

## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN AS MOTHERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE

#### A. The Evidence for Mothers of the Synagogue

##### 1. The Inscriptional Evidence

There exist two Greek inscriptions in which the title mētēr synagōgēs occurs (reconstructed), one Greek inscription in which a woman bears the title mētēr, two Latin inscriptions in which the title mater synagogae occurs, and one Latin inscription in which a woman bears the unusual title pateressa. All six of the inscriptions are from Italy, three being from Rome, two from Venosa in Apulia and one from Venetia in Brescia. They range in date from around the second century C.E. until perhaps as late as the sixth century.

##### Rome

CII 523 (= CIL VI 29756).<sup>1</sup> Sarcophagus fragment decorated by a shofar, a lulav and a seven-branched menorah; known since the late sixteenth century, but no longer extant. Date unknown. The manuscripts differ on points of spelling; for the variants see CII, ad loc. The text of Leon is:

Beturia Pau-  
2 lla F domi  
heterne quos-  
4 tituta que bi-  
xit an(nos) LXXXVI meses VI  
6 proselyta an(norum) XVI  
nomine Sara mater  
8 synagogarum Campi  
et Bolumni  
10 en irenae ai cymysis  
autis.

##### Shofar Lulav Menorah

L. 3: read aeternae con-.  
L. 4: read quae vi-.  
L. 5: read menses.  
Ll. 10-11: read ἐν ἐλρήνῃ (ἡ) κοίμησις αὐτῆς.

Veturia Paulla F(?), consigned to her eternal home, who lived 86 years, 6 months, a proselyte of 16 years, named Sara, mother of the synagogues of Campus and Volumnius. In peace her sleep.<sup>2</sup>

Veturia Paulla,<sup>3</sup> a proselyte to Judaism at the age of seventy, had taken on the name Sara, most likely as a sign of her conversion. Campus probably means Campus Martius, a plain of around six hundred acres on the left bank of the Tiber. CII 88<sup>4</sup> and 319<sup>5</sup> refer to fathers of the synagogue of the Campesians, which may be the same congregation.<sup>6</sup> These three inscriptions are the only evidence for the synagogue of the Campesians. While it would be quite dangerous to generalize on the basis of three inscriptions, it is striking that of the four title-bearers mentioned, three bear the title mother/father of the synagogue, which raises the question whether this might have been a central title in that congregation. As to the infant archon, which must indicate archon-to-be, it seems reasonable to assume that the boy was given his title because of his father's active leadership in the congregation. (This inscription is thus indirect support for the view that the title mother/father of the synagogue was functional, rather than honorific, a point which will be discussed below.)

Our knowledge of the synagogue of the Volumnesians is based on four inscriptions (CII 343,<sup>7</sup> 402,<sup>8</sup> 417,<sup>9</sup> 523). Leon locates it among the Transtiberine group of congregations. CII 343, 402 and 417 were found in the Monteverde catacomb, which according to Leon, was the earliest of the Roman Jewish catacombs, perhaps going back to the first century B.C.E. and remaining in use until at least the end of the third century.<sup>10</sup> With the exception of CII 523, the title mother/father of the synagogue does not occur in connection with the synagogue of the Volumnesians. The titles which do occur are archon (archon: CII 343), archon-to-be (mellarchon: CII 402) and (archon?)-for-life (zabiou = dia biou?: CII 417).

Veturia Paulla, then, was the mother of two synagogues, one in which the title mother/father of the synagogue may well have been a key term of leadership and one in which archon may have been a major function. Her functioning as mother of two synagogues is not unparalleled, for CII 508<sup>11</sup>, also from Rome, mentions a father of synagogues. There is no difficulty in imagining that a person could be actively involved in two synagogues. Note that no husband is mentioned in the inscription. If Veturia Paulla did not become Jewish until the age of 70, then, considering the life expectancy of that period, her husband was most likely already dead when she converted, if indeed she had been married. In any case, the inscription gives

us no reason to assume that she received her title through her husband.

CII 496.<sup>12</sup> Sarcophagus fragment. Found in the Via Anicia; may have come from the Monteverde catacomb (1st C. B.C.E. - 3rd C. C.E.).<sup>13</sup>

[Ἐνθά]δε κεῖτε  
 2 [Μαρ? Ἰουλ?]ια Μαρκελ-  
 [λα μή]τηρ συνα-  
 4 [γωγῆς] Αὐγουστη-  
 [σιων. Μ]νησθῆ  
 6 [...ἔ]ν εἰρήνῃ  
 [ἡ κοίμῃ]σις αὐ-  
 8 [τῆ]ς.

