

the slave or the minor reading it, but curses be upon him (m. Sukk. 3:10)! The shame of having a member of one of these groups read to an illiterate, Jewish, adult male was apparently great in the eyes of the rabbis.<sup>65</sup> What m. Sukk. 3:10 does show is that it was not unknown in the rabbinic period for women to be capable of reading scripture aloud.

Neither t. Meg. 4.11 nor m. Sukk. 3:10 can be dated more specifically than to the Tannaitic period, which closed around the first quarter of the third century. They are not parallel passages, of course, for t. Meg. refers to women reading the Torah in public and forbids it, while m. Sukk. 3:10 refers to women reading the Hallel in private and grudgingly allows it. The enigma of the inclusion of women in the minyan of the seven cannot be definitively solved with the few hints available to us in our sources, but their inclusion does make it impossible to state that under no circumstances did women publicly read from the Torah in the ancient synagogue. We must simply admit that we do not know if women did or did not read.<sup>66</sup> If we do not know what the situation in Palestine and Babylonia was, how much less do we know of synagogue worship in Egypt or in Rome, where Marin and Gaudentia worshiped.

In conclusion, although the recitation by priestly women of the priestly blessing seems unlikely in light of the explicit "Aaron and his sons" in Num 6:22, it is not impossible that certain communities could have interpreted this to mean "Aaron and his children" and have asked both the priestly women and the priestly men present to bless them. Further, although there is no solid evidence for women having read the Torah publicly in the synagogue service, it cannot be excluded, particularly for the Greek-speaking congregations (about which we know next to nothing), that they did. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that one or more of the three women of our inscriptions were remembered with the title "priest" because their priestly descent had entitled them to certain rights and honors in the synagogue service during their lifetime.

### C. References to Male Priests in Inscriptions and Papyri

Before attempting to come to a decision as to the likelihood of the three possible interpretations of hiercia/hierissa, a brief survey of hiercus in Jewish inscriptions and papyri is necessary. From Rome there are four hiercus inscriptions, all

from the Monteverde catacomb, which Leon dates from the first century B.C.E., through the end of the third century C.E.<sup>67</sup>

CII 346. Marble plaque.

Ἐνθάδε κτε  
2 Ἰουδᾶς ἱερε-  
ους.

L. 1: read κέῖται.

Ll. 2-3: read ἱερέυς.

Here lies Judas, priest.

CII 347. Marble plaque.

Ἐνθάδε  
2 κέῖνται  
Ἰουδᾶς καὶ  
4 Ἰωσῆς ἀρ-  
χοντες  
6 καὶ ἱερεῖς  
καὶ ἀδελφοί.

Here lie Judas and Joses, archons and priests and brothers.

CII 355. Three marble fragments.

[Ἐνθ]άδε κτε Ἰ[...]  
2 [...]ος ἱερεῦ[ς ....]  
[....]καν ἐν[....]  
4 [....]την.<sup>68</sup>

L. 1. read κέῖται.

Here lies J[....], priest [....].

CII 375. Marble plaque engraved on both sides; broken into six fragments.

Ἐνθάδε κτε  
2 Μαρία ἡ τοῦ ἱε-  
ρέως.

L. 1. read κέῖται.

Here lies Maria the (wife? daughter?) of the priest.<sup>69</sup>

It is striking that all of the Roman hierieia/hiereus inscriptions are from the Monteverde catacomb.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, no information about the actual role of the priest can be gleaned from these inscriptions. CII 375 is especially important for the question of whether hierieia/hierissa simply means "wife (or daughter) of a priest." The Maria here, who is the wife or daughter of a priest, is not called hierieia or hierissa, but

rather hē tou hierēōs. This does not mean that hierēia/hierissa in the three inscriptions in question could under no circumstances mean "wife (or daughter) of a priest," but it does show that there was a way in Greek to express such a relationship without this title, which a Greek speaker would have understood as meaning "female cultic functionary." Perhaps the "of the priest" is to distinguish her from another Maria in the community or perhaps it was meant to indicate that she was a non-Aaronide wife of a priest and therefore not a hierissa herself.

There are three occurrences of hierēus at Beth She'arim:

CII 1001 (Schwabe and Lifshitz, Beth She'arim 2. no. 49).

