establish a link with the deity (Mitchell 1999: 92).

The final phase of building GD 80 is oriented eastwards, is unroofed, and 40 lamps were found in it by Plassart’s excavation team. While it is impossible (and, indeed, would be foolish) to attribute the use of the final phase of GD 80 to the Hypsistarians, there is nothing to suggest that the lamps could not have been used in a ritual such as that described in the Oenoanda Oracle. There is certainly no known Jewish ritual with which to compare this and, to add further to this idea, even as late as the fourth century AD, Hypsistarians were sometimes mistaken for Jews (Mitchell 1999: 93–94). In any event, I have offered the Hypsistarians up for consideration only to illustrate how tenuous and tendentious the identification of GD 80 as a Jewish and/or Samaritan synagogue is.
**GD 80 (the building identified as ‘the synagogue’)**

It is important to note that there is nothing in the structure of *GD* 80 itself that is in any way Jewish in nature, although I am mindful of Levine’s always useful suggestion that Jews and Jewish architecture are influenced by local material culture. However, as I will show, the internal arrangement of benches in *GD* 80 (which reminded André Plassart of the configuration of later synagogues) is not in any way unique on Delos.

**The physical evidence**

*GD* 80 lies on the northeastern shoreline of Delos in the Bay of Gournia, outside the defensive town walls built by Triarius in 69 BC. It stands in the area just east of the stadium and northeast of the gymnasium and *Ephebium* (Figs. 1 and 2).

When Plassart excavated the site in 1912, he found a large rectangular room measuring 16.90 m (north to south) by 14.40 m (west to east). The floor of this room had a coarse flaked marble/gravel-like covering, and there was some plaster left on the base of some of the walls, and rooftiles scattered around the floor. Dividing this originally rectangular space into two almost equal parts, with room A in the north and room B in the south, is an east-west wall with three doorways. This wall was erected some unknown time after the north, west and south walls (it is not bonded into them), and is made up of local gneiss, rubble, and worked marble from abandoned or destroyed buildings including pieces of capitals, marble inscription bases, triglyphs and thresholds.

![Plan of GD 80 (after Mazur 1935)](fig2.png)

Fig. 2. Plan of *GD* 80 (after Mazur 1935)
There was also a further space, room D, along the south of the building, parallel with rooms A and B, which was divided into smaller chambers and which may have contained a stairwell. Running beneath part of rooms B and D is the cistern around which the building was constructed.

According to Plassart, rooms A and B served as the assembly halls of a synagogue, based on his assumptions about Inscriptions ID 2329 and ID 2328 and on the letter preserved in Josephus. There are white marble benches in place in this area dating to the period he argued that GD 80 was in use as a synagogue (from around the middle of the first century BC). There are also benches running along the south and west inner walls of room B, and some more benches running along the south, west and north walls of area C (the corridor between the main rectangular space and the peristyle courtyard to the east).

In the centre of the west wall of room A is a white marble throne (Fig. 3). This was found in situ with the marble benches on either side, along the inside west wall of the area A (Plassart 1913: 526). This throne is obviously similar to the first century BC throne for the priest of Dionysos in the theatre in Athens, or the stone thrones in the Ampherion at Oropos, and to others all over the Graeco-Roman world. Reuse of valuable objects is clearly a sensible way to
reduce the cost of furnishing any given space, and the throne (and its footrest) may well come from the theatre on Delos, on the west side of the island.

The benches in GD80 appear to be identical with those still left in the Ephebium of the nearby gymnasium, from whence they may have been removed after the destruction and abandonment of the gymnasium some time around 74–63 BC. Of course, this does not prove that GD80 was not used as a synagogue, but it is also striking that two of the Sarapeia on the island have a similar layout, including similarly reused benches. Thus, the internal configuration of GD80 is not in itself evidence that it was used as a synagogue. There are other buildings on the island with this sort of benching still apparent, such as in the Heraion (Deonna 1938: Pl. VII, photo 60); the Italian Agora (Deonna 1938: Pl. VIII, photos 64, 69); in the semi-circular exedra of the Sanctuary of Apollo (Deonna 1938: Pl. VII, photo 60); the Ephebium and in the orchestra of the theatre (Deonna 1938: Pl. VIII, photos 67, 68), as well as others dotted around the island.

