

more exact understanding of the organizational structures of that community.

In CII 1404⁵⁴ Theodotos' forefathers are listed together with the elders and Simonides as the founders of his synagogue. The plural "elders," as in CII 663, 731f and 803, makes one think of a council of elders. Simonides, who bears no title at all, should remind us that synagogue leadership was not (and is not today) limited to title-bearers. The activities and installations of the synagogue listed in the inscription ("the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments, the hostel and the side rooms, and the water facilities, as lodging for those from abroad who need it") give us an idea of what the elders and other synagogue leaders had to administer.

In summary, these inscriptions teach us that the title "elder" was geographically widespread and known from at least the first century C.E. onwards. Four inscriptions (CII 663, 731f, 803, 1404) have presbyteroi in the plural, indicating a sort of council of elders. CII 800, which mentions both a presbyteros and palaioi, raises the question of the diversity of synagogal constitutions.

3. Reconstruction of the Office of Elder

The comprehensive survey of the title presbyteros in Jewish inscriptions and the selective survey of literary references to Jewish elders has yielded a certain outline, albeit shadowy, which can help in defining the functions of the elders of our inscriptions. It is clear, of course, that "elder" implied different functions in different periods and probably also varied regionally. The following reconstruction is not meant as an ahistorical blurring of differences, but should rather be seen as representing the range of possible functions in the early centuries of the Common Era.

The evidence points to councils of elders rather than single elders.

Four inscriptions refer to elders in the plural (CII 663, 731f, 803, 1404), and a number of New Testament references to Jewish and Jewish-Christian elders (Luke 7:3-5; Acts 11:30; 15:2,4,6,22-23; 16:4; 21:18; Jas 5:14) presuppose a council of elders. The evidence for a special seating place for elders (t. Meg. 4.21 [Zuck. 227]; 1 QS 6:8-9; possibly CII 663 and the benches in the Sardis synagogue) also points to a council of elders.⁵⁵

Elders appear often in a specifically religious context.

The Roman lawgiver appears to have viewed Jewish elders primarily as religious functionaries, as a Jewish counterpart to Christian clerics (Cod. Theod. 16.8.13). In addition to functions relating specifically to the worship service (Corp. Iur. Civ., Nov. 146.1), the collecting of money in the synagogue to be sent to the patriarch (Cod. Theod. 16.8.14) must also be seen as a religious function. Judicial functions (Cod. Theod. 16.8.2; Cod. Iust. 1.9.15) could be viewed as secular activity, but to the extent that for Jews to live by their own law is a religious issue, this, too, must be seen as religious. Special seating arrangements during the worship service (t. Meg. 4.21, etc.) also point to a religious context for the elders' activities. The rabbinic definition of an elder as a scholar (b. Qidd. 32b), if this was shared by Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews, is further support for a religious locus of their activity. Given the title's background as a political, civic term, it should not be excluded that elders also had political, representative functions, but the texts cited show that one could not argue that they had only civic functions and not religious ones.

Whether the elders of our inscriptions were ordained or not cannot be known.

There is no positive evidence that they were, and rabbinic sources (e.g., y. Bik. 65d.11-15; b. Sanh. 14a) claim that ordination was limited to the Holy Land.

4. The Role of Women Elders

It should not be necessary to discuss once again the question of whether presbytera was an honorific title or not. The line of argumentation is the same as for the other titles borne by women. The person fully convinced that women could not have had official functions in the ancient synagogue is likely to remain unconvinced by all evidence to the contrary, and will argue that these women elders were wives of elders or older women (in spite of Mannine's age of thirty-eight in CII 590 and of the parallelization of presbytera and archisynagogissa in CII 731c, and in spite of the fact that no husbands appear in the inscriptions) or simply honorific elders. A. E. Harvey, for example, writing in 1974, notes, ". . . there are several Jewish tombstones in Italy and Asia Minor bearing the word πρεσβύτερος, but some of them must be purely honorific (four are in the