

## **PART ONE**

### **THE INSCRIPTIONAL EVIDENCE**



## CHAPTER I

### WOMEN AS HEADS OF SYNAGOGUES

#### A. The Inscriptional Evidence for Women as Heads of Synagogues

In three Greek inscriptions women bear the title archisynagōgos/archisynagōgissa. The formation is a rather curious one. Whereas, for example, archiereus, archigrammateus, archikybernētēs consist of archi- plus the name of the office, archisynagōgos/archisynagōgissa comes from arch- plus an element formed from the institution over which the officer stands, in this case synagōgē. Architriklinos (from triclinium--a dining room with three couches), meaning "head waiter," would be a parallel. Although the title also occurs occasionally in paganism,<sup>1</sup> it is most often Jewish, and it is probable that the pagan examples represent a borrowing from Judaism, rather than vice versa.

Smyrna, Ionia

Cll 741; IGR IV 1452. Marble plaque (36 x 26 x 2 cm); horizontal lines beneath each row of letters (probably 2nd C.).

Ῥουφείνα Ἰουδαία ἀρχι-  
2 συνάγωγος κατεσκεύα-  
σεν τὸ ἐνσώριον τοῖς ἀπε-  
4 λευθέροις καὶ θρέμμασιν  
μηδενὸς ἄλλου ἐξουσίαν ἔ-  
6 χοντος θάψαι τινά. εἰ δέ τις τολ-  
μήσει, δώσει τῷ ἱερωτάτῳ τα-  
8 μείῳ (δηνάρια) ἅπ καὶ τῷ ἔθνει τῶν Ἰου-  
δαίων (δηνάρια) ᾠ. Ταύτης τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς  
10 τὸ ἀντίγραφον ἀποκεῖται  
εἰς τὸ ἀρχεῖον.

L.4: read θρέμμασιν.

L.5: read ἄλλου.

Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue, built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house. No one else has the right to bury anyone (here). If someone should dare to do, he or she will pay 1500 denars to the sacred treasury and 1000 denars to the Jewish people. A copy of this inscription has been placed in the (public) archives.

The history of the interpretation of the title archi-synagōgos in this inscription can serve as an exemplification of the way in which scholars have dealt with all of the following inscriptions. Salomon Reinach, who first published the inscription, solves the dilemma of a woman archisynagōgos in a novel way.<sup>2</sup> He first reviews how Emil Schürer deals with the problem of mothers of the synagogue, namely by declaring both mothers and fathers of the synagogue to be honorary office holders.<sup>3</sup> What can be done now that a woman head of the synagogue has been discovered, he asks, for this goes against Schürer's establishment of the title archisynagōgos as functional. Reinach solves the crass contradiction between genuine function and woman by positing two stages in the development of the title. Since we know that at the early stage heads of the synagogue had a genuine function, we cannot, he reasons, depart from the accepted understanding. Later, however, archisynagōgos became a purely honorific title, one which passed from father to son.<sup>4</sup> It took on a sense which was "more vague and more general," analogous to the title father or mother of the synagogue. Thus it is in the category of head of the synagogue honoris causa that Rufina is to be seen.

M. Weinberg's solution to the dilemma is that Rufina was the wife of an archisynagōgos, "for women have never held an office in a Jewish community, and certainly not a synagogue office."<sup>5</sup> Emil Schürer's is simple: "Rufina herself bears the title ἀρχισυναγωγος, which in the case of a woman is, of course, just a title."<sup>6</sup> Jean Juster, after describing how difficult it was to fill the office of archisynagōgos, what authority and knowledge were required, notes in closing that "the title of archisynagōgos could also be accorded honorifically, even to women and children."<sup>7</sup> Samuel Krauss adopts the wife solution: "Concerning the women, it can certainly not mean that they were bestowed with the dignity of a head of the synagogue, for the synagogue did not allow women such honors; it is rather the wives of heads of the synagogue who are meant."<sup>8</sup> Salo Wittmayer Baron writes, "The aforementioned woman archisynagogus of Smyrna, if not merely the wife of an official, was very likely a lady whom the congregation wished to honor, but to whom it could hardly have entrusted the actual charge of an office."<sup>9</sup> Jean-Baptiste Frey, querying whether the title could be honorific or whether Rufina was simply the wife of a head of the synagogue, notes, "It seems difficult to admit that she actually exercised the functions of a head of the synagogue."<sup>10</sup>



It does seem difficult for these scholars to admit that a woman could have exercised an official function in the ancient synagogue. Are there any who can imagine it? The epigraphist Louis Robert is a notable exception in the history of the interpretation of this inscription. In the context of discussing a Jewish woman who bears the title archegissa, which will be discussed below, Robert notes, "In Jewish communities women bore titles," and lists the Rufina inscription and others.<sup>11</sup> Robert does not make any further attempts to define the titles or to discuss the functions associated with them, but he does see all of these examples as part of the same phenomenon and not as something exceptional. More recently, A. Thomas Kraabel, Dorothy Irvin and Shaye Cohen have also suggested that the title archisynagogos in this inscription denotes an actual function.<sup>12</sup>

Are the arguments of those who consider the title honorific convincing? As to the view that Rufina was merely the wife of an archisynagogos, it is striking that in the legal matter at hand, namely that of guaranteeing a burial place for her freed slaves and the exposed infants raised in her household, she acts in her own name. Thus we do not even know whether she was married or not. The suggestion that the title archisynagogos was honorific in the later period will be discussed below. The primary argument, however, is that a woman, qua woman, could not have held such a post. This will be discussed after all of the evidence has been surveyed.

#### Excursus: What is an Honorific Title?

In order to ascertain whether the titles discussed in this thesis were or were not honorific titles, the meaning of the term "honorific title" must first be clarified. The sense in which this term has been used by scholars dealing with the Jewish inscriptions in question is that a title which normally designates a function (e.g., archisynagogos) is here merely meant to honor a person. In the case of pater/mater synagogae, one decided that the title itself implies no function, but is per se an honorific title.

This is by no means the way in which "honorific title" is normally used. For example, Friedrich Preisigke devotes a section to Ehrentitel in his dictionary of the papyri.<sup>13</sup> The honorific titles listed fall into two categories: adjectives, often in the superlative (e.g., clarissimus, lamprotatos), and nouns, often corresponding to a titular adjective (e.g., spectabilitas, lamprotēs). A man of senatorial rank, for example,

could bear the title vir clarissimus (abbreviated c.v.),<sup>14</sup> his wife being clarissima femina (abbreviated c.f.).<sup>15</sup> While the title does not necessarily pass on to the children, there are examples of clarissimus iuvenis (c.i.)<sup>16</sup> for a young man, and clarissima puella (c.p.)<sup>17</sup> and clarissimus puer (c.p.)<sup>18</sup> for a young girl and boy respectively. Thus, a "distinguished" (clarissimus/a) person was not simply any distinguished person, but rather a person of senatorial rank. The senatorial rank certainly implied certain duties and functions, but these were not expressed with this title, and clarissimus/a can properly be termed an "honorific title." Quite unlike the title archi-synagōgos, clarissimus/a never denoted an official function; it was per se honorific. Note also that while a wife does receive the title of her husband, it is not the case that his title was functional while hers was purely honorific. The titles of both were honorific. Finally, while the wife did receive the title clarissima femina through her husband, she apparently could continue to bear it even if no longer married to the vir clarissimus, but to another not of senatorial rank.<sup>19</sup> This, then is the standard use of "honorific title," and it will become clear that our case has little to do with it.

What of the wife of a religious functionary receiving his title? Could this not be seen as an honorific title? For example, the wife of a flamen dialis is called flaminica,<sup>20</sup> but this was not simply a title, for a flaminica had certain cultic functions and appeared at her husband's side wearing official cultic garb. Like her husband, the flaminica wore priestly garb; on her head she wore the red veil, the flammeum, and a purple scarf, the rica, to which was attached the pomegranate branch, the arbor felix. Her mantle was also purple in color and her tunic was made of wool. She wore shoes made of the leather of an animal which had been slaughtered, but not of an animal which had died a natural death. Like her husband, she was not allowed to touch a corpse, nor did she have to swear oaths. Further, the flaminica had the duty to offer sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> According to Plutarch, she was the priestess of Juno,<sup>22</sup> but this may be incorrect information on Plutarch's part. Certain flaminicae were assigned to the cult of deceased women of the imperial family.<sup>23</sup> Thus it is clear that having attained a title through marriage did not necessarily imply that no duties accompanied that title or that it was not an official one.

The example of the flaminica is not meant to be a parallel to the Jewish materials. Indeed, the flaminicae and flamines

bear little resemblance to the Jewish functionaries, and most of the Jewish materials are later. The point of this example is not to compare the two groups, but rather to call into question the widespread and otherwise unsubstantiated notion that if a wife bore the title of her husband, then this meant that her title was purely honorific. Therefore, even if one were to conclude that the Jewish women bearing titles were in fact simply the wives of synagogue officials, this would not in itself prove that they had no function.

Before speaking of the honorific nature of these women's titles, one must first establish that honorific titles even existed in the ancient synagogue. The assumption is that titles normally functional were honorific when bestowed upon women, which is similar to suggesting the existence of a church with functioning male bishops and honorary female bishops. There is no internal reason to assume that any of the titles of synagogue organization were honorific.

One often cites the child office-holders as a parallel to the women (e.g., CII 120: archōn nēpios; 402: mellarchōn), thereby overlooking that a grown woman has little in common with a two year old boy. Rather than attesting to the existence of honorific titles, such inscriptions can be seen either as evidence for the hereditary nature of some offices in certain synagogues or for the role of family ties in the selection process. Judging by the word, a mellarchōn became a functioning archōn upon reaching adulthood.<sup>24</sup> Such a case in no way parallels adult women bearing titles.