It is possible to date – approximately – the second phase of the building by reference to the material used in the rebuilt areas of the internal walls, and especially to the marble taken from the nearby gymnasium. A second century BC inscribed base (ID 1928) of the Gymnasiarch Poses was used in rebuilding one of the walls of GD80, after the destruction or removal of the statue which it carried. Another gymnasium inscription base (ID 1923b) relating to ephebes under the rule of the Gymnasiarch Diotimos Theodosion (126/125 BC) was also found in another rebuilt wall. Other inscriptions from the gymnasium ended up being reused in the Palaestra of the Lake on the western side of the island. As the gymnasium was plundered during the pirate raids of the Mithridatic wars, it is only from this time (74–63 BC) that GD80 could have been adapted for the sort of use that required the seating arrangement found there (Plassart 1913: 532).

On the eastern side of the building is area C, the remains of the corridor and step or stylobate leading out into what was originally a peristyle courtyard. The peristyle would have measured approximately 18 m × 18 m, but has now been destroyed by the sea almost up to the line of the stylobate (Fig. 4). In October 2003 I saw that the northern and southern walls of the existing structure extend to almost the same point of collapse into the sea, some 1.50 m beyond the stylobate, and rooftiles were found along the inside of these perimeter walls indicating that they were at least partially covered.

The seaward side of area C retains a section of a stylobate running parallel just over 6 m from the easternmost wall. The visible section is made of blocks of white marble resting on a gneiss foundation. This line stops approximately 5 m from the north and south walls of area C.

Plassart and other scholars (most notably, Mazur 1935; Bruneau 1970; White 1987, 1990; Binder 1999 and Trümper 2004) interpreted the physical layout of the first phase and second phases of GD80 in several ways, none of which really has much bearing on its identification as a synagogue, other
than the fact that in the final phase of the structure it had benches arranged around the walls of the two main areas and that the final phase is oriented towards the east. However, as I mentioned above, this seating arrangement is something of a red herring given the configuration of Sarapeion A (Fig. 5) and Sarapeion C (GD 100) in the area between the theatre and Mount Cynthus. There is also, of course, the further connection between the names from the inscriptions found in and near GD 80 and the donor names on the Sarapeion C list of subscribers (and the associations of Hermaists and the Poseidonists). There is no dispute about the identification of the list of subscribers to Sarapeion C. It was found in, and specifically refers to, that structure. In fact, more than 170 dedicatory and votive offerings and inscriptions relating Isis, Sarapis and Anubis were found in Sarapeion C alone (Bruneau and Ducat 1983: 227).

Like most large buildings on the island, GD 80 had its own cistern (Figs. 2 and 6). GD 57 and GD 80 both have large courtyards in addition to a smaller peristyle court. This was quite normal for some of the larger Hellenistic houses on Delos where one courtyard was often deeper and sometimes taller than the other, in order to enhance the entrance to a reception room. This certainly seems to apply to GD 80 and has implications for its orientation, which is not
Fig. 5. View of GD 91 – Sarapeion A

Fig. 6. The cistern in GD 80
eastwards since the throne in the benched area of A sits in what was originally one of the two courtyards of the house.

Other than lamps, antefixes, rooftiles and inscription blocks, there was nothing found in the building that would enable it to be absolutely identified as belonging to a particular group, religious or otherwise, although the number of lamps found in the structure is quite curious in itself, and I will come back to this point a little later. In particular, there was no artifact, structure or inscription found within GD 80 which is of a Jewish nature. As I have already discussed above, and as described by Mazur in 1935, a number of the inscription or statue bases found in GD 80 are in the form of Greek and Near Eastern ‘horned’ altars, including two of the bases cited as Jewish (Inscription 2 (ID 2328) and Inscription 4 (ID 2331) by Plassart in 1912/1913.