L. 1: read κεῖται.

Here lies (Maria? Julia?) Marcella, mother of the synagogue of the Augustesians. May [. . .] be remembered (?). In peace her sleep.

The form of the letters would indicate a second- or possibly third-century C.E. dating. That Markella was a woman is indicated by the fragmentary -ia before Markel- and by the final sigma for au[tē]s. "Mother of the synagogue" is also partially reconstructed: mētēr syna[gōgēs], but seems to be quite a plausible reconstruction.

Six inscriptions bear witness to the Synagogue of the Augustesians (CII 284,<sup>14</sup> 301,<sup>15</sup> 338,<sup>16</sup> 368,<sup>17</sup> 416,<sup>18</sup> 496). The other titles mentioned are scribe (grammateus) and archon-to-be (mellarcon = mellarchōn: CII 284), gerusiarch (gerousiarchēs: CII 301, 368), archon (iarlchōn: CII 338), (archon?)-for-life (zabiou = dia biou?: CII 416<sup>19</sup>).

The synagogue could have been named for the emperor Augustus (27 B.C.E. to 14 C.E.), who was in fact friendly toward the Jews. He may have been a patron of the community.<sup>20</sup> If the synagogue was founded during the reign of Augustus, it would be one of the oldest in Rome.

As in CII 523, no husband is mentioned in our inscription, so we should not assume that Marcella received her title because of her husband. Unfortunately, the brief inscription does not yield any further information about Marcella's life, age at death or title.

CII 166.<sup>21</sup> Marble fragment; more fragmentary today than when first discovered. Found in the Appia catacomb (1st - 3rd C. C.E.).<sup>22</sup>

**Menorah** 2 Ἐνθάδε κεῖτε Σιμπ[λικία μήτηρ? συ-]  
 ναγωγῆς, φίλανδρος [.....]  
 συναγωγῆς τῇ ἰδίᾳ σ[υμβίῳ ἐποίησεν].

L. 1: read κεῖται.

Here lies Simplicia, mother (?) of the synagogue, who loved her husband. [Husband's name and office] of the synagogue set up (this stone) to his own wife.

The form of the letters would indicate a second- or possibly third-century C.E. dating. The [mētēr synagōgēs] is admittedly conjectural, but the gender of the deceased is established by the philandros and by the tē idiā s[ymbiō]. Further, the title mother of the synagogue, known from elsewhere, is a plausible reconstruction for the lacuna preceding -nagōgē, especially since synagōgēs occurs in the following line.

In contrast to the two inscriptions just discussed, the name of the synagogue is lacking here, so that one cannot discuss comparative materials from the same synagogue. A further contrast is that a husband is mentioned here, and he seems to have been an office-holder. He may have borne the title patēr synagōgēs or perhaps another title. As the titles of both wife and husband are missing, it is impossible to say whether they bore the same title, but since it seems quite possible that she was a mother of the synagogue and he a father of the synagogue, then the question of how she attained her title gains added relevancy.

Venetia, Brescia

CII 639; CIL V 4411.<sup>23</sup> First quoted by Feliciani in 1463.<sup>24</sup>  
 Date unknown.

Coeliae<sup>25</sup> Paternae  
 matri synagogae  
 Brixianorum.

To Coelia Paterna, mother of the synagogue of the Brescians.

Unfortunately, the only other Jewish inscription from Brescia (CII 638) reads [. . .] χιουνα/γωγο[.], certainly archisynagōgos, but hardly enough to give us significant information about the Jewish community in Brescia.

## Venosa, Apulia

In 1853, a Jewish catacomb in Venosa (the ancient Venusia) was discovered.<sup>26</sup> The inscriptions (CII 569-619; 619a-619e) are of two types: dipinti, painted in red on the stucco covering of the walls, and graffiti, scratched onto the walls, whereby most of the latter have disappeared. Two of the Venosan inscriptions are of interest for the question at hand.

CII 606; CIL IX 6231.<sup>27</sup> Letters traced by finger into the wet stucco, later painted in red (3rd - 6th C.).<sup>28</sup>

Hic requesc-  
2 et Alexsanra  
pateressa qui v-  
4 it anoro plus m[. . .].