Is it nevertheless possible, and even probable, that the women title-bearers received the titles on account of their husbands? A major difficulty with this hypothesis is that in all of the inscriptions in which women bear titles, husbands are mentioned only twice (CII 166, 619d). Even if it were to have been the case that the women in these two inscriptions acquired their titles on account of their husbands, which is not a necessary consequence (why should two Jewish leaders not be married to each other?), it does not follow that no functions were attached to the title. Nor does it follow that all of the other women acquired their titles in this way. The Jewish women's titles have been compared to German women being addressed as "Frau Dr." when their husbands hold a doctorate,<sup>25</sup> but even this custom does not prove the honorific nature of the titles. Many German women are called "Frau Dr." because they have written a doctoral dissertation. Further, if it had been a common custom

for Jewish women to assume the titles of their husbands, why does this not find expression in the inscriptions? Numerous inscriptions mention male title-bearers and their wives, but with the two exceptions noted above, the wives are not honored with titles (CII 22, 216, 247, 265, 333, 391, 416, 457, 511, 532, 553, 681, 733b, 739, 770, 788, 949, 1145, 1531, etc.) and the situation is the same with the daughters of male title-bearers (CII 102, 106, 147, 172, 291, 510, 535, 537, 568, 610, 645, 1202, etc.).

In sum, we do not have evidence that the custom of wives taking on their husbands' titles even existed in ancient Judaism, but even if it did exist, and even if one or two of our inscriptions were to reflect that custom, this would not prove that the wives in question had no functions attached to their titles, nor would it prove that all Jewish women acquired their titles in this way. Further, there is no indication in the ancient sources that any of the titles of synagogue leadership were honorific at any period.

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From the Rufina inscription it is clear that Rufina was a wealthy woman who possessed the funds to build a special tomb for her freed slaves and thremmata (= Latin alumni), i.e., those children who had been exposed as infants by their parents and taken by her to be raised either as slaves or as adoptive children. Since this is a tomb for the freed slaves, to whom Rufina would have been a patron, and not for other members of her family, it is likely that the thremmata mentioned here were slaves and not adoptive children. This grave, the persons to be buried in it, the marble plaque with its official legalistic language, and the high fine to be imposed all point to the wealth and influence of this woman. We know nothing about her marital status, but it is noteworthy that no husband is mentioned; she has drawn up the deed in her own name.

This type of inscription, that is, a document stating for whom a particular tomb is meant, forbidding others to bury anyone in it and imposing a fine, usually to be paid to a public institution, is quite typical for Jewish,<sup>26</sup> as well as for non-Jewish,<sup>27</sup> inscriptions from Asia Minor. The "sacred treasury" (hierōtaton tameion) is most likely the imperial treasury, the sacrum aerarium.<sup>28</sup> The fines insure that Jewish and Roman officials maintain their interest in protecting the tomb.

What do we know about the Jewish community in which Rufina was active? There are only two other Jewish inscriptions from Smyrna which mention office holders. CII 739 is a donative inscription made by one Irenopoios, who was an elder and father of the tribe, and the son of an elder;<sup>29</sup> CII 740 is a further donative inscription, probably from the same synagogue.<sup>30</sup> Another inscription not included in the CII names a Roman citizen, Lucius Lollius Justus, who was a scribe of the Jewish community in Smyrna.<sup>31</sup> Further inscriptions from Smyrna include a magical amulet (CII 743),<sup>32</sup> and a 45-line inscription from the time of Hadrian (117-138), listing donations to the city, one line of which refers to former Judeans who had donated 10,000 drachmas.<sup>33</sup> Of the titles in these inscriptions, elder and scribe are fairly common elsewhere, and father of the tribe seems to be analogous to father of the synagogue. That both father and son bear the title elder in CII 739 could mean that in Smyrna titles could pass from father to son, whether automatically or not is another question.

The picture of Rufina the Jewess which emerges from this and related inscriptions is that of a wealthy, independent woman looking after her business affairs according to the customs of the time. Her Roman name and her wealth could indicate that she was a member of a leading family of Smyrna. There is no indication that she was married. She bore the title archisynagōgos, which, if her name had been Rufinus, would have entitled her to being listed in modern secondary literature as a leader of the Jewish community in ancient Smyrna.

#### Kastelli Kissamou, Crete

CII 731c.<sup>34</sup> White marble sepulchral plaque (45 x 30 x 2.8 cm; height of letters: 1.5-3.0 cm; distance between lines: 0.5-1.5cm; 4th/5th C.).

Σοφία Γορτυνί-  
2 α, πρεσβυτέρα  
κὲ ἀρχισυναγώ-  
4 γισσα Κισάμου ἐν-  
θα. Μνήμη δικέας  
6 ἐς αἰῶνα. Ἀμήν.

L. 3: read καί.  
L. 5: read δικαίας.  
L. 6: read ἐς αἰῶνα.

Sophia of Gortyn, elder and head of the synagogue of Kisamos (lies) here. The memory of the righteous one for ever.  
Amen.

A. C. Bandy dated the inscription to the first or second century. Jeanne and Louis Robert, however, are of the opinion that it is from the fourth or fifth century.<sup>35</sup> Given the script, especially the rounded sigma and the nearly cursive omega and mu, the later date seems much more plausible.

Unlike the Rufina inscription, this one gives us no hints as to the background of Sophia. Here, again, no husband is mentioned, so one cannot assume that she was married.

This is the only Jewish inscription from Kastelli Kissamou and one of only three from Crete. The other two Cretan inscriptions do not supply us with any information which could help us to reconstruct the organizational structure of Cretan synagogues.<sup>36</sup>

It is noteworthy that Sophia of Gortyn was both elder and head of the synagogue. She bears the feminine forms of both titles (presbytera and archisynagōgissa). In Greek, both hē archisynagōgos as in the previous inscription, and hē archi-synagōgissa are possible.<sup>37</sup> The title will be discussed below in the context of other women elders.

As this inscription was first published in 1963, the older authors cited in connection with Rufina did not express their opinion as to the meaning of archisynagōgissa. A. C. Bandy, however, did carry forward the tradition by suggesting that, "The term πρεσβυτέρα implies that the deceased either was the wife of a πρεσβύτερος or she received this as an honorary title, since it was often bestowed on women. The word ἀρχισυναγωγισσα implies either that her husband was, in addition, an ἀρχισυνάγωγος or that she received this as a second honorary title, since this also was given to women."<sup>38</sup> Jeanne and Louis Robert do not suggest such a thing. Rather they compare the title with other Jewish women's titles: archēgissa, hierisa, archisynagōgos, and presbytera.<sup>39</sup>

Anyone reading the inscription can see that there is no internal reason for believing that Sophia of Gortyn received the titles through her husband. If her husband was the source of her titles, why is she not called Sophia, the wife of X? The image of Sophia of Gortyn emerging from the inscription, albeit in much more vague outlines than that of Rufina, is of a very important figure in the Jewish community of Kisamos. She was not only an elder, but also head of the synagogue. There is no evidence that she was married.

## Myndos, Caria

**CII 756.**<sup>40</sup> Donative inscription on chancel screen post of white marble (ca. 1 m x 21 cm x 19 cm); decorative grooves on the inscription side, forming a sort of "i"; topped by a multi-tiered pedestal (at least 4th/5th C.).

[Ἀπὸ Θεοπέμπτῃς  
2 [ἀρ]χισυν(αγῶγος) καὶ τοῦ υἱ-  
οῦ αὐτῆς Εὐσεβίου.

L. 2: read καὶ.

[From Theopempte, head of  
the synagogue, and her son Eusebios.

Charles Diehl, whom Théodore Reinach consulted as to the date of the inscription, was inclined towards a sixth-century dating, which Reinach accepted.<sup>41</sup> The main reason for the late dating is the use of the siglum ϣ for ου, which in the rounded form of our inscription points to a late date. The rounded sigma and epsilon would further substantiate a later dating, but a century or two earlier than the sixth century would also be possible.

The inscription is carved into the top of a white marble quadrangular post. Reinach was not certain whether the inscription was a funerary or donative inscription. Noticing the groove on the left side of the post, he suggested that it might be for a tenon leading into a lattice-work, which would in turn lead to another post like this one, this being a donative inscription for the structure.<sup>42</sup> Recently discovered parallels confirm that this is close to correct. Our post is most likely the support for a synagogue chancel screen, such as those found in Tell Rehov<sup>43</sup> and Khirbet Susiya<sup>44</sup> in Israel. Zeev Yeivin's inscription no. 19 from Khirbet Susiya is a chancel screen post with a donative inscription in exactly the same place as the Theopempte inscription, that is, at the top of the quadrangular portion of the post. The screens, which fitted in between two posts, were flat marble slabs decorated with geometric, floral, and/or Jewish motifs, some of them also containing an inscription.

This arrangement of post, screen, post, screen was placed as a divider at the front of a basilica separating what in Christian churches would be the altar from the nave. In this way, the apse could be set off from the rest of the prayer hall. What we should imagine, then, is a chancel screen post which would have been placed at the front of the synagogue prayer hall.

The inscription names the head of the synagogue, Theopempte, and her son, Eusebios, as donors of the post, and perhaps also of the screen which would have fitted into it.

Of Theopempte, one can at least say that she possessed sufficient funds to make this donation together with her son, whose age we do not know. Again, no husband is mentioned, but the presence of the son indicates that she was or had been married. Her son bears no title, which shows that if his father had a title, it did not automatically pass on to the son.

Since this is the only known Jewish inscription from Myndos,<sup>45</sup> we can say nothing about the organization of the Jewish community there.

The scholarly opinion as to what archisynagōgos could mean here is quite the same as for Rufina. Théodore Reinach, the brother of Salomon Reinach, who had published the Rufina inscription eighteen years earlier, adopted his brother's theory that the title archisynagōgos in this period had come to have a "purely honorific sense."<sup>46</sup> The Theopempte inscription, to the extent that it was known, was also meant in the evaluations listed above for the Rufina inscription. The interpretation of one scholar should, however, be especially noted. Erwin Goodenough translates the inscription in a peculiar way:

. . . of Theopemptes, archisynagogus,  
and of his (sic) son Eusebius.<sup>47</sup>

How Goodenough could translate "of Theopemptes," when the genitive form is already Theopemptes, and especially how he could translate autēs as "his" is not easy to comprehend, but then this is not the first time in the history of scholarship that a woman has been transformed into a man.

Theopempte, then, was a donor to the synagogue which recognized her as a head of the synagogue. She was the mother of a son. Judging by the inscription, the funds for the donation were either hers, if the son was still a child, or hers and her son's, if he was an adult. The donation, the formulation of the inscription and the title betray not a hint of dependency. The figure which emerges is an independent, at least moderately well-to-do, leader of the synagogue in Myndos--a woman.