The rectangular structure of GD 80 still retains the remains of a coarse chipped marble floor, which has sometimes been described as ‘mosaic’, but is more like rough tessellation. Areas A and B are bisected by an east-west wall with three doorways. This wall was erected some unknown time after the north, west and south walls, as it is not bonded to them. When it was excavated in 1912/13 its three doorways were found walled up. This east-west wall is made up of local gneiss, rubble, and reused material from other buildings, including pieces of capitals, marble inscription bases and thresholds. There are also three doorways on the east side of the structure, providing access to areas A and B from the peristyle courtyard along the shoreline.

The cistern

Uniquely on the island, GD 80 appears to have been constructed over a rock-fault which was extended into a cistern by means of vaulting. For those who built the house this fault must have represented a convenient location, since it meant the degree of excavation necessary to provide the house with its water supply was considerably lessened. Philippe Bruneau, of the École française d’Athènes, is the only person, following Plassart, who has excavated on the site of GD 80 and in 1962 he excavated and cleaned out the well/cistern which André Plassart had left untouched. Bruneau also made extensive and detailed plans of the cistern structure as well as the site in general. Unfortunately, the list of finds from the cistern is not complete but included a piece of bluish marble; a fragment of a bluish marble bowl; three antefixes of beige/pink clay decorated with palmettes; some fragments of a vase with a ringed wall; and three fragments of blown glass (Plassart had also found numerous fragments of small glass vases in GD 80, but not in the cistern). From the cistern, Bruneau recovered the only one of the 41 lamps not found during the original excavations of GD 80. This lamp dates to the first century BC and depicts a man and woman copulating (Fig. 7).

Only the area immediately underneath the arch of the cistern was accessible when it was in use and although the floor is now quite opened out, this is only
because of Bruneau’s 1962 excavations (Bruneau 1970: 481). Even with the excavated opening, access from room D is both difficult and precarious as the opening lies under and extends only a metre from the arch (Fig. 8). Access is even more restricted from room B as there is a sharp and sheer drop from the floor level to the bottom of the cistern (Fig. 9). There are no steps built into the cistern, and there is insufficient space in the opening in rooms B or D for access via a ladder for the purposes of bathing.
It has been suggested that the cistern in GD80 could have been used as a *mikveh* (Binder 1999: 306), but this is physically impossible as access to it would have been even more difficult when the floor was intact. The arch above the cistern provides limited access to the cistern from both B and D and the *highest* point of the arch is just 32 cm off the original floor level (Fig. 9)! The cistern is deep (the bottom of the fault lies at 4 m in places) and is by no means a level surface, running some 6.08 m in length, under a vaulted roof, and was probably constructed before the rest of the building was finished (Bruneau 1970: 481). The arches over the opening to the
cistern serve not only as access for the drawing of water, but also bear weight for the wall that divides areas B and D, so that the floor does not collapse into the cistern.

Binder also says that Bruneau suggests that a wooden ladder or stairs may have been used to enter the cistern for ritual ablutions.\textsuperscript{33} What Bruneau actually said was, ‘À cette interprétation on peut toutefois objecter que [the cistern] fait défaut tout dispositif d’évacuation d’eaux usées’, (‘In this interpretation one could, however, object that the cistern is lacking any mechanism to deal with the disposal of waste water’) (Bruneau 1970: 481).

Furthermore, while there may be water in the well/cistern from the water table, there is no running water, and it would undoubtedly have presented a most unsatisfactory manner in which to bathe, ritually or otherwise. Emptying this cistern would have been almost impossible, especially as it is partly fed from the aquifer. Most importantly, on an island devoid of a surface supply of water, bathing would have rendered the cistern useless for the collection of water for domestic purposes. This, in turn, would suggest that the building ought to have had a separate domestic water supply if it had a \textit{mikveh}. It does not.

Donald Binder (1999: 306) cites Bruneau as having said that the cistern in GD\textsubscript{80} was unusual in that it allowed for human access, but he is incorrect on two counts. The first is that many of the cisterns on Delos are constructed to incorporate stone stairways specifically designed for human access.\textsuperscript{34} The second is that Binder did not understand what Bruneau said, which was that \textit{according to Plassart}, it is possible to take water from room B via an opening in the wall framed by a marble arch, leaving just enough space to draw water from Room B. However, Bruneau also went on to say that if this is possible now, it is only because part of the floor is missing, and that he was \textit{not able to accomplish the task himself} [my emphasis] (Bruneau 1970: 482). In any case, access is somewhat better from room D, and it is likely that it was properly accessed from there when the cistern was in use.