שלום

Ll. 1-2: read requiescit (l. 1 Lenormant:<sup>29</sup> requiesc-);  
De Rossi:<sup>30</sup> AlexsanFa. (Ligature on the r  
possibly indicates dr.)  
Ll. 3-4: read quae vixit annorum plus minus.

Here lies Alexsanra, "fatheress" (pateressa), who lived approximately [. . .]. Peace!

The title pateressa is simply the feminine of pater. The name could be Alexsandra (as the reported ligature may indicate), but then the present spelling may simply be a variation thereof. Since a husband is not mentioned, there is no reason to make assumptions about his possible titles or office; perhaps she was not married or perhaps she was a widow. Therefore, it would be rather incautious to agree with Harry Leon when he writes:

There is one example (606) of a pateressa Alexandra (spelled Alexsanra). It seems more likely that this title was given to the wife of a pater than that it was an independent title like that of mater synagogae at Rome and elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

While there is certainly a linguistic difference between pater-essa and mater synagogae, there is nothing in this difference to indicate that the one is an independent title while the other is derived from the husband's title. Indeed, one could as easily have argued the opposite, namely that the pateressa was a genuine office-holder, for her title indicates that she was a female pater, while the matres synagogae were just that, mothers and not fathers. Such an argument would be as arbitrary as that given by Leon. There is in fact no reason to consider pateressa as either more or less official than mater synagogae, whereby the question

of whether pateressa implied a synagogue function or a civic one, must remain open.

CII 619d. Found in the hypogeum (3rd - 6th c.).<sup>32</sup>

Ἦδε κεῖτε  
2 Φαυστεινα  
μήτηρ, γυ-  
4 νή Αὐξα-  
νίου πα-  
6 τρός καὶ  
πάτρονος  
8 τῆς πόλεως.

L. 1: read κεῖται.

Ll. 4-5: Frenkel, Lifshitz: Αὐξανίου; Bognetti: Αὐσανίου;  
J. and L. Robert: Λυσανίου.

Here lies Faustina, mother, wife of Auxanios, father and patron of the city.

CII 619c. The epitaph of the husband, Auxanios:

Ἦδε κεῖτε Αὐξανειὸς πατήρ  
2 καὶ πατρὼν τῆς πόλεως.

Here lies Auxaneios, father and patron of the city.

This inscription again raises the question whether women bearing the title mother received it through their husbands. Unlike CII 166 (Simplicia) discussed above, this inscription is not fragmentary. It is thus clear that both wife and husband had the same title, which could indicate that the offices of both Faustina and Auxanios implied active leadership or it could mean that Auxanios alone was a leader, while his wife Faustina simply bore an honorific title. It is possible that Faustina received her title because of her family connections, but this does not necessarily imply that it was honorific.

A further question raised by this inscription is the nature of the title mētēr/patēr when it stands alone, without the additional "of the synagogue." For example, was Auxanios father of the synagogue and patron of the city or was he also a father of the city? The question raised by the term pateressa, which also stands alone, takes on new interest in light of the "of the city" in connection with "patron." A definitive solution is impossible, but the patrōn tēs poleōs makes a civic function for the title patēr/mētēr seem more likely than a synagogue function. It is probable that in the Diaspora the line separating synagogue leadership from civic leadership was rather fluid. The parallel use of patēr and patrōn in this inscription, as well as in 619b<sup>33</sup>

and 619c, should caution us from making too quick an identification between father/mother and patron.

Father/mother is one of the more common titles among the Jewish Venosan inscriptions. Patēr/pater occurs nine times outside of our inscription,<sup>34</sup> while mētēr and pateressa occur one time each. Of the ten patres mentioned among the Venosan inscriptions, seven are named Faustinus, and the mother in CII 619d is named Faustina. This may indicate that they were all from the same family (see especially CII 611 and 613 for the passing down of names) and that the name Faustinus/a was as important a factor in attaining this title as any individual leadership skills a person might possess. In fact, Faustina may even have been named mother on the basis of the family into which she was born, most likely the same basis for success as that of the men named Faustinus in arriving at their office, rather than the family into which she married.