In order to ascertain the exact functions of these women synagogue heads, a survey of the literary and inscriptional evidence for their male counterparts is necessary.



## B. The Meaning of "Head of the Synagogue"

### 1. Literary References to the Title

In comparison with other titles of synagogue office, we have at our disposal considerable literary evidence for the title head of the synagogue. The sources, Jewish, Christian and pagan, include references to both Palestinian and Diaspora synagogues.<sup>48</sup>

For the first century, some of the best evidence is found in the New Testament. Mark 5:22,35,36,38 and the parallel Luke 8:49 mention an archisynagōgos, Jairos by name, whose daughter is healed by Jesus. Interesting for our question is the parallel to Mark 5:22, Luke 8:41, where instead of archisynagōgos, Luke writes archōn tēs synagōgēs. That Luke considers the two to be synonymous is shown by his use of archisynagōgos in 8:49. In Matt 9:18,23 we read neither archōn tēs synagōgēs nor archisynagōgos but rather simply archōn. Does this mean that all three titles are synonymous?

Mention should be made here of a textual variant to Acts 14:2 found in the Western text (D, partially supported by syr<sup>hmg</sup> and cop<sup>G67</sup>). Instead of, "The unbelieving Jews stirred up and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against the brothers" (i.e., Paul and Barnabas) the Western text has, "The heads of the synagogue of the Jews and the archons of the synagogue (syr<sup>hmg</sup> omits "of the synagogue," which would give the general meaning of "rulers," possibly identifying them as the rulers of Iconium) stirred up for themselves persecution against the righteous."<sup>49</sup> Important here is the distinction between "heads of the synagogue" and "archons of the synagogue." One should keep in mind, however, that this is a later textual variant, which cannot be used as first-century evidence of this distinction.<sup>50</sup> Further, this textual addition was made by a Christian, who may have had very little knowledge of a Jewish distinction between heads of the synagogue and archons, which would leave us to explain the seeming identification of head of the synagogue, archon of the synagogue and archon found in a synoptic comparison of the Jairos story, as well as within Luke himself (Lk 8:41 vs. 8:49). One could assume that either the identification found in the Jairos story or the distinction made in the Acts textual variant reflects actual Jewish practice or one could assume that the authors in question were not particularly familiar with Jewish synagogue organization and used the titles loosely. This could well be the case with Luke and the author of the textual addition

to Acts 14:2. It is difficult, however, to assume that Matthew, who was writing for Jewish-Christians, would have been unfamiliar with the organizational structure of the synagogue.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the problem can only be solved by assuming that titular practice varied as to geography and time. At any rate, since two Italian inscriptions (CII 265 from Rome: *Stafulus, archōn* and *archi-synagōgos*; CII 553 from Capua: *Alfius Juda, archōn, archisynagōgos*)<sup>52</sup> give further attestation of a distinction between the two offices, it is probably safe to assume they were usually distinct.

A second question raised by the Jairos passage is whether there was more than one synagogue head in each synagogue (Mark 5:22: "one of the heads of the synagogue, Jairos by name"), but the meaning could simply be that Jairos was one of the class of heads of the synagogue rather than that several synagogue heads served in one synagogue.

Luke 13:10-17 is more instructive as to one of the functions of head of the synagogue. When Jesus healed a woman at the synagogue on the sabbath, the head of the synagogue, "indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, said to the people, 'There are six days in which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath day'" (Luke 13:14). From this passage it would seem that the head of the synagogue was responsible for keeping the congregation faithful to the Torah.

The Acts of the Apostles attests to the office of head of the synagogue in first-century Diaspora Judaism. When Paul and Barnabas come to Antioch of Pisidia and attend the synagogue service on the sabbath, the heads of the synagogue invite them to give a word of exhortation to the people immediately following the reading of the law and the prophets (Acts 13:15). The plural "heads of the synagogue" is not insignificant here, for the only reasonable interpretation is that this synagogue possessed not just one head of the synagogue, but several. Further, their inviting Paul and Barnabas to give the sermon indicates a leadership role in the planning and organizing of the service, as well as the role of representative of the congregation vis-à-vis the visitors from abroad.

In Acts 18:1-17, which describes Paul's missionary activity in Corinth, we also find more than one head of the synagogue (Acts 18:8: Crispus, who had become a believer in Jesus; Acts 18:17: Sosthenes, who had not)<sup>53</sup> in a single community, although from the passage it is not clear that they served in the same

synagogue. It seems probable that Sosthenes, who in Acts 18:17 is said to have been beaten by the crowd before the judgment seat of Gallio, is the leader of the group of Jews who had attacked Paul and dragged him before the proconsul Gallio with the complaint that Paul was "persuading people to worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13). If Sosthenes was indeed the leader of this delegation, this would point to a function of leadership similar to the one we saw in Luke 13:10-17, where the head of the synagogue warned against transgressing the Torah by breaking the sabbath. Sosthenes' involvement indicates a sense of responsibility for keeping his people faithful to the law, as interpreted by him, as well as a representative role over against the Roman proconsul.

As for rabbinic sources on the first century, one must consider a Mishnaic passage, Yoma 7:1 (parallels: m. Soṭa 7:7,8). The context is the reading from the Torah on Yom Kippur (in m. Soṭa the septennial Sukkot reading of the Torah):

חזן הכנסת נוטל ספר תורה ונוחננו לראש הכנסת,  
ויראש הכנסת נוחננו לסגן, והסגן נוחננו לכהן גדול.  
וכהן גדול עומד ומקבל וקורא עומד.

The sexton of the synagogue takes the Torah scroll and gives it to the head of the synagogue (or: of the assembly), and the head of the synagogue gives it to the adjutant high priest, and the adjutant high priest gives it to the high priest. The high priest stands and receives and reads it standing.<sup>54</sup>

Due to the etymological similarity between r'ōš hakkēneset and archisynagōgos, the identification between the two is likely. Since it is unclear what would be the purpose of a synagogue on the temple mount, and since Josephus<sup>55</sup> and the Mishnaic tractate Middot do not mention such a synagogue in their descriptions of the temple, Frowald Hüttenmeister<sup>56</sup> and others go against the older interpretation by doubting that such a synagogue existed. Sydney Hoenig translates r'ōš hakkēneset as "head of the assembly" and hazzān as "overseer of the assembly." He believes that they were "Pharisaic leaders of the Anshé Maamad who were stationed in the Temple as the lay participants alongside the Sadducean officiants."<sup>57</sup> If such were to be the case, this would be a rather different meaning of head of the synagogue than is attested elsewhere, i.e., the synagogue head as leader of an individual synagogue. An alternative proposal which would not presuppose the existence of a synagogue on the temple

mount, would be that the hazzan and the r'ōs hakkēneset mentioned here were synagogue functionaries in one of the many synagogues of Jerusalem and were selected for the special honor of passing the Torah scroll to the high priest in the Yom Kippur (and Sukkot) services. The number of persons in the chain of passing certainly seems more than absolutely necessary and must therefore have something to do with honor. According to this interpretation, the hazzan and the r'ōs hakkēneset would be the two representatives of synagogue officials (or of the laity, as Hoenig suggests) in the festival service.

The only r'ōs bēt hakkēneset known to us by name from rabbinic literature is Shagbion (šGBIWN, variant Shavion, šBIWN), who was r'ōs bēt hakkēneset (note the alternative form of the title)<sup>58</sup> in Akhziv in the time of Rabban Gamliel (II), i.e., in the second half of the first century.<sup>59</sup>

The later rabbinic evidence is no less scattered than the material discussed thus far. One is once again reminded of how much the rabbinic authorities differed from their Christian neighbors, the latter producing numerous and complex church orders, while the former displayed little interest in defining the duties of the respective synagogue officers. After the Mishnaic passages discussed above, the earliest rabbinic evidence is found in t. Meg. 4.21 (Zuck. 227): "The head of the synagogue should not read (from the scripture) until others have told him that there is no one."<sup>60</sup> Could this imply that the head of the synagogue was responsible for asking others to read, but did not read himself (or herself)?<sup>61</sup> This would fit in well with Acts 13:15, where the heads of the synagogue ask Paul and Barnabas to preach (rather than preaching themselves).

In b. Pesah 49b (top) a list has been put together for the young man seeking a wife. It forms a sort of catalogue of highly respected positions in Judaism:

חנו רבנן: לעולם ימכור אדם כל מה שיש לו  
 וישא בת חלמיד חכם. לא מצא בת חלמיד חכם  
 ישא בת גדולי הדור. לא מצא בת גדולי הדור  
 ישא בת ראשי כנסיות, לא מצא בת ראשי כנסיות  
 ישא בת גבאי צדקה. לא מצא בת גבאי צדקה  
 ישא בת מלמדי חינוך. ולא ישא בת עמי הארץ,  
 מפני שהן שקץ, ונשותיהן שרץ, ועל בנוחיהן  
 הוא אומע "ארור שכב עם כל בהמה".

Our rabbis taught: Let a man always sell all he has and marry the daughter of a scholar. If he does not find the daughter of a scholar, let him marry the daughter of [one of] the great men of the generation. If he does not find the daughter of [one of] the great men of the generation, let him marry the daughter of a head of synagogues. If he does not

find the daughter of a head of synagogues, let him marry the daughter of a charity treasurer. If he does not find the daughter of a charity treasurer, let him marry the daughter of an elementary school teacher, but let him not marry the daughter of an 'am ha-aretz because they are detestable and their wives are vermin, and of their daughters it is said, "Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast" (Deut 27:21).<sup>62</sup>

This passage shows which positions the rabbis considered to be the highest; head of the synagogue is listed third, after scholar and great men of the generation (probably a title of civic leadership) and before charity treasurer and children's teacher. This view is from a particular perspective, and it is therefore easy to understand why scholar would rank highest. One must be cautious about using this list as an objective presentation of how all Jews would have ranked professions and offices. Given this particular perspective, slot number three in the list may well imply that the head of the synagogue was normally a person of some learning. The whole thrust of the advice given here is not to marry the daughter of an 'am ha-aretz, i.e., the contrast is between ignorance of the law and knowledge of it. This confirms the image of the head of the synagogue which has been emerging from the literary passages referred to thus far.

