CHAPTER FOUR

SYNAGOGUE ART: MOSAIC PAVEMENTS

Mosaic pavements adorn synagogues in the diaspora from the fourth century on, and they are in fact the principal ornament of most excavated synagogues in the diaspora and the Land of Israel (Hachlili 1988:222-3). Exceptions are a plaster floor at Dura and an opus sectile floor in the early synagogue of Ostia.

A THE MOSAIC PAVEMENTS

Aegina

The main hall of the synagogue at Aegina is decorated with an impressive geometric carpet, 13.50m × 7.60m, in several colors (Figure IV-1a, b). The inner main carpet is composed of an overall pattern of alternating ovals and large and small circles, the large circles being filled with four-petalled rosettes. Two frames border the carpet and two Greek inscriptions appear near the entrance on the west (Sukenik 1934:44-45; Mazur 1935:26, Pls. IV, V; Goodenough 1953, II:75-76). The inner frame consists of whirl rosettes with a design of crossed loops at their center; the outer border has interlacing flowers. At the east end of the mosaic near the apse appears a narrow panel of an ivy pattern with plain white tesserae at its center, possibly for a bamah or lectern. This carpet design is similar to other mosaic pavements in Greece and the east, for instance in the upper level of the House of Aion at Antioch (Levi 1971:Pl. CXXXVIa).

The mosaic floor dates to the first half of the fourth century.

Apamea

The mosaics of the Apamea synagogue were found under the fifth century Grande Colonnade Atrium church (Mayence 1935:199; 1939:201; Verhoogen 1964:13, Pls.

1 The terminology of geometric designs used to describe the ornamental motifs of the mosaics is based on Repertoire graphique décor géométrique dans la mosaïque antique (Paris 1973). The sites discussed below are arranged in alphabetical order.
Figure IV-1. Aegina mosaic: a. mosaic; b. detail.