The twelve occurrences of the title pater/patēr/mētēr/pateressa indicate that it played a central role in the Jewish community at Venosa. Unfortunately, the inscriptions do not give us any indication of the actual function involved. Leon posits, "It is not improbable, therefore [because the title was common at Venosa], that the Venusian pater was a board member."<sup>35</sup> This seems plausible. One would only want to add that it is also not improbable that Alexsanra, pateressa (CII 606), and Faustina, mother (CII 619d) were also members of the board.

## 2. The Literary Evidence

There is one literary reference to Jewish mothers of the synagogue. It occurs in a Christian anti-Jewish polemic entitled De Altercatione Ecclesiae et Synagogae.<sup>36</sup> The work is a dialogue between two matrons, Synagoga and Ecclesia, in which a number of controversial points are discussed. In the context of a discussion of circumcision in which Church argues that circumcision cannot be the sign of salvation, because if this were the case, women, who do not receive circumcision, could not be saved, we read: ". . . what will your virgins do, what your widows, what even your mothers of the synagogue, if you bear witness that the sign of circumcision has helped the people to eternal life?" (quid facient virgines tuae, quid facient viduae, quid matres etiam synagogae).<sup>37</sup> The argument is that not only will normal Jewish women be excluded from eternal life if circumcision is the sign of eternal life, but that even the most outstanding women of the Jewish community, the mothers of the synagogue, will be

excluded. This Christian document thus attests that the title "mother of the synagogue" was sufficiently widespread to be known outside of Jewish circles and could be used as in some sense synonymous with "leading Jewish women." From the rhetorical standpoint, the title had to be vested with some authority or the sarcasm implicit in quid matres etiam synagogae would not have carried.

The careful work of dating and ascertaining the provenance of the De Altercatione Ecclesiae et Synagogae remains to be done. Jean Juster dates it from 438 to 476.<sup>38</sup> We would thus have a fifth-century literary attestation of the title "mother of the synagogue," which fits in well with the inscriptional evidence. Bernhard Blumenkranz suggests that the work may have originated in Spain or in Gaul, but in any case in an area which had only recently been assumed into "Romania," because Synagogue claims that Church was still living like a barbarian at a time when Synagogue already possessed Roman citizenship and was fighting wars.<sup>39</sup>

## B. The Meaning of "Mother/Father" and "Mother/Father of the Synagogue"

### 1. The Received Scholarly Opinion

The scholarly consensus is that both "mother of the synagogue" and "father of the synagogue" were honorific titles. It is my belief that this view arose because "mother of the synagogue" inscriptions have been known since the fifteenth (CII 639) and sixteenth (CII 523) centuries. That is, scholars have been faced for some centuries with the dilemma of women bearing this title. Rather than admit that the title signified a function, thereby allowing women into the ranks of synagogue leadership, they proposed that both fathers and mothers of the synagogue were honored members, but nothing more. Samuel Krauss's argumentation is quite specific in this respect: "A genuine office could not have been associated with the distinction [of father/mother of the synagogue] for the simple reason that it was also bestowed upon women."<sup>40</sup> The few scholars who have gone beyond the view of an honorific title have, unfortunately, produced speculations based on little evidence. Abraham Berliner, for example, suggested that the pater synagogae was the parnas (administrator of charities) of the older period, later called gabba'y. He was to care for the sick and dying and to make the necessary arrangements for funerals.<sup>41</sup> The mater synagogae, which is the same as pateressa, was responsible for



sick and dying women and for providing money to poor brides. Her office corresponds to the office of parnesessa, which was still known in seventeenth-century Italy.<sup>42</sup> No reason is given for this identification; since the words have totally different etymologies, one can certainly not posit a continuity of terminology. One wonders whether an office dealing with charity was chosen because this seems appropriate for women. The parnesessa/parnās suggestion has the double advantage of maintaining the similarity between pater and mater which the terms themselves suggest and of assigning to them functions which need not be construed as implying leadership inappropriate to women.<sup>43</sup>

Harry J. Leon, who rejects Berliner's identification of pater and parnās as ungrounded,<sup>44</sup> reports on Berliner's theory that the mother of the synagogue "cared for women, especially the sick and dying"<sup>45</sup> with considerably greater sympathy, although he must admit that we have little to go on. In the end he classifies mother and father of the synagogue as honorary offices.<sup>46</sup>