\textit{The lime kiln}

In room A of GD\textsubscript{80} there is a substantial lime kiln measuring some 2m in diameter (Figs. 2 and 10). Produced by melting down marble, lime was a valuable commodity in the ancient world. In agriculture, it was used as a fertilizer and to improve drainage. Lime was also used in construction. Mortar for laying masonry was made by mixing lime with sand. Concrete was made by mixing the lime with crushed or natural stone. Plaster was covered with a similar mix to mortar, with a coat of lime on top. Lime putty was used to set fine brickwork and masonry. Lime white is a mixture of the lime and water and was used for whitening walls, the traditional ‘whitewash’, and lime plaster was used to waterproof cisterns.
The town centre of Delos, as it became further and further removed from the commercial and strategic centres of the Mediterranean, lay abandoned and in ruins. The marble lying around the island remained one of its final assets. The lime kiln in GD 80 was most likely put in place in the post-abandonment phase of the site as the burning or melting down of marble (an expensive and imported commodity) for lime generally only occurred when the Mediterranean marble trade was tapering off, that is, from about the third century AD, and possibly as late as the fourth century AD, and there was agriculture and viticulture on the southern part of the island up until the beginning of the fifth century AD when the island was finally abandoned, so some of that obsolete marble would have been burned down to make lime to use for this purpose (Brunet 1990).

When Plassart found the marble inscription bases in rooms A and B of GD 80, he stated (without explaining his reasoning) that they were not associated with the kiln (Plassart 1913: 526). Given that a number of large marble column barrels and inscription bases were also found in GD 80 probably waiting to be sawn into smaller pieces before being burned down, and given also the variety of the inscription bases found in GD 80, including two small marble inscription bases with no visible text or with wholly eroded text (Deonna 1938: Pl. CXII, photos 969–970), which were found by Plassart
in the same area as IDs 2330, 2331 and 2332 – discussed earlier – it is logical to expect that the marble found in this building was destined for the flames of the kiln.

The various interpretations of GD 80

Plassart (1913) identified GD 80 as a Hellenistic house with a formal portico entranceway on its eastern extremity. Belle Mazur (1935) interpreted the main structure as a Hellenistic house with a peristyle courtyard, rather than a portico. Both options are equally possible. Mazur’s reconstruction of it was based on parallels of size and layout with other houses on the island, specifically GD 57, the House of the Poseidonists, on the western side of the island. Having looked at the extant houses on the island, it is my view that GD 80 is more comparable with the House of the Hermes (GD 89) (Fig. 11) near the theatre, which had at least three storeys, accessed from various external and internal stairways. The ground floor plan of this house appears to be very similar to the ground floor plan of GD 80, as well as to the ground floor plans of the House of the Dauphins (GD 111) and the House

Fig. 11. GD 89 – The House of the Hermes
of the Poseidonists (GD 57) (Fig. 12). In any event, without any evidence to corroborate its identification, none of these interpretations of the original layout of GD 80 have anything to do with it ever having been a synagogue.

Belle Mazur's was the only dissenting voice on the subject of the so-called synagogue on Delos, and, while her interpretation of the physical structure of the building was very similar to that of Plassart and others, her interpretation of the inscriptions and statue bases found in the building was not. She argued that they were not consistent with a Jewish context, that Plassart’s inscriptions were not Jewish and that GD 80 was therefore not a synagogue, but some sort of establishment belonging to the Greek cult of Theos Hypsistos (Mazur 1935: 22).

Eleazar Lipa Sukenik (1934) accepted André Plassart’s interpretation of GD 80. However, once he had read Mazur’s 1935 analysis of the evidence, he changed his mind. Writing in 1949, he said: ‘the case of the so-called “Synagogue” at Delos shows how misleading incomplete research can be’, and went on to conclude, based on Mazur’s argument, that the word προσευχή could only mean ‘prayer’ and not ‘synagogue’ because of the absence of the definite article in the inscription; that the deity referred to as ‘hypsistos’, was the Greek
god Zeus; and that the form of the inscribed bases was pagan and not Jewish (Sukenik 1949).