A further sign of the honor in which the rabbis held the head of the synagogue is the directive in a baraita to drink a glass of wine in honor of the head of the synagogue at a funeral ceremony (y. Ber. 6a.28-29).<sup>63</sup>

Several fourth-century laws preserved in the Theodosian Code further attest that the head of the synagogue was one of the main synagogue officials. Cod. Theod. 16.8.4 reads:

Idem A. hierois et archisynagogis et patribus synagogarum et ceteris, qui in eodem loco deservunt. Hierois et archisynagogos et patres synagogarum et ceteros, qui synagogis deservunt, ab omni corporali munere liberos esse praecipimus. Dat. kal. dec. Constant(ino)p(oli) Basso et Ablavio cons.<sup>64</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 public 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>65</sup>

The legal assumption is that since these officials are already fulfilling a munus, they should be liberated from the public munera corporalia.<sup>66</sup> Cod. Theod. 16.8.13 from the year 397 reaffirms certain privileges for synagogue heads and other Jewish officials, among which are the exemption from the forced public service of decurions and the right to live according to their own laws.

Idem AA. Caesario p(raefecto) p(raetori)o. Iudaei sint obstricti caerimoniis suis: nos interea in conservandis eorum privilegiis veteres imitemur, quorum sanctionibus definitum est, ut privilegia his, qui inlustrium patriarcharum dicioni subiecti sunt, archisynagogis patriarchisque ac presbyteris ceterisque, qui in eius religionis sacramento versantur, nutu nostri numinis perseverent ea, quae venerandae Christianae legis primis clericis sanctimonia deferuntur. Id enim et divi principes Constantinus et Constantius, Valentinianus et Valens divino arbitrio decreverunt. Sint igitur etiam a curialibus muneribus alieni pareantque legibus suis. Dat. kal. ivl. Caesario et Attico cons.<sup>67</sup>

The same Augustuses to Caesarius, Praetorian Prefect. Jews shall be bound by their own ritual. Meanwhile, in preserving their privileges, We shall imitate the ancients by whose sanctions it has been determined that privileges shall be preserved for those who are subject to the rule of the Illustrious Patriarchs, for the heads of the synagogues, the patriarchs, and the elders, and all the rest who are occupied in the ceremonial of that religion, namely those privileges according to the consent of Our Imperial Divinity, which by virtue of their holy office are conferred on the chief clergy of the venerable Christian religion. The foregoing, indeed, was decreed by the divine imperial authority of the sainted Emperors Constantine and Constantius, Valentinian and Valens. Such Jews shall therefore be exempt from the compulsory public services of decurions and shall obey their own laws.

Given on the kalends of July in the year of the consulship of Caesarius and Atticus (July 1, 397).<sup>68</sup>

While these two laws do not give us actual details of any of the concrete functions of synagogue heads, Cod. Theod. 16.8.14 from the year 399, under the emperor Honorius, does:

Idem AA. Messalae p(raefecto) p(raetori)o. Superstitionis indignae est, ut archisynagogi sive presbyteri Iudaeorum vel quos ipsi apostolos vocant, qui ad exigendum aurum adque argentum a patriarcha certo tempore diriguntur, a singulis synagogis exacta summam adque susceptam ad eundem reportent. Qua de re omne, quidquid considerata temporis ratione confidimus esse collectum, fideliter ad nostrum dirigatur aerarium: de cetero autem nihil praedicto decernimus esse mittendum. Noverint igitur populi Iudaeorum removisse nos depraedationis huiusmodi functionem. Quod si qui ab illo depopulatore Iudaeorum ad hoc officium exactionis fuerint directi, iudicibus offerantur, ita ut tamquam in legum nostrarum violatores sententia proferatur. Dat. iii id. april. Med(iolano) Theodoro v. d. cons.<sup>69</sup>

The same Augustuses to Messala, Praetorian Prefect. It is characteristic of an unworthy superstition that the heads of the synagogues or the elders of the Jews or those whom they themselves call apostles, who are dispatched by the patriarch at a certain time to collect gold and silver, should bring back to the patriarch the sum which has been exacted and collected from each of the synagogues. Wherefore, everything that We are confident has been collected, taking into consideration the period of time, shall be faithfully dispatched to Our treasury. For the future, moreover, We decree that nothing shall be sent to the aforesaid patriarch. The people of the Jews shall know, therefore, that We have abolished the practice of such depredation. But if any persons should be sent on such a mission of collection by that despoiler of the Jews, they shall be brought before the judges, in order that a sentence may be pronounced against them as violators of Our laws.

Given on the third day before the ides of April at Milan in the year of the consulship of the Most Noble Theodorus (April 11, 399).<sup>70</sup>

The practice presupposed here is a continuation of the ancient practice of each male Jew annually contributing a half-shekel to support the temple in Jerusalem. After the destruction of the temple, a similar practice grew in its stead, with the money going to support the patriarch in Palestine. From this description, one could assume that the synagogue heads and presbyters collect money in their individual synagogues and then turn it over to the apostles who have been sent by the patriarch to collect the money and to bring it back to him. One could also interpret the passage to mean that some of the money was brought directly by synagogue heads and elders, while some of it was brought by the apostles sent out for this purpose.<sup>71</sup>

The value of these three laws is that they give an outsider's view, i.e., that of the lawgiver, of the internal leadership structure of the synagogue. In the eye of the lawgiver, the head of the synagogue was one of the main, if not the main, synagogue functionaries.

Several patristic sources make reference to synagogue heads. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 137, Justin Martyr (died ca. 165) delivers the following exhortation to Jews:

Συμφάμενοι οὖν μὴ λοιδορεῖτε ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, μηδὲ  
Φαρισαίοις πειθόμενοι διδασκάλοις τὸν βασιλέα τοῦ Ἰσρα-  
ὴλ ἐπισκώπητέ ποτε, ὅποῦα διδάσκουσιν οἱ ἀρχισυνάγωγοι  
ὕμῶν, μετὰ τὴν προσευχήν.<sup>72</sup>

Do not agree to abuse the Son of God, nor follow the Pharisees as teachers in jesting at the King of Israel, as your synagogue heads teach you, according to the prayer.

While the polemical nature of this passage must serve as a warning not to accept it at face value, the image of head of the synagogue as spiritual and intellectual leader in no way contradicts what we have seen up to this point; it rather confirms it.

Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315-403), in his discussion of the Jewish-Christian Ebionites, writes:

Αναγκάζουσι δὲ, καὶ παρ' ἡλικίαν ἐγκαμίζουσι τοὺς νέους, ἐξ ἐπιτροπῆς δῆθεν τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς διδασκάλων. Πρεσβυτέρους γὰρ οὗτοι ἔχουσι καὶ ἀρχισυναγώγους. Συναγωγὴν δὲ οὗτοι καλοῦσι τὴν εἰαυτῶν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ οὐχὶ ἐκκλησίαν, τῷ Χριστῷ δὲ ὀνόματι μόνον σεμνύνονται.

Their young men, having attained the marriageable age, are given to marriage under coercion, on account of a decision of their teachers, for they have elders and synagogue heads, and they call their church a synagogue and not a church and honor Christ in name only.<sup>73</sup>

It seems that the Jewish-Christians described here maintained the traditional synagogue organizational structure. While we do not know to what extent Epiphanius actually had direct contact with Jewish-Christians, there seems no reason to doubt that Jewish-Christians would have maintained Jewish organizational structures. If this bit of information is not a reflection of the fourth century, then it may have come down to Epiphanius from his sources and reflect an earlier period. What is interesting here is that synagogue heads and elders are classified as teachers.

Palladius, in his Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom, probably written around 408 in Syene in Egypt, states that the ("corrupt and falsely named") patriarch of the Jews changes yearly, as do the synagogue heads, in order to gain wealth, for the buying and selling of the priesthood is a Jewish (and Egyptian) custom.<sup>74</sup> The context of this statement is a discussion of six bishops who were accused of having attained their office by the payment of money, whereby the Christian rejection of the practice is contrasted with the Jewish tolerance of it. Given this polemical purpose, one should be more sceptical of taking this remark at face value than is Jean Juster, who notes, "This text proves that the archisynagogue was nominated for a term."<sup>75</sup> Palladius himself does not state that he is personally familiar with this Jewish practice, but rather employs the vague introductory formula "it is said" (*phasi*).

Several further Christian sources do not seem reliable enough to warrant a detailed discussion. The Acts of Pilate,<sup>76</sup> which mentions heads of the synagogue throughout, seems to have drawn upon a sort of catalogue of known Jewish titles (synagogue



heads, Levites, elders, priests, high priests) and combined them at random to create scenes in which Jewish leaders debated and deliberated in council meetings. Further, the passages in Ambrose<sup>77</sup> and Jerome<sup>78</sup> cited by Juster to support his theory that synagogue heads had to have a knowledge of medicine, do not seem particularly convincing to me.

Pagan authors were also familiar with the title. In Flavius Vopiscus' Life of Saturninus 8, Scriptores Historiae Augustae 3.398-399 is preserved a letter from the emperor Hadrian (117-138) to his brother-in-law Servianus. Among the various negative comments about Egypt we read:

Illic qui Serapem colunt Christiani sunt, et devoti sunt Serapi qui se Christi episcopos dicunt. Nemo illic archisynagogus Iudaeorum, nemo Samarites, nemo Christianorum presbyter non mathematicus, non haruspex, non aliptes.

Those who worship Serapis are in fact Christians, and those who call themselves bishops of Christ are, in fact, devotees of Serapis. There is no head of the Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian elder, who is not an astrologer, a soothsayer, or an anointer.<sup>79</sup>

Of interest here is the parallelization between Christian bishop, Christian elder and Jewish synagogue head.<sup>80</sup> This is a further attestation that the title was well known.

The emperor Alexander Severus (222-235) was called the "Syrian archisynagogus"<sup>81</sup> by his opponents, most likely because he was friendly to the Jewish people. This simply serves to underscore that "head of the synagogue" was the official Jewish title most widely known in the ancient world.