Jean-Baptiste Frey, on the basis of CII 533 and the law of immunity in the Theodosian Code (both to be discussed below) is forced to conclude that the title must imply an active role in administration.<sup>47</sup> The existence of mothers of the synagogue, however, sways the interpretation once again in the direction of charity, and Frey posits that these persons may have had certain functions which were particularly honorable, such as directing charitable works and assistance in the community. "This could have been the special role of the 'mothers' of the community," he adds.<sup>48</sup> In the same vein, several scholars imagine that the role could have been one of patronage.<sup>49</sup>

Most scholars, however, have concluded that the office was honorary and are quite specific in citing the existence of mothers of the synagogue as the reason for this.<sup>50</sup>

## 2. Further Literary References to the Title

In trying to arrive at a better understanding of this title, the lack of literary documentation is a particularly severe problem. While we possess no synagogue constitutions or rules of order to help us with any of the titles, some, such as head of the synagogue, are at least mentioned in several literary sources. For father/mother of the synagogue, in contrast, there is a paucity of literary references. The most important of these is found in the Theodosian Code 16.8.4:

Idem A. hiereis et archisynagogis et patribus synagogarum et ceteris, qui in eodem loco deserviunt. Hiereos et archisynagogos et patres synagogarum et ceteros, qui synagogis deserviunt, ab omni corporali munere liberos esse praecipimus. Dat. kal. dec. Constant(ino)p(oli) Basso et Ablavio cons.<sup>51</sup>

The same Augustus to the priests, heads of the synagogues, fathers of the synagogues, and all others who serve in the said place.

We command that priests, heads of the synagogues, fathers of the synagogues, and all others who serve the synagogues shall be free from every compulsory service of a corporal nature.

Given on the kalends of December at Constantinople in the year of the consulship of Bassus and Ablavius (December 1,331;330).<sup>52</sup>

It is unlikely that the holder of an honorific title would be included in the group of persons to whom immunitas<sup>53</sup> from corporal duties (munera corporalia) was granted. In Roman law certain groups of society were freed from these duties. Among others, these included high state officials and members of certain professions. Pagan priests were included to a certain extent, and in the course of time Christian clergy were also included. Thus, the context of this law implies that the three synagogue officials mentioned here are freed from the duties on the basis of their functional role in the synagogue. The following phrase, "and all others who serve the synagogues" (et ceteros, qui synagogis deserviunt) strengthens this interpretation, for it makes it evident that the law wishes to free those who are actually serving as functionaries, even those whose actual title is not included. The plethora and non-uniformity of titles must have been the cause for this additional, rather inclusive clause. In any case, it seems clear that this law refers to synagogue functionaries, and one would be hard pressed to argue that the patres synagogae, who are being freed from very concrete public duties, are merely distinguished members of the synagogue who bear an honorific title.

One cannot generalize from this fourth-century law that the pater synagogae was in all periods an actual functionary rather than just a distinguished member of the synagogue. However, presumably the law is simply recognizing organizational structures which had existed for some time and which continued to exist after the promulgation of the law.

To my knowledge, this law and the mention of matres synagogae in the Altercatio Ecclesiae et Synagogae are the only explicit literary references to mothers or fathers of the

synagogue. Several other texts may be of indirect value. In Matt 23:9, for example, Jesus makes reference to "fathers": "And call no one your father on earth, for you have one father, the heavenly one."<sup>54</sup>

This occurs just after the prohibition to call anyone "rabbi" (vv. 7-8) and just before the injunction to his hearers not to allow themselves to be called "masters" (kathēgētai; v. 10). This certainly looks like an honorific use of the term patēr, since one has the choice of using it or not, and it seems to be a form of address. It may be that in Jesus' time, in Palestine, the title was just coming into use and was, in fact, an honorific title. "Rabbi" would be a somewhat parallel case, for it only came into use gradually (Hillel and Shammai, for example, do not bear the title).<sup>55</sup> Only after some time did it come to be conferred through ordination, and only in the modern period did a rabbi come to be anything like a synagogue functionary, with duties similar to a minister or a priest. Perhaps patēr began as an honorific title, but that seems to have changed by the fourth century, as the law in the Theodosian Code indicates. It is also possible, however, that patēr tēs synagōgēs is not the actual successor to the patēr title about which Jesus warns, but rather had an independent development.