Bruneau (1970; 1982) accepted Plassart’s identification and dismissed Mazur’s rebuttal of Plassart’s work, along with Sukenik’s later acknowledgement of the correctness of her rebuttal. Bruneau insisted that the inscriptions showed that GD 80 was a sanctuary of the Jewish God Most High, Theos Hypsistos, since the name Zeus Hypsistos does not appear on the inscriptions and since the cult of Zeus Hypsistos had its own sanctuary on Mount Cynthus. He also rejected Mazur’s argument concerning the format and style of the inscribed bases, saying that the Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora assimilated certain pagan customs which over time became established in their religion. Peculiarly, even though he agreed with Mazur’s translation of the phrase ἐν προσευχήι as ‘for a prayer/offering’, he accepted Plassart’s reading of it as ‘for the synagogue’ and insisted that προσευχή remains ‘an essentially Jewish term’ (Bruneau 1970: 488), concluding that GD 80 was a synagogue of an exceptional type, and that the endurance of the Jewish cult on Delos even after the destructions of 88 and 69 BC confirms the references in the literary sources (Bruneau 1970: 485). However, those texts, as I have shown, do not refer to any structure at all, let alone to a synagogue. At the very best, they confirm the presence of Jews on Delos (and other neighbouring Jews), and indicate that the Jews on Delos were for some time unable to follow their customary religious practices.

Michael White (1987: 80; 1990: 138) concluded that because there is some external evidence of a Jewish community on Delos, GD 80 would have fitted their needs and that in all likelihood it was a Samaritan synagogue that was founded. I have no argument with this. Like many other buildings on the island, GD 80 could have been a synagogue. It is only that there is no evidence that it was a synagogue, be it Jewish or Samaritan (White 1990: 152).

Alf Thomas Kraabel (1992) came to the conclusion that GD 80 was a synagogue on the basis of the earlier debate (rejecting Mazur’s critique and Sukenik’s support of it), and relying on Bruneau’s presentation of the material. His main argument for the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue rests on the epigraphical references to Theos Hypsistos in the inscriptions found by André Plassart (Kraabel 1992: 491) which, he says, ‘do not offer an obviously pagan use of the term at a time when references to one or other pagan deity as Hypsistos are not uncommon’. As I have shown above, the inscriptions are out of context and unrelated, and one of them only contains the epithet hypsistos and not theos hypsistos.

Whilst Kraabel (1992: 493) acknowledged the ambiguity of the proseuchē inscription, he concluded it was Nonetheless Jewish. He did not remark on the form or style of the inscribed bases, nor did he note or refer to the cuttings for lead fixings.

Hudson McLean (1996) took the two Samaritan inscriptions as proof that GD 80 was a synagogue, but a Samaritan one. In McLean’s interpretation of
the physical structure (wholly adopted from White), he noted that there was no provision in GD 80 for cultic rites, that there was no altar or shrine and that therefore the congregation ‘related to a remote external cult, namely the Samaritan cult practiced at Mount Gerizim’ (McLean 1996: 195).

Peter Richardson (1996) interpreted GD 80 as a ‘remodelled house adapted to the needs of the worshipping community’ (Richardson 1996: 97). He accepted that Plassart and all those who followed on from his work were correct and that GD 80 was a synagogue.

Binder (1999) made what is probably one of the most ambitious of all the interpretations of the building. Based only on the letter preserved in Josephus (AJ 14.213–216) and on Plassart’s and later, Bruneau’s interpretation of the material he found, he described GD 80 as ‘a synagogue with an ancillary banquet hall used to hold feasts on sacred days’ and argued that the dividing wall between Rooms A and B presented ‘the first serious architectural evidence suggesting the division of the sexes within the synagogue’ (Binder 1999: 299). He deemed that access to the cistern from rooms B and D was part of the proof for this claim, on the basis that it was possible that the cistern might have functioned as a mikveh (Binder 1999: 316–317) which, as I have shown is unlikely, both physically and domestically.