## 2. Inscriptional References to the Title

Well over thirty Greek and Latin inscriptions making mention of synagogue heads are known to modern scholarship.<sup>82</sup> Of these, three make reference to women synagogue heads. The geographical spread is large: Italy,<sup>83</sup> Greece,<sup>84</sup> Macedonia,<sup>85</sup> Moesia,<sup>86</sup> Asia Minor,<sup>87</sup> Cyprus,<sup>88</sup> Syria,<sup>89</sup> Palestine,<sup>90</sup> and Africa.<sup>91</sup> The chronological span is also considerable, ranging from before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.<sup>92</sup> until well into the Byzantine period.

What can we learn from these inscriptions about the function of the synagogue head? Taking note of the fact that a number of synagogue heads are mentioned as donating portions of the synagogue or of restoring the synagogue,<sup>93</sup> it is tempting to conclude that the head of the synagogue was in charge of maintaining the

physical plant of the synagogue. Unfortunately, this argument falls in the face of the fact that bearers of other titles, as well as bearers of no titles, are also listed as donors in numerous inscriptions. Furthermore, the very nature of epigraphical material is such that we must expect building activity to be mentioned fairly frequently. One memorialized donations in inscriptions. Bookkeeping, organizing the religious service, administering the guest house and ritual bath, exhorting the congregation to follow the commandments or any of the other functions which must have been performed by synagogue officials did not merit public inscriptions. Mention of these is more likely to occur in literature, if at all.

If the inscriptions cannot help us to define accurately the functions of the head of the synagogue, they can nevertheless provide us with useful information. For example, on the basis of inscriptional evidence, one must conclude that the head of the synagogue was distinct from the archon. In CII 265<sup>94</sup> and 553,<sup>95</sup> one person holds both titles, indicating that they cannot be synonymous. Further, CII 766<sup>96</sup> lists a head of the synagogue-for-life, a head of the synagogue and an archon, as if these were different offices.

Of special interest is the Theodotos inscription (CII 1404; Lifshitz, *Donateurs*, no. 79)<sup>97</sup> which was found on Mount Ophel in Jerusalem and dates from before the destruction of the temple:

Θ[ε]όδοτος Ούετιήνου, ἱερεὺς καὶ  
 2 ἀ[ρ]χισυνάγωγος, υἱὸς ἀρχισυν[αγώ]-  
 γ[ο]υ, υἱωνὸς ἀρχισυν[α]γώγου, ᾠκο-  
 4 δόμησε τὴν συναγωγὴν εἰς ἀν[άγν]ω-  
 σ[ιν] νόμου καὶ εἰς [δ]ιδασχ[ή]ν ἐντολῶν, καὶ  
 6 τ[ὸ]ν ξενῶνα, κα[ὶ] τὰ δώματα καὶ τὰ χρη-  
 σ[τ]ήρια τῶν ὑδάτων εἰς κατάλυμα τοῦ-  
 8 ς [χ]ρήζουσιν ἀπὸ τῆς ξέ[ν]ης, ᾧν ἐθεμε-  
 λ[ί]ωσαν οἱ πατέρες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πρε-  
 10 σ[β]ύτεροι καὶ Σιμωνίδης.

Theodotos, son of Vettenos, priest and head of the synagogue, son of a head of the synagogue, grandson of a head of the synagogue, built the synagogue for the reading of the law and the teaching of the commandments, and the hostel and the side rooms and the water facilities, as lodging for those from abroad who need (it). His fathers and the elders and Simonides founded it (i.e., the synagogue).

From this we get a vivid picture of the types of activities occurring in a synagogue complex. In addition to the reading of scripture and the study of the commandments, we read of a guest house for visitors from abroad, which was probably especially necessary in Jerusalem, as well as water facilities, most likely

for ritual purposes. Each of these items required administration, and while the active participation of the congregation must be presupposed, it is nevertheless reasonable to assume that synagogue officers had a special responsibility in the administration of all these aspects of synagogue life. The officers mentioned in this inscription are synagogue heads and elders. This does not mean that this congregation had no other officers, but it does imply a sort of council which formed the founding body.<sup>98</sup>

It is tempting to conclude from the fact that Theodotos' father and grandfather were also synagogue heads that the office was hereditary. CII 587,<sup>99</sup> which speaks of the child synagogue head Kallistos, who died at the age of three years and three months, would serve to strengthen this hypothesis, as would CII 584,<sup>100</sup> which speaks of Joseph, head of the synagogue, son of Joseph, head of the synagogue. It may be that the office was hereditary in the cases mentioned, but if we assume that it was hereditary everywhere, then there is no way of explaining the phrase "head-for-life of the synagogue" (ho dia biou archi-synagōgos), which occurs in CII 744<sup>101</sup> and 766,<sup>102</sup> for that implies that not every head of the synagogue was one for life.<sup>103</sup> Also of importance is Lifshitz, Donateurs no. 85<sup>104</sup> which, according to Lifshitz's reconstruction, mentions a person who had been head of the synagogue five times, which obviously implies temporary terms of office. If most synagogue heads served for a term only, then they must have been elected or appointed, for a title bestowed by inheritance would surely be for life. A further factor which makes it unlikely that the title archisynagōgos was generally an inherited one is that the title which the son bore was not always that of his father. In CII 504, for example, the son is a gerusiarch, while the father is an archisynagōgos.<sup>105</sup> Here the office of archisynagōgos could not have been hereditary. At most one could imagine that we are dealing with the custom of honoring the son of an office-bearer by appointing or electing him to an office, be it that of his father or another.<sup>106</sup>

Part of the general difficulty in evaluating these hints that the office may have been hereditary, as well as the literary evidence for the patriarch's having appointed the synagogue heads annually, which was discussed above, is the temptation to take one piece of evidence as applying to all places and for the entire period in question. Rather than taking the Theodotos inscription (CII 1404) and the two inscriptions from Venosa

(CII 584 and 587) as proof that the office of synagogue head was hereditary, it seems more reasonable to assume that these indicate the special honor in which the son of a synagogue head was held, this honor being expressed in his being (automatically?) appointed or elected to an office, sometimes the same as his father and sometimes not. This reverence could even extend to infants (e.g., CII 587); the boy received the title of the office he would fill when he came of age.

CII 681,<sup>107</sup> 766<sup>108</sup> and 804<sup>109</sup> provide us with a further warning not to assume that the only way to attain the title of synagogue head was by inheritance. In each of these inscriptions the son is a head of the synagogue, and the father bears no title. Thus we see that, although the modern scholar would like very much to have a clear answer as to how a synagogue head was selected, there is no one solution which fits all the literary and epigraphical evidence. It is best to assume that there was no unified practice in this regard. Probably some were appointed by a council or an individual, some were elected, and some inherited the office. Some persons seem to have been synagogue heads for life and others for a period of time.

One inscription deserves special mention because of the constellation of office holders it presents to us. CII 803 (Lifshitz, *Donateurs* 38)<sup>110</sup> is dated to the year 391 and was found, along with many other mosaic inscriptions, in the floor of a synagogue ruin in Apamea in Syria. It reads:

Ἐπὶ τῶν τιμιωτάτων ἀρχισυνα[γῶ]-  
 2 γων Εὐσεβίου καὶ Νεμέου καὶ Φινέου  
 καὶ Θεοδώρου γερουσιάρχου καὶ τῶν  
 4 τιμιωτάτων πρεσβυτέρων Εἰσακίου  
 καὶ Σαούλου καὶ λοιπῶν, Ἰλάσιος, ἀρχισυνά-  
 6 γωγος Ἀντιοχέων, ἐποίησεν τὴν ἴσοδον τοῦ  
 ψηφίου πό(δας) ρν', ἔτους γψ' Εὐδνέου ζ'. Εὐλογία πᾶσι.

L. 4: read τιμιωτάτων.

L. 6: read εἴσοδον.

At the time of the most illustrious heads of the synagogue Eusebios, Nemios and Phineos, and under the gerusiarch Theodoros, and the most illustrious elders Eisakios and Saulos and the others, Ilasios, head of the synagogue of the Antiochenes, made the entrance of the mosaic, 150 feet, in the year 703, in the seventh month of Audyneos. Blessing on all.

Three offices are mentioned: head of the synagogue, gerusiarch and elder. If the order of offices implies order of importance, then head of the synagogue was the highest office in this synagogue. The fact that Eusebios, Nemios and Phineos were all

serving as heads of the synagogue in the year 391 is an important piece of evidence for the debate as to whether more than one archisynagōgos could serve simultaneously.<sup>111</sup> Probably Theodoros the gerusiarch presided over the council of the elders,<sup>112</sup> who seem to be too numerous to mention.

How Ilasios fits into this picture is unclear. His title, archisynagōgos of the Antiochenes, surely cannot imply that he was the sole synagogue head in Antioch, as Jean-Baptiste Frey imagines.<sup>113</sup> In such a large city as Antioch, which had a considerable Jewish population, there must certainly have been many synagogue heads.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps Ilasios served as synagogue head for a group of people from Antioch who had moved to Apamea and become part of the community there.

### 3. Reconstruction of the Office of Head of the Synagogue

The reader with a sensitivity for chronology, geography, genre and religious tradition will doubtlessly be overwhelmed by the variety of material cited, and cited side by side, as if Moesia were Jerusalem and the first century were the fifth. This colorful mixture of quotations of the friends and enemies of the ancient synagogue heads should at the very least remind us of how little we know of the office they held. The dream of every historian of religion is to trace a development, to differentiate, to set the late fourth-century Apamean synagogue head in sharp relief against the first-century Roman one. It is not for lack of desire that this will not be done. It is for lack of evidence.

If there is not enough evidence to trace a development, there is also not so little evidence as to evoke general despair of knowing anything. The evidence clearly permits us to say, for example, that "head of the synagogue" was one of the best, if not the best, known titles of synagogue office. One could call Alexander Severus the "Syrian archisynagogus" and the meaning was clear. I would propose the following reconstruction of what seems to have been the leading office in the ancient synagogue.

#### Was there more than one synagogue head in each synagogue?

The evidence (Mark 5:22; Acts 13:15; CII 766, 803; possibly Acts 18:8,17) suggests that more than one synagogue head could serve in a synagogue at a time. No ancient source limits the number to one.<sup>115</sup>

How was a head of the synagogue selected?