Also of interest in this context is the Aramaic title ʾabba (Hebrew: ʾāb or ʾābī), which occurs as an honorific title in rabbinic sources.<sup>56</sup> The title occurs in conjunction with a proper name, as, for example Abba Sha'ul (m. Menah. 8:3; 11:5; m. Mid. 2:5; 5:4; m. B. Meṣ. 4:12; 6:7; m. B. Bat. 2:7, 13; m. Sanh. 10:1; etc.), Abba Guria (m. Oidd. 4:14) or Abba Gorion (m. Oidd. 4:14). Although according to a baraita in b. Ber. 16b one may call only the three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) "father" and the four matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah) "mother," the use of these terms was not infrequent. According to a further baraita (b. Ber. 16b; y. Nid. 49b.45-47), one should not call slaves "mother so-and-so" or "father so-and-so," but in the house of Rabban Gamliel one did so. Thus, the honorific use of both "father" and "mother" is attested.

Also of interest is the term ʾab bēt dīn, a title borne by the head of the Sanhedrin during the Second Temple period. The ʾab bēt dīn was second in line to the nāṣī.<sup>57</sup>

This very limited literary evidence for the terms mother/father and mother/father of the synagogue is certainly an insufficient basis for tracing a development or for ascertaining the precise functions of the title-bearer. The Aramaic terms for

"mother" and "father" could be used honorifically as terms of respect; that such a usage would at least have been understandable to a Greek audience is indicated by Matt 23:9. The one legal reference to fathers of the synagogue occurs in the context of synagogue officials (Cod. Theod. 16.8.4). The literary evidence, therefore, limited as it is, forces us to distinguish between an honorific use of the title, which takes the form of "mother/father so-and-so," and an official use thereof, which in the Theodosian Code takes the form patres synagogarum.

### 3. Further Inscriptional References to the Title

If the literary evidence for this title is quite limited, there is considerable epigraphical evidence. In Rome eight fathers are mentioned and three mothers. Most are connected with an individual synagogue. Marcella (CII 496) was the mother of the synagogue of the Augustesians; Menophilos (CII 537<sup>58</sup>) was father of the Carcaresians; Julianus (CII 88<sup>59</sup>) and Quintus Claudius Synesios (CII 319<sup>60</sup>) of the Campesians, Gadias (CII 510, 535<sup>61</sup>) of the Hebrews; Pancharios (CII 509<sup>62</sup>) of the synagogue of Eleaea, and Domnus (CII 494<sup>63</sup>) was father of the synagogue of the Vernacilians. Veturia Paulla (CII 523) was the mother of the synagogue of the Campesians and the Volumnesians. In addition to these references to specific communities, Mniaseas (CII 508<sup>64</sup>) is called father of synagogues (patēr synagōgion), Assterias (CII 93<sup>65</sup>) is called father of an unnamed synagogue, and Simplicia (CII 166) seems to have been the mother of an unnamed synagogue, according to the plausible reconstruction in the CII.

That the office was one of high honor can be seen in CII 319,<sup>66</sup> the epitaph of Irena, wife of Clodius, the brother of Quintus Claudius Synesius, the father of the synagogue of the Campesians. A derived honor to say the least! The inscription shows the pride that even being related to a father of the synagogue must have evoked. Domnus (CII 494) had already held two other offices; he was an archon three times and phrontistes twice. While this does not necessarily imply that father of the synagogue was a higher office than archon and phrontistes, we should probably take it to mean that they were at least of equal stature. Mniaseas (CII 508) was also a mathētēs sophōn (Hebrew: talmid ḥakām), a scholar, although there is not necessarily a connection between the two. The age at death is indicated in only two of the inscriptions: Veturia Paulla (CII 523) was eighty-six when she died, and Pancharios (CII 509) lived to the

extraordinary age of one hundred ten. While we cannot generalize from two examples, the advanced age of these two people does support what one would expect from the title itself, namely that the office-holder should be an older, venerable member of the community.

In the much discussed, late third-century Stobi inscription (CII 694<sup>67</sup>), it is Claudius Tiberius Polycharmus, also called Achyrios, father of the synagogue in Stobi, who, in fulfillment of a vow, constructed the "buildings for the holy place and the triclinium and the hall with four rows of columns." This he did with his own funds, without touching the revenues of the sanctuary. While it would be an error to use this inscription as evidence that one function of the father of the synagogue was to be in charge of building activity, (indeed, according to this method nearly all office-holders and many non-office-holders could be seen to have this function, for it is in the nature of epigraphical remains that many inscriptions are donative), it is probably not an accident that this one was wealthy enough to make this donation. Further, the reference to the communal funds may be significant. Could it imply that the father of the synagogue would have access to this money for building purposes?