Ἱερέων.  
כהנים.

Of the priests. Priests.

Schwabe and Lifshitz, Beth She'arim 2. no. 180 (part one).

BA  
Ἱερεὺς[ς]  
[Ἱ]αβὲ Ἱερών[υμος].

The priest, Rabbi Hieronymos.

Schwabe and Lifshitz, Beth She'arim 2. no. 181.

Ἰουδᾶς  
Ἱερεὺς.

Judas, priest.

In addition to these, there are two further inscriptions of relevance:

CII 1002 (Schwabe and Lifshitz, Beth She'arim 2.28).<sup>71</sup>

המקום הזה  
של כהנים.

This place belongs to priests.

Schwabe and Lifshitz, Beth She'arim 2. no. 148.

Χωρὸν Βυρτιλῶς.

A priest from Beirut.

CII 1001 is carved on the ceiling above arcosolium 1 of Hall I in Catacomb 1. The "Of the priests. Priests," must mean that arcosolium 1 was set aside for the graves of priests. CII 1002

in Hall I of Catacomb 1 also indicates a separate burial place for priests; Schwabe and Lifshitz are of the opinion that māgôm here must mean "arcosolium," so that this inscription would be a further attestation of burying people of priestly descent separately. It is worthy of note that in none of the Greek inscriptions in arcosolium 1 of CII 1001 does the term "priest" occur (Schwabe and Lifshitz, Beth She'arim 2. nos. 50-53). Perhaps the single inscription CII 1001 was viewed as sufficient emphasis of the priestly ancestry of those buried in that arcosolium, making the use of hierous/hiereia on each individual epitaph unnecessary. This practice of the separate burial of priestly women and men indicates a strong concern for the priesthood even in the third and fourth centuries C.E.<sup>72</sup>

Little can be said about the other inscriptions. In Schwabe and Lifshitz, Beth She'arim 2. no. 148, chōēn is the Greek transliteration of kōhēn.

At Leontopolis in Heliopolis, the site of CII 1514, the Marin inscription, no Jewish hierous inscriptions have been found. In fact, other than the Roman and Beth She'arim inscriptions, few Jewish inscriptions with hierous have been found at all to date.<sup>73</sup> In light of this rather striking distribution--a number of "priest" inscriptions from the Monteverde catacomb in Rome and from the necropolis at Beth She'arim and few elsewhere--it is reasonable to assume that priestly descent was especially emphasized in the communities which buried their dead on these two sites.<sup>74</sup> Whether this special emphasis on the priesthood also implies that priestly women and men in these communities had special roles cannot be said.

The term hierous also occurs several times in Egyptian Jewish papyri (CPJ 120, 121, 139 [twice]), but since each occurrence consists only of a name followed by "priest," they are of little help to us in identifying any priestly functions.

### Conclusions

As unsatisfying as it may be, it must be admitted that it is impossible to know precisely what hieria/hierissa in the three ancient Jewish inscriptions means. Were this term to be the equivalent of the rabbinic kōhenet, no problems of orthodoxy would present themselves, for kōhenet does not signify a cultic or administrative religious functionary. If, on the other hand, it were to imply certain functions in the synagogue or temple worship service, the accepted image of ancient Jewish worship

would have to be altered considerably. In contrast to the synagogue functionaries discussed thus far, the Jewish priesthood has biblical roots and was attached to the temple service, both of which make the question of Jewish male and female priests highly complex.

For all of these difficulties, it must also be emphasized that if the three inscriptions had come from another Graeco-Roman religion, no scholar would have thought of arguing that "priest" does not really mean "priest." The composers of these inscriptions must have been aware that they were employing a term which normally implied a cultic function. Further, as the above survey has shown, it is not as far-fetched to imagine that a woman could have had a cultic function, for example, at the Jewish temple in Leontopolis, or that a woman could have had a synagogue function, such as reading from the Torah, as it might seem at first blush. Until further evidence is found to support one or the other of the interpretations, it seems most prudent to keep the various options open. In light of the evidence surveyed, an absolute statement such as that of Jean Juster, ". . . women were not allowed to be priestesses among the Jews,"<sup>75</sup> does not seem prudent.



## **PART TWO**

### **BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**