There seems to have been more than one method of selection. The two inscriptions mentioning synagogue heads who were sons of synagogue heads (CII 584, 1404) and the one mentioning an infant head of the synagogue (CII 587) suggest that the office was hereditary. The two inscriptions mentioning a head-for-life of the synagogue (CII 766, 744), as well as the one which possibly speaks of a person having been head of the synagogue five times (Lifshitz, Donateurs no. 85), suggest that not all held the office for life and that some were selected in a way other than by inheritance. Although election is not mentioned in connection with synagogue heads, it should not be excluded as a possibility. If there is a kernel of truth to the note in Palladius (Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom 15) about the patriarch's appointing synagogue heads, then this could be seen in connection with Cod. Theod. 16.8.15 with its mention of "persons whom the patriarchs have placed in authority over others." This would mean that among those officials whom the patriarch appointed were included some heads of the synagogue.

What were the functions of the head of the synagogue?

If the synagogue was for "the reading of the law and the teaching of the commandments" (CII 1404), then it is logical to assume that the synagogue head was responsible in a special way for seeing that this was done. Our sources confirm this. Given the thrust of the baraita in b. Pesah 49b, it seems that the head of the synagogue was a person learned in the law. It follows that a major function of the head of the synagogue was the exhortation and spiritual direction of the congregation (Lk 13:10-17; possibly Acts 18:12-17), which included teaching (Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 137; Epiphanius, Panarion 30.18.2). It was the synagogue heads who invited members of the congregation to preach (Acts 13:15); apparently they did not themselves read from scripture unless no one else was able (t. Meg. 4.21). M. Yoma 7:1 and m. Soṭa 7:7-8 report on a special liturgical function accorded to one synagogue (or assembly?) head during a holiday service. The synagogue heads, together with the elders, collected money from their congregations to be sent to the patriarch (Cod. Theod. 16.8.14,17). While responsibility for erecting new synagogues and restoring old ones was not limited to the head of the synagogue, synagogue

heads were among those who felt especially responsible for the building and restoration of synagogues, drawing upon their own funds when necessary (CII 722, 744, 756, 766, 803, 804, 1404, etc.<sup>116</sup>). It is possible that synagogue heads were often members of leading families who were financially able to perform this service.

Using the analogy of Diaspora Jewish leaders today, the ancient Diaspora head of the synagogue was probably both a leader for the congregation and representative of the congregation vis-à-vis non-Jewish neighbors and Roman authorities. (Possibly Acts 18:12-17 is to be seen in this light.) As in the Jewish Diaspora today, the civic and religious functions were probably seldom sharply distinguished.

What was the relationship between the head of the synagogue and other synagogue officials?

The head of the synagogue seems to have been the leading functionary in the ancient synagogue. In inscriptions, wherever synagogue heads are mentioned, they are mentioned first in the list (CII 766, 803). In the Theodosian Code the order varies (cf. Cod. Theod. 16.8.4, 13, 14). In m. Yoma 7:1 and m. Soṭa 7:7-8 the head of the synagogue occurs before the sexton and after the high priest and the adjutant high priest; in other words, here too, the head of the synagogue is the first of the synagogue officials named, (if the reference is to a synagogue official). In the baraita in b. Pesah. 49b the head of the synagogue does not occur first in the list, but rather after scholar and great ones of the generation and before charity treasurer and teacher of children, but then this is not a list of synagogue officials.

That the head of the synagogue was the main synagogue functionary is further supported by the fact that the title is the one chosen by Alexander Severus's enemies to mock his friendship with the Jews and is the one used in Hadrian's letter to Servianus to single out the typical Jewish official for mockery.

Was the head of the synagogue identical with the archon?

It seems that in most cases archisynagōgos must be distinguished from archōn (CII 265, 553, 766; the Western text of Acts 14:2). The identification between the two implicit in the synoptic comparison of the Jairos story (Matt 9:18, 23; Mark 5:22, 35, 36, 38; Luke 8:41, 49) could be a loose use of terminology,

a reflection of a time or place in which the two terms were interchangeable, or a mistake.

#### 4. The Role of Women Synagogue Heads

Given the evidence for women heads of the synagogue, and using the proposed reconstruction of the office of synagogue head as a base, what can one say about the role these women might have had? Or did they even have a role? Perhaps the title was purely honorific after all?

The two arguments adduced in favor of the title's being honorific are:

1. The women received the title from their husbands (M. Weinberg, S. Krauss, S. W. Baron, J.-B. Frey, A. C. Bandy);
2. In the later period the title was honorific for both women and men (S. Reinach, Th. Reinach);
3. In the case of women, the title must be honorific (E. Schürer,<sup>117</sup> J. Juster).

Erwin Goodenough's translation, which makes Theopempte a man, will not be discussed here.

Concerning the wife thesis, one searches in vain for the husbands in question. In the three inscriptions with women synagogue heads, no husbands are mentioned. Further, Rufina and Theopempte give the impression of a certain autonomy (control of one's own funds, household and business affairs); if they were married, the marriage seems to have allowed for a certain independence on the part of the women. The fact that Theopempte's son Eusebios does not bear a title shows that, if his father had one, he did not inherit it. This, of course, does not preclude the possibility that Theopempte could have received the title from her husband, but it does call into question the connection between women's titles and children's titles made by modern scholars, the implication being that the former are the wives of, the latter the sons of, synagogue officials. Finally, in the three inscriptions where wives of synagogue heads are named (CII 265, 553, 744), they do not in fact bear the title of their husbands. In other words, there is no case where both husband and wife are called synagogue heads. Where women are called synagogue heads, we have no evidence that they were even married at the time of the inscription.

No less questionable is the thesis of the brothers Reinach that in the later period the title was honorific for both women and men. From the survey of the evidence for synagogue heads it



is evident that no ancient sources allude to this possibility. Indeed, as discussed above, we cannot assume that such honorific titles even existed in the ancient synagogue. Further, it is rather unclear what is meant by "late." Since Salomon Reinach dates the Rufina inscription to not before the third century, one wonders how he would deal, for example, with the fourth-century references in the Theodosian Code to heads of the synagogue (16.8.4 [331]; 16.8.13 [397]; 16.8.14 [399]) or with CII 803 from Apamea in Syria dated to 391 and mentioning synagogue heads. These can certainly not be said to be honorific titles, and yet they probably post-date the Rufina inscription. One has the suspicion that the theory of the later development into an honorific title was created expressly for the purpose of interpreting the Rufina inscription and then came in quite handy for the Theopempte inscription when it was discovered some years later. In any case, there is no support for this theory in the literary and inscriptional evidence surveyed.

As for the argument that the titles must be honorific by virtue of the femininity of the holders, it is difficult to discuss this in a few sentences. In a sense it is much more honest than the two theories just presented, for the author states his basic assumption clearly and without embellishment. It forces the discussion to where it should be, namely at the question of whether it is inconceivable that a woman was a leader in the ancient synagogue. We are in possession of three ancient inscriptions in which women bear the title head of the synagogue. It is our task to interpret these in the context of other ancient references to women officers of the synagogue. If the presupposition is that a woman was not capable of fulfilling the office of synagogue head or that the ancient synagogue considered all women, *qua* women, incapable or unfit, then one must produce a plausible explanation for the existence of these three inscriptions. They themselves call into question certain presuppositions about the history of Jewish women.

It is true that there are certain indications that women's lives were restricted in a number of ways in ancient Judaism, but a word of caution is in order here. Modern scholarship does not possess the Jewish literature which would be the proper companion to our inscriptions, namely Graeco-Jewish literature from the early Byzantine period from Asia Minor or Crete or even any Graeco-Jewish literature from this period or even any Jewish literature from Asia Minor or Crete.

Rather than trying to fit these inscriptions into our pre-conceived notions of what women were (and are) and of what Judaism was, would it not be more reasonable to take these inscriptions as a challenge to our pre-conceptions, as traces of a Judaism of which we know very little? It is, of course, not sufficient simply to make counter-assertions to the statement that archisynagogos was a purely honorific title when borne by women. It is necessary to produce a counter-reconstruction which is more convincing than the view that these women did nothing.

I propose the following reconstruction. Women synagogue heads, like their male counterparts, were active in administration and exhortation. They may have worked especially with women, although we should not assume that they worked only with women. Perhaps they looked after the financial affairs of the synagogue, administering it as Rufina administered her large household; perhaps they exhorted their congregations, reminding them to keep the sabbath as had the synagogue head in Luke 13:14 before them. We must assume that they had a knowledge of the Torah in order to be able to teach and exhort others in it.

Rufina, Sophia and Theopempte could have worked in a team of two or three synagogue heads, for we have seen that the number was not necessarily restricted to one. Or perhaps they served alone. A community like Myndos could well have selected Theopempte, a woman who had donated to the synagogue, possibly a widow at this time, as its sole archisynagogos. And perhaps the Jewish congregation in Smyrna considered itself fortunate to have such an able administrator as Rufina as its sole synagogue head. Whether they served alone or with others we cannot say; either is possible.

How did these women come to this high office? Rufina, for example, was wealthy. Perhaps she came from a leading and learned Jewish family, and the congregation honored her with this office much as they would have honored her brother. Or possibly she was the daughter of a leading Roman family, as the name suggests, and the congregation wished to honor a high-born newcomer to Judaism with a responsibility worthy of her descent. Theopempte also had certain funds at her disposal. Had she shown such an active interest in seeing the new synagogue built that the congregation rewarded her with this office? Sophia of Gortyn, both elder and head of the synagogue, must have been very actively involved in the affairs of the synagogue. Was it her long years of work that convinced even the most skeptical that a woman was capable of filling that office? Family ties, long

years of active involvement, largesse--these have often played a role in attaining various offices and seem as likely in the case of women as of men. Whether they were appointed or elected we do not know.

The final key to the interpretation of these three inscriptions, as well as of those which follow, lies in accepting this reconstruction as historically plausible, or in refuting it as historically impossible.



## CHAPTER II

### WOMAN AS LEADER

#### A. The Inscriptional Evidence for a Woman as Leader

One of the more recent additions to our knowledge of women leaders in ancient Judaism is the Peristeria inscription, first published in 1937, from the area of Thebes in Phthiotis in Thessaly.