In addition to the form father/mother of the synagogue, one also encounters the simple father or mother alone. It is not immediately clear if this is a synagogue title, a municipal title or a civic title (denoting representation of the Jewish people in a given area). At Venosa in Apulia, for example, the terms pater (CII 611 twice, 612, 613 twice<sup>68</sup>), pater (CII 590 twice,<sup>69</sup> 599,<sup>70</sup> 619c,<sup>71</sup> 619d<sup>72</sup>), pater pateron (CII 619b<sup>73</sup>), meter (CII 619d), and pateressa (CII 606) occur with no genitival addition. Should we take these as indicating synagogue office? CII 619b, which mentions Marcellus, "father of fathers" (pater pateron) and patron of the city, could lead one to think that Marcellus' first title referred to a religious function (especially in light of Mithraic parallels to be discussed below), while the second was a municipal title. Auxanios (CII 619c, 619d) is called father and patron of the city, so that one could construe "of the city" with both father (of the city) and patron (of the city).<sup>74</sup> CII 613, which mentions Faustinus pater, grandson of Faustinus pater, son of Vitus, gerusiarch (ierusiarcontis [gen.]), probably refers to three synagogue officials, although it is conceivable that the man and his grandfather held municipal or civic office, while his father was a synagogue official. My tendency is to think that father/mother at Venosa refers to synagogue office, but the

several inscriptions which clearly refer to municipal honors (CII 611, 619b, 619c, 619d) should teach us that the leading families of the synagogue(s) of Venosa were also leading citizens of Venosa, thus making a definitive answer to the question impossible.

An inscription (CII 533<sup>75</sup>) from Castel Porziano in Italy (nearly 10 kilometers to the southeast of Ostia), which probably dates from the first half of the second century, mentions a Livius Dionisius, pater (also without synagogae), who, together with the gerusiarch and an Antonius whose title is broken off, seem to be the three main leaders of the community, at least regarding the grant of a small plot of land to the gerusiarch Gaius Julius Justus for a family tomb. (This interpretation relies on the generally accepted reconstructed version given in the CII.) From this inscription we would have to conclude that the pater had some control over Jewish community property. Although it may be accidental, the pater is listed before the gerusiarch and the other official. Again, pater here could also be a civic title, he being the head of the Jewish community, while the gerusiarch headed the synagogue (the third title probably also being a synagogue title).

CII 739<sup>76</sup> from Smyrna in Asia Minor mentions a patēr tou stematos (sic) who was also an elder and the son of an elder. Whatever father of the tribe (or guild?) might mean is unclear.

From Mantinea in Arcadia comes CII 720<sup>77</sup> with its mention of a father of the people-for-life (patēr laou dia biou).<sup>78</sup> This term makes one think of the entire Jewish community rather than just the synagogue, although at Smyrna these may have been coterminous.

In summary, the epigraphical data alone are insufficient for arriving at an exact definition of this title. Especially problematic is whether to distinguish between mother/father of the synagogue and mother/father without a genitive. However, we can see that wherever the titles occur, the context implies that these people were among the highest functionaries of the synagogue (or community), and that they may well have had control over the common treasury, probably together with other leaders. The inscriptions indicate nothing about caring for the sick, the dying or young unmarried girls. Likewise, there is nothing in the inscriptions themselves to make us think that the titles were purely honorific. Further, the only times patronage is mentioned (Venosa: CII 619b, 619c, 619d--the last two referring to the

same person), the men are called fathers and patrons of the city, thus precluding an identification of those two terms.