Lee I. Levine (writing in 2000), accepted Bruneau’s conclusion that GD 80 was a synagogue, and referred to the 1970s as the point at which a scholarly consensus was arrived at (Levine 2000: 100; apparently on the basis of Philippe Bruneau’s publication of the site). Levine described IDs 2328, 2330, 2331 as having been inscribed on ‘column bases’, which is incorrect. These inscriptions are actually on carved stelae, some in the shape of horned altars, some rectangles with lead fixings. Levine further mentioned ID 2329 (the proseuchē inscription), noting that it could have been used in a pagan context but that, combined with the other ancillary evidence and the discovery of the two Samaritan stelae in 1979 by the École française d’Athènes, it added up to sufficient evidence to identify GD 80 as the earliest synagogue thus far found (Levine 2000: 100–101). But, as I have shown, the Samaritan inscriptions and the inscriptions found by André Plassart are unrelated and, while the Samaritan inscriptions are unquestionably evidence of some sort of Samaritan community on Delos, Plassart’s inscriptions are not Jewish.

Levine (2000: 103) asked whether there were two separate synagogues (one Jewish, one Samaritan) or one synagogue serving both communities. He went on to conclude that the location of the Delian Jewish community was in a ‘relatively isolated part of the island’. In fact, GD 80, the proseuchē inscription and the two Samaritan inscriptions were found in densely populated areas, each not more than 100 m or so from the others, abutting a heavily occupied residential area on the east side of the stadium. This area has not been fully excavated yet, but it is evident from Bruneau’s plans, my own observations in October 2003 and by cursory examination of satellite views of the site.
from the *Google Earth* website, that there are sub-surface and above-surface walls all over the area, so that there is practically no unused ground in that quarter. There was simply no room in the town and town-adjacent areas of this small island for isolation of any sort.

Trümper (2004) acknowledged that the identification of *GD 80* as a synagogue was made primarily on the basis of the inscriptions and furnishings. She cited just three scholars, Bruneau, White and Binder, as being sufficient to explain the history and use of *GD 80* ‘because no substantially differing views have been presented in the literature’ (Trümper 2004: 569). In a footnote she goes on to qualify this with the extraordinary statement that the earlier opponents to the ‘synagogue’ argument (Mazur and Sukenik) ‘can be ignored here’. She is ultimately drawn into a circular argument of her own making and cannot then acknowledge the full force of the Mazur argument against the identification of *GD 80* as a synagogue. Of course, she is hindered in her view by not actually having read Mazur’s article.  

Trümper goes on to cite the four inscriptions found in *GD 80* that bear the name *theos hypsistos*. She is incorrect in this detail: only three of the inscriptions bear the epithet *theos hypsistos* (*IDs* 2328, 2330 and 2331). One of the inscriptions bears only the epithet *hypsistos* (*ID* 2332). She goes on to say that the use of this epithet is still debated, although it is now generally agreed that it was used (although not exclusively) ‘by Diaspora Jews (and also Samaritans) to refer to their god’ (Trümper 2004: 569). This may well be the case from about the middle of the first century AD for the use of the epithet *theos hypsistos*, but it is by no means certain in the first century BC or earlier – the period to which Trümper refers. By using later evidence to support earlier data without any corroboration, she creates yet another circular and potentially misleading argument.

Trümper goes on to make another incorrect statement, saying that there is an ongoing discussion about the three other Jewish and Samaritan inscriptions: ‘One was discovered in a private house nearby, in the *Quartier du stade*, and the other two, on stelae, were found in an unexcavated area some 90 m north of *GD 80*’ (Trümper 2004: 571). Here she has confused two separate things. The two Samaritan stelae to which she alludes were discovered in 1979 by Philippe Fraisse of the École française d’Athènes (see the section above on inscriptions). However, the so-called third inscription to which she refers is the original *proseuchê* inscription that Plassart found back in 1912 (*ID* 2329), which was indeed found in the stadium district, in Habitation IIA of *GD 79* (see section on inscriptions, above) and which she refers to separately and earlier in her article. Thus, she has introduced more obfuscation into the argument by duplicating a piece of evidence and treating it as though its existence supports her argument that it and the Samaritan inscriptions may have originated in *GD 80*.