Thebes in Phthiotis (Thessaly)

CII 696b.<sup>1</sup> A kioniskos (also called columella: a small column, flat on top and without a capital, used as a gravestone<sup>2</sup>) with the symbol of the seven-branched menorah.

Μνημα  
2 Περιστερίας  
ἀρχη-  
4 γίσσης.

Ll. 3-4: read ἀρχηγίσσης (genitive of ἀρχηγίσσα).

Tomb of Peristeria, leader.

G. Sotirou, who discovered the inscription, took peristeria to be a common noun (cf. peristera, "pigeon," "dove"), and Archēgisis to be the name of the deceased.<sup>3</sup> Louis Robert<sup>4</sup> suggested the interpretation given above, on the basis that a common noun peristeria is inexplicable here. Robert explains the proper name Peristeria as one of the Greek personal names formed from the names of animals, comparing it to Peristera (from peristera).<sup>5</sup> The title archēgissa he explains as the feminine equivalent of the term archēgos<sup>6</sup> which occurs on a Jewish gold medallion now at the Jewish Museum in London.

CII 731g.

Ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς Ἰ-  
2 ακωβ ἀρχηγου  
πινωνᾶ.

L. 2: read ἀρχηγου.

In accordance with a vow of Jacob, president, the setter of pearls.

Robert points out that although archēgos is not attested elsewhere as a Jewish title, the Latin principalis, which occurs in an inscription from Moesia, could be a parallel:

CII 681.

Ioses arcisna  
2 et principales  
filius Maximini  
4 Pannoni sibi et  
Qyriae coiugi  
6 sui vivo suo me-  
moria dedica-  
vit.

L. 1: read arcisynagogus (ἀρχισυνάγωγος).  
L. 2: read principalis.  
L. 5: read coniugi.  
Ll. 6-7: read suae vivo se memoriam.<sup>7</sup>

Ioses, head of the synagogue and leader, son of Maximinus Pannonus, dedicated this monument, while still alive, for his wife and himself.

Thus, Robert considers the title archēgissa to be the female equivalent of archēgos, which occurs only once in the Jewish inscriptions, but has its Latin equivalent in principalis. Robert is in no way disturbed by an ancient Jewish woman bearing an official title; on the contrary, he refers to other Jewish women bearing titles in inscriptions.

Robert's suggestion that Peristeria is a proper noun and archēgissa a title is convincing. In order to interpret archēgissa in the context of ancient Judaism, a study of possible meanings is required. Since archēgissa is, to my knowledge, a hapax legomenon, the search for its meaning must concentrate on archēgos (m. and f.), the word from which it was derived.

The only other Jewish inscription found on this site, CII 696a, a stele with a seven-branched menorah, a lulav and a dove, does not provide further information about the organizational structure of the congregation:

Μνημα Σαου-  
2 λ καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ  
γαμετῆς Ἀννας.

The tomb of Saul and his wife Anna.

## B. Archēgos in Ancient Literature and Inscriptions

Archēgos appears both as an adjective, meaning "beginning," "originating," "primary," "leading," "chief," and as a noun,

meaning "founder" (as of a family), "ancestral heroine," "prince," "chief," "first cause," "originator" or "originating power."<sup>8</sup> An archēgos could be a deity, and thus Plato reports that the Egyptians said that Neith was the founder of Sais in Egypt, while the Greeks said it was Athena,<sup>9</sup> and the daughters of Ascopus (Salamis, Aegina, Thebe, Sinope, etc.) were considered to be the ancestral heroines of cities.<sup>10</sup> Archēgos could also be the human ancestor of a tribe or family.<sup>11</sup> The word can also mean "leader," and it is in this sense that Eusebius calls his opponent Marcellus "leader of the godless heretics,"<sup>12</sup> and an inscription from Dijon, France refers to a man named Chyndonax as archēgos of the priests (CIG 6798).

In the LXX, archēgos translates a number of Hebrew words, but most often r'ōš, in the sense of military, political or clan leader (Exod 6:14; Num 13:3; 14:4; 25:4; Deut 33:21; Judg 9:44; 1 Chr 5:24; 8:28; 12:21; Neh 7:70-71; 11:16-17; Lam 2:10). Archēgos as a translation of qāšîn, "chief," "ruler" (Judg 11:6, 11; Isa 3:6,7) and šar, "prince," "official," "governor" (Judg 5:15; 1 Chr 26:26; Neh 2:9; Isa 30:4) is also relatively frequent. Josephus uses archēgos five times, three times in the sense "originator," "author" (of crimes: Ant. 7.9.3§207; of trouble: Ant. 20.6.3§136; of legal violations: Ag. Ap. 1.270), and twice in the sense of "ancestor," "founder of our race" (Ag. Ap. 1.71,130). Philo uses archēgos in the meaning "leader," "chief" (Leg. alleg. 3.175 [Num 14:4; Hebrew: r'ōš]; De somn. 1.89 [Num 25:4; Hebrew: r'ōš hā'ām]); much more common in Philonic usage is the related archēgetēs, which refers to Adam as the founder of the human race (De opific. 79,136,142), Seth, "the head of our race" (De poster. 42), God, as the originator of the universe (De ebriet. 42), the twelve sons of Jacob (De fuga 73), etc.

In the NT Christ is the archēgos, i.e., originator of life (Acts 3:15), of salvation (Heb 2:10), and of faith (Heb 12:2), as well as archēgos kai sōtēr, i.e., leader and savior (Acts 5:31).

This survey has yielded three basic meanings of archēgos:

1. ancestral hero or heroine, founder;
2. originator;
3. leader, chief.

#### C. The Meaning of archēgissa/archēgos in Jewish Inscriptions

For the two archēgissa/archēgos inscriptions (CII 696b, 731g), the second meaning cannot apply, for one must be the originator of something, and in neither inscription is there a

genitive to indicate that something. The third meaning, "leader," "chief" is a plausible one, although it is not possible to define it more accurately in relation to other Jewish offices. If, as Robert has suggested,<sup>13</sup> archēgos is the equivalent of principalis (CII 681), then archēgos is not a substitute for archisynagōgos, because the Ioses of CII 681 bears both titles: arcisina(gogus) et principal(i)s. However, since Jewish titles differed from locality to locality, archēgissa/archēgos may in fact have been the equivalent of archisynagōgissa/archisynagōgos in Peristeria's (CII 696b) or in Jacob's (CII 731g) community. Since there is no further indication either in the inscriptions themselves or in Jewish literature, one cannot decide definitively whether archēgissa/archēgos means leader of the Jewish civic community or of the worship congregation, but this distinction would apply only in areas where these two were not the same. Perhaps the Jewish community in Thebes in Phthiotis was so small that this distinction is irrelevant.

Given the background of the term archēgos, however, another meaning also presents itself. We have seen that archēgos in the sense of "ancestor," "founder" was widespread among both Jews and non-Jews, whereby the reference was nearly always to an ancestral figure or to a deity. Could it be that archēgissa/archēgos meant "founder of the Jewish community" in a particular city? One must admit that this would be a somewhat new meaning for this term, a further development of the meaning "ancestral founder" of a city, a clan, a race, but in a time in which Judaism was still a missionary religion, it is possible that the founder of a community could have been a revered figure, and by this title, have been compared to the ancestral founders of cities, families, etc. In the writings of the Jewish-Christian Paul, one finds traces of the reverence in which he, as the founder of a Christian community or as the one who had baptized a particular individual, was held or expected to be held (e.g., 1 Thess 2:9-12; 4:1-2; Phlm 10).<sup>14</sup>

While the idea that a woman might have founded a Jewish community might seem absurd at first glance, seen in the light of ancient Jewish proselytism, it is not implausible. Scholars have recognized for some time that women proselytes are mentioned relatively frequently in ancient sources.<sup>15</sup> If numbers of women were converting to Judaism, it is not impossible to imagine that one woman could have been the first in her community to convert and could have been active in persuading others to do so as well. Proselytizing activity by women, if it indeed existed, would have been similar to the work of such Jewish-Christian women as



Priscilla and Junia, both of whom seem to have been active missionaries. Priscilla,<sup>16</sup> who together with her husband Aquila had a house church (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19), was a teacher in the early church (Acts 18:26--notice the synagogue context) and an important co-worker of Paul (Acts 18:2-3,18; Rom 16:3-5; 1 Cor 16:19; see also 2 Tim 4:19). The Jewish-Christian woman Junia (Rom 16:7) bore the title apostolos,<sup>17</sup> which implied active missionary work. (See esp. 1 Cor 9.)<sup>18</sup> Another important parallel, although non-Jewish, would be Thekla, probably the most well known of early Christian women missionaries.<sup>19</sup>

If archēgissa were to have meant "founder," then we would have to imagine the same type of leadership in Peristeria that we encounter in Priscilla or Junia. Thekla would be a parallel case as to proselytizing activity, although she is described as being more counter-cultural than a Jewish archēgissa may have been.

In sum, while it is impossible to ascertain more accurately what functions the title archēgissa/archēgos implied, other passages in which the term occurs indicate that "leader" is an accurate translation. "Founder," which emerged as a second possible meaning is an intriguing possibility which must remain uncertain.



## CHAPTER III

### WOMEN AS ELDERS

#### A. The Inscriptional Evidence for Women as Elders

Six ancient Greek inscriptions have been found in which women bear the title "elder" (presbytera/presbyteressa = presbyterissa). In addition to these, there exists one Greek inscription in which a woman is called PRESBYTNS (sic), most likely presbytis.

Kastelli Kissamou, Crete

CII 731c.<sup>1</sup> White marble sepulchral plaque (45 x 30 x 2.8 cm; height of letters: 1.5-3 cm; distance between lines: .5-1.5 cm; 4th/5th C.).

Σοφία Γορτυνί-  
2 α, πρεσβυτέρα  
κὲ ἀρχισυναγώ-  
4 γισσα Κισάμου ἔν-  
θα. Μνήμη δικέας  
6 ἐς ἔωνα. Ἀμήν.

L. 3: read καί.  
L. 5: read δικαίας.  
L. 6: read εἰς αἰῶνα.

Sophia of Gortyn, elder and head of the synagogue of Kisamos (lies) here. The memory of the righteous one for ever. Amen.