#### 4. Possible Non-Jewish Parallels

A brief survey of the title in the Graeco-Roman world may be useful for ascertaining a more exact meaning. However, the range of uses, being quite broad, yields a somewhat confusing picture. We find everything from the title of a Roman emperor, father of his country (pater patriae),<sup>79</sup> to a priestess of Venus being addressed as mother (mater).<sup>80</sup> One also finds mothers and fathers of various sorts of guilds (collegia)<sup>81</sup> and of cultic clubs, especially of oriental cults. While it could be that the mothers and fathers were patrons of the professional guilds<sup>82</sup> the evidence from cultic clubs seems to point to cultic leaders of some sort.<sup>83</sup>

For our question, the cultic clubs will yield the most valuable material for comparison. The most obvious parallel comes from the cult of Mithras, where pater was the highest of the seven grades through which a person could pass. It seems that the lower orders, such as Lions, could have a pater at their head,<sup>84</sup> and that the patres could have a pater over them, who would be called pater patrum/pater pateron, PP in abbreviated form.<sup>85</sup> One is immediately reminded of the pater pateron from Venosa (CII 619b) and of CII 607, 610, and 614, where the abbreviation PP occurs. The Mithraic parallels are a further confirmation that PP equals pater patrum. While we have no evidence that Judaism had anything like the seven grades of Mithraism, the exact concurrence of titles is striking and one should not exclude Mithraic influence here. Pater patrum, even when taken out of the Mithraic context of seven grades, could still signify a high office. Mother and father were also used in other cults, several inscriptions from which make clear that a simple identification of mother/father with patrona/us is inappropriate.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the evidence indicates that mothers and fathers in the professional clubs may have had a different role from those in the cultic clubs. While the evidence from Mithraism must be seen in light of the Mithraic ranking system, which Judaism did not have, it is nevertheless a help for us, for it indicates the leading role a pater played, as a member of the highest rank or as a pater over another rank or as pater over the highest rank, that is as pater patrum.<sup>87</sup>

### Conclusions

There is solid evidence that women bore the title mother of the synagogue, or variations thereof, in inscriptions that may represent a span of six centuries. The six inscriptions discussed are all from Italy. These inscriptions cannot be seen as freaks of history, nor can they be cavalierly dismissed as purely honorific titles. Given the fragmentary nature of our evidence, we should assume that the six women discussed were not the only women to have borne this title. The fifth-century (?) anti-Jewish polemic, De Altercatione Ecclesiae et Synagogae, bears witness that non-Jews were also familiar with this phenomenon. While we cannot exactly define the function of a mother/father of the synagogue, all indications are that it had something to do with the administration of the synagogue. Family ties seem in certain instances to have played a role in a person's selection to this office, so we can assume that most mothers/fathers were members of leading families.



## CHAPTER V

### WOMEN AS PRIESTS

#### A. The Inscriptional Evidence for Female Priests

There exist three ancient Jewish inscriptions in which a woman bears the title hieria/hierissa. They range in age from the first century B.C.E. through possibly the fourth century C.E. and were found in Tell el-Yahudiyyeh in Lower Egypt, in Beth She'arim in Galilee, and in Rome.

#### Tell el-Yahudiyyeh

CII 1514 (SEG 1 [1923] no. 574). Rectangular stele, 45 cm in height, 22 cm in breadth, with an indented space ruled for the inscription, but without architectural decoration.

Μαριν  
2 ἱέρισα χρ-  
ηστή πα-  
4 σίφιλε κ-  
αὶ ἄλυπε κ-  
6 αὶ φιλογίτ-  
ων χαῖρε, ὦ-  
8 ς ἔτων ν'.  
L γ' Καίσαρ Π-  
10 αὔνι γι'.

L. 9: read λυκάβαντος γ' Καίσαρος.

O Marin, priest, good and a friend to all, causing pain to no one and friendly to your neighbors, farewell! (She died at the age of) approximately fifty years, in the third year of Caesar (Augustus), on the thirteenth day of Payni (= June 7, 28 B.C.E.).

C. C. Edgar, who first published the inscription in 1922, thought that IERISA was "the name of Marion's father; whether it is an indeclinable noun or whether this is a genitive in -α I do not know."<sup>1</sup> Edgar thus thought that Marion's father's name was Ierisas or Ierisa. This rather strange interpretation of a not uncommon Greek noun was corrected the following year by Hans Lietzmann, who recognized it to be hieris(s)a, "priestess" (Priesterin).<sup>2</sup> The name Marin is a form of Marion<sup>3</sup> and also occurs in other Greek inscriptions.<sup>4</sup>

This is one of eighty Jewish inscriptions found in a Jewish necropolis in Tell el-Yahudiyyeh.<sup>5</sup> Many of the inscriptions are dated; CII 1466, 1492, 1493, 1498 are also from the time of