There are a number of other claims made by Trümper to which I must also refer. One is that the niche in the wall of room A postdates the construction of
the wall and is ‘rather crudely made’ (Trümper 2004: 585). This is incorrect, as anyone who has looked at other structures on the island will see. The niche is an integral part of the original Hellenistic construction. I found numerous other such niches, constructed and dressed in precisely the same manner and these niches are common all over the island and elsewhere (Fig. 13).\(^{38}\) They could indeed have been used, as she suggests, for placing lamps to light building interiors. It is also possible that they were shrines of some sort, as were those recorded by Renfrew during his extensive excavations on Phylakopi (see Renfrew 1985: 11–12, Pl. 12b).\(^{39}\)

Trümper (2004: 585) also says that the inscription bases resemble ‘altar incense burners’, and were probably used in the ‘synagogue’ on Delos, a claim, for which, again, there is no evidence whatsoever. Trümper cites Anders Runesson (2001: 437) here as support for this argument, but Runesson does not offer any support for this specific contention, and indeed his comments on meal and incense offerings relate only to the petition to restore the Temple at Elephantine some time before its ultimate abandonment\(^{40}\) and not to any purported synagogue usage, then or later.

Conclusions

Because we know so very little about early synagogues, it is important to proceed carefully with the available evidence and not to reach into inherently

Fig. 13. *GD* 80 niche and two other niches on Delos
teleological solutions to explain what we do not as yet have answers to. The problem with these and other interpretations of the structure, identification and internal furnishings of GD 80 (other than Mazur’s) is that they are predicated on the pre-existing belief, following Plassart, that GD 80 is a synagogue. They are not based on the physical, literary or epigraphic evidence. The argument, for instance, that the Samaritan inscriptions provide additional proof that GD 80 was a synagogue is spurious since it is clear from all the evidence that the initial identification of GD 80 as a synagogue was made on the basis of the tenuous association of two inscriptions by Plassart, and that that initial association is clearly not supported by the evidence.

Plassart’s identification of GD 80 as a synagogue may have given rise to an historical distortion in the chronology of the development of synagogues in the diaspora. Indeed, some scholars have dated the ‘Delian synagogue’ not even to the last phase of the building (when the benches were added), but to its Hellenistic origins in the third century BC, and all on the basis of the first inscription that Plassart discovered 90 m north of GD 80.

The question to ask must surely be, if Plassart had not originally associated the inscriptions from GD 79 and GD 80, whether such an identification could ever have been made. The answer to that question is clearly ‘no’; such an identification of GD 80 as a synagogue on such tenuous material would be deemed implausible.

It is safe to say that while there is nothing that would exclude GD 80 from being a synagogue, there is not one piece of evidence that would suggest that it actually was a synagogue. Each of the hypotheses arguing that GD 80 was a synagogue is based on the association of those first two inscriptions by Andre Plassart back in 1912. Nor does the discovery in 1979 of the two Samaritan inscriptions go to support the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue, though it raises many other questions and makes other interesting interpretations possible.

All that can be said with certainty is that there were Jews or Samaritans (or both) on Delos from some time in the first (or possibly second) century BC, and that they were prevented from following their traditional customs for an unknown period of time during the first century BC.

While it is possible that there was a synagogue (Samaritan or Jewish, or both) on Delos, there is as yet no evidence that it has been found. Because of the restrictions on the traditional practices of some cults and associations, including the Jews, in the first century BC, it is also possible that if Jews assembled for religious purposes, they did so in private dwellings, not in cultic establishments, in which case they would have remained hidden and unidentifiable. Moreover, the letter preserved in Josephus (AJ 14.213–216) relating to the Jews being forbidden to follow their religious traditions and customs is dated to precisely the time that it is argued GD 80 functioned as a synagogue, that is, to the middle of the first century BC.
As I have already said, the issue of physical evidence is complicated because in this period it is not certain that we should be looking for synagogues since religious structures are bound to be of an ambiguous nature if that worship was forbidden by local law. An obvious example would be that when Christians were being persecuted under Roman rule there were no purpose-built Christian churches or basilicas. Private houses, bath houses, crypts and even catacombs were used as meeting places, and overt architectural statements of identity only emerged when the political climate of religious tolerance made safe for them to develop.

All in all, it is impossible to identify GD 80 as a synagogue on the available evidence. It is furthermore impossible to identify any other structure on the island as a synagogue. It is also clear that other than the two Samaritan (Israelite) inscriptions, nothing specifically pertaining to Jews or Samaritans has been found on the island. I have shown that the names Lysimachus and Agathokles are not indicators of ‘Jewishness’ on the island and appear elsewhere in very specifically non-Jewish contexts on the island. The only names associated with a Jewish or Samaritan context on Delos are those of Jason of Knossos and Artemidoros of Heraclea, both apparently from Crete. And again, we do not know if these were Samaritan benefactors or pagan donors or patrons.

I have to conclude, therefore, that the vexed question of the existence of a synagogue on Delos must remain open, and that we must hope for specifically Jewish and/or more Samaritan material to be found to help with any potential identification.

Notes

1 The École française d’Athènes maintain a number of houses on the island for the purpose of accommodating their archaeologists during the digging seasons and I am most grateful to their Director of Studies, Mde. Michèle Brunet for arranging to open one of their dig houses for me, and to Panayotis Chatzidakis of the 21st Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classic Antiquities, for giving me permission to stay on the island in October of 2003.
2 For the essentials of the debate on the chronology, see Goldstein 1998: 84–100.
4 Ibid.
5 Roussel and Launey 1937: 295; Plassart 1913:, 205, n.2; Plassart 1914: 526, n.1; Frey, CIJ, I, n.726.
6 My translation.
7 Roussel and Launey 1937a: 119.
8 Roussel and Launey 1937a: 188.
9 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 395.
10 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 374.
11 Roussel and Launey 1937a: 1.
12 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 278.
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13 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 295; Plassart 1913: 205, n.2; Plassart 1914: 527, n.2; Frey, CII I, n.729.
14 My translation.
15 Roussel and Launey 1937a: 122.
16 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 389.
17 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 296; Plassart 1913: 205, n.3; Plassart 1914: 527, n.3; Frey, CII I, n.728.
18 My translation.
20 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 296; Plassart 1913: 205, n.4; Plassart 1914: 527, n.4; Frey, CII I, n.727.
21 My translation.
22 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 296; Plassart 1913: 206, n.5; Plassart 1914: 528, n.5; Frey CII I, n.730.
23 Roussel and Launey 1937b: 296; Plassart 1913: 206, n.6; Plassart 1914: 528, n.6; Frey, CII I, n.731.
24 My translation.
25 Deonna 1938: Pl. CXII, photographs 969 and 970.
26 Translation based on Bruneau 1982: 469.
27 My translation.
29 My translation.
30 Levine 1982: 6; 1998: 23; 2000: 581 rightly makes the point that Jews, wherever they may be, have borrowed from and adapted what they saw around them.
31 Around 200 m distant from GD 80. The Ephebium is where the education of ephebes took place under the supervision of the Gymnasiarch. The construction of the benches there is very similar to the construction of the benches in GD 80, and the throne would probably have been used by the Gymnasiarch who instructed the ephebes. The throne could, alternatively, have come from the theatre as it is identical to other theatre ‘VIP’ chairs.
32 Boardman, Griffin and Murray 1988: 388.
34 The cistern of GD 79 (the building where ID 2329 was found), for example, has a stone staircase leading down into that cistern.
35 Bruneau 1970: 486–487. However, one of the inscriptions (ID 2332) contains the epithet hypsitos and not theos hypsistos.
37 Trümper 2004: 519 n.17, says that she had no access to Mazur’s ‘book’. However, I had no difficulty in obtaining a photocopy of what is actually a short article in 2003 from the Ecole française d’Athènes while I was staying in Athens before travelling south to Delos.
38 Niches from other buildings on Delos. Unfortunately, I have lost my references to exactly which houses I took the photographs in, but they were taken in the Theatre District in October 2003.
39 Renfrew 1985: 11–12 and plate 12b.
40 Runesson 2001: 437.

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