This inscription was discussed above in the context of heads of the synagogue.<sup>2</sup> Important for the interpretation of the title presbytera is its parallelization with archisynagōgissa, which makes it unlikely that presbytera is simply a term meant to distinguish Sophia the elder from a Sophia the younger.

Bizye, Thrace

CII 692.<sup>3</sup> Grey marble stele (width: .23 m; broken off below the lettering; height of letters: 2.5 cm.; no earlier than 4th/5th C.); above the inscription a seven branched menorah and an ethrog.

#### Ethrog Menorah

Μνή(μ-) σι  
2 α Πρεβεα[ς]  
τῆς πρεσ-

4 Βυτέρας τ-  
 ἥς κεκοιμημ-  
 6 ἐνης.

- L. 1: ligature between Μ, Ν, and Η.  
 L. 3: ligature between Η and Ξ.  
 L. 5: ligature between Η and Μ.  
 Ll. 5-6: read κεκοιμημένης (The υ for οι is one reason for the late dating.)

Tomb of Rebeka, the elder, who has fallen asleep.

Whereas the original editors of the inscription, R. M. Dawkins and F. W. Hasluck, see a connection between presbytera here and archisynagōgos in the Rufina inscription from Smyrna (CII 741), Jean-Baptiste Frey argues that "elder" here either simply distinguishes this Rebeka from another, younger Rebeka or that it designates the wife of an elder, that is, of a member of the local gerousia.<sup>4</sup> Samuel Krauss also suggests that the title "elder" when applied to women could mean that the woman was the wife of an elder.<sup>5</sup> Jean Juster believes that "elder" when applied to women was probably a "simple title" accorded to women who were "pious and venerated in the community."<sup>6</sup> We have seen this kind of argumentation in the context of the other titles borne by women. It is therefore not necessary to quote further secondary authors on this point; the line of argumentation is nearly always the same.

This is the only Jewish inscription from Bizye, so one can say nothing about the Jewish community there or its form of organization. As the inscription itself gives no further information about Rebeka, nothing of her background or status can be known.

#### Venosa, Apulia

Three Greek inscriptions found in a Jewish catacomb in Venosa (ancient Venusia) in Apulia, which is in southern Italy, mention women elders. They probably date from the third to the sixth centuries.

CII 581; CIL IX 6226<sup>7</sup>.

Τάφος  
 2 Βερωνικε-  
 νις πρεσβιτέ-  
 4 ρες ἐτ φιλια  
 Ἰωσέτις.

Ll. 3-4: read: πρεσβυτέρας.

L. 4: ετ φιλια = Latin et filia (should be et filiae).

Tomb of Beronikene,<sup>8</sup> elder and daughter of Ioses.

Note that Beronikene's father bears no title and that she is described as the daughter of her father rather than as the wife of a given man.

CII 590; CIL IX 6230<sup>9</sup>. Painted in red letters on the stucco covering of the wall of the grave.

Τάφος  
2 Μαννινες πρεσ-  
βιτέρες τιγάτερ Δον-  
4 γινι πατέρις ίνγόνιν  
Φαοστινι πατέρις  
6 έτ[ω]ν λη'.

L. 1: read Τάφος.

L. 2: read Μαννινης.

Ll. 2-3: read πρεσβυτέρας θυγάτηρ.

Ll. 3-4: Δονγινι = Latin Longini (gen. of Longinus).

L. 4: read έγγόνιον.

Tomb of Mannine,<sup>10</sup> elder, daughter of Longinus, father, granddaughter of Faustinus, father, (aged) 38 years.

Mannine was 38 years old at her death; she is the only woman elder whose age we know. The title patēr, borne by the father and the grandfather, is known from other Venosan inscriptions (CII 599, 611 twice, 612, 613 twice, 619c, 619d).<sup>11</sup> The constellation of Mannine, presbytera, Longinus, patēr, and Faustinus, patēr, makes it unlikely that Mannine's title simply means "aged woman" (which would also be precluded by her age at death) or is meant to distinguish her from a younger Mannine. Perhaps Mannine's appointment or election was not unrelated to her family background. The inscription shows, however, that her father's title had not passed down automatically to her, for her title is not the same as her father's.

CII 597; CIL IX 6209.<sup>12</sup> Painted in red letters on the stucco covering of the wall of the grave.

Τάφος Φα-  
2 οστινες πρεσ-  
βιτερες. διλψ

Ll. 1-3: read Φαοστινης πρεσβυτέρας.

Tomb of Faustina. Peace.

This name, sometimes spelled slightly differently, is quite common at Venosa (CII 569, 578, 590, 591, 593, 598, 599, 600, 601, 611 three times, 612, 613 twice, 619d), and a good number of these persons are title-bearers (CII 590, 599, 600, 611 twice, 612, 613 twice, 619d). Perhaps Faustina's title was not unrelated to her family background.

It is striking that three of the five extant presbytera inscriptions are from Venosa. CII 606 (Alexsanra, pateressa) and CII 619d (Faustina, mētēr), which are discussed below, are also from Venosa, giving a total of five women title-bearers from one town. Although the total number of Venosan inscriptions is considerable (CII 569-619; 619a-619e), and although the number five is certainly not high enough to speak of "equal access" for women and men, the concentration of these five inscriptions in one catacomb is striking enough to suggest that the Venosan community may have had a tradition of granting women official functions.

The masculine presbyteros occurs only once at Venosa (CII 595).<sup>13</sup> The inscription is a strange mixture of Hebrew and Greek written in Hebrew characters, and the elder in question bears the Latin name Secundinus. The elder's wife, Materina, bears no title.

#### Oea, Tripolitania

SEG 27(1977) no. 1201.<sup>14</sup> Inscription on a loculus in a Jewish catacomb; text lined up in three columns, above which is a menorah and a lulav and between which are two palm branches (4th/5th C. C.E., possibly later).

I

II

III

#### Menorah Lulav

Μνήμη-  
2 η τῆς  
Μακαρία

Palm  
Branch

Μαζαυζαλα  
2 πρεσβετέ-  
ρησα ἔζησε  
4 εαυτου τ

Palm  
Branch

ἀναπαυσης  
2 ὁ Θε μετὰ τῷ  
ὀσίῳ κ μ τῷ δικ-  
4 ἔω.

- I, 1. 3: read Μακαρίας (or: μακαρίας).  
II, 1. 1: read Μαζαυζαλας.  
II, 11. 2-3: read πρεσβυτέρισσας.  
II, 1. 4: read ἐνιαυτούς (?);  
III, 1. 1: read ἀνάπαυσις.  
III, 11. 2-4: read ὁ Θεὸς μετὰ τῶν ὀσίων καὶ μετὰ  
τῶν δικαίων.

Tomb of Makaria (or: the blessed) Mazauzala, elder. She lived [. . .] years. Rest. God is with the holy and the righteous ones.

This inscription was found in Libya in a Jewish catacomb which was destroyed during World War II. The primary difficulty of interpretation is found in II, l. 4, the meaning of which must remain uncertain; the connection between II, l. 4 and III, l. 1 is also rather unclear. Mazauzala is probably a Libyan name.<sup>15</sup> This need not imply that the woman was a convert, for Jews in antiquity bore a wide variety of names. The title presbeteressa<sup>16</sup> is similar in form to archisynagōgissa in CII 73lc.<sup>17</sup> Three other inscriptions are known from the same catacomb, but they add little to our knowledge of the Jewish community there.<sup>18</sup>

#### Rome

CII 400.<sup>19</sup> Marble plaque, broken in two pieces. Letters engraved and painted in red. Found in the Monteverde catacomb (1st C. B.C.E. - 3rd C. C.E.)

Ενθ(δ)δε  
2 κῆται Σα-  
ρα Ούρα π-  
4 πρεσβύτ(ι)ς

#### Menorah

L. 1: text has ΕΝΘΑΔΕ.  
L. 2: read κῆται.<sup>20</sup>  
L. 3: Möller suggests Ούρα.  
Ll. 3-4: text has ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΝΕ, probably πρεσβύτης (f.)  
but could also be πρεσβύτης (m. or f.).

Here lies Sara Ura, elder (or aged woman).

The male presbys can be used much like presbyteros,<sup>21</sup> and perhaps the female form used here also means more than simply "aged woman." A possible parallel could be the Christian order of presbytides, which was forbidden by the Council of Laodicea.<sup>22</sup>

These six, possibly seven, inscriptions form the evidence for Jewish women elders. The geographical spread is greater than for women heads or mothers of the synagogue, with one inscription from Crete, one from Thrace, one from the province of Tripolitania in North Africa, one from Rome, and three from southern Italy. The inscriptions themselves teach us little about the women themselves and nothing about the title presbytera/presbyteressa (or presbytis). The only age given (38 for Mannine) would seem to preclude the meaning "aged woman." The parallelization of presbytera and archisynagōgissa in CII 73lc is further support for presbytera being an official title. The inscriptions themselves give no indication that these women were the wives of elders, for no husbands are mentioned.

If the title presbytera/presbyteressa implied a function, what could that function have been? As with the other titles, an analysis of the functions of male elders can shed light on the duties and rights of female elders.

## B. The Meaning of "Elder"

### 1. Literary References to the Title

Of the various titles occurring in ancient inscriptions, "elder" is one of the most difficult to define precisely, for in the course of its long history the title took on rather different meanings.<sup>23</sup> "Elder" could denote a political function, as in the "elders of Israel" (Num 11:16-30; 2 Sam 3:17; 5:3; 17:4, etc.). It sometimes included judicial functions, as in the "elders of the city" (Deut 19:12; 21:2-9, 19-20; 22:15-21; 25:7-9). Philo (In Flacc. 74, 76, 80; Leg. ad Gaium 229) and Josephus (J.W. 7.10.1 §412) speak of the gerousia of Alexandria, a body which would have had representative political (and religious?) functions; it is not certain, however, that the members of this gerousia were called presbyteroi.<sup>24</sup> The New Testament regularly refers to members of a group in the Sanhedrin as "elders" (Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31; 11:27; Luke 9:22, etc.). According to a saying in the Talmud, "elder means nothing other than scholar" (b. Qidd. 32b). The Theodosian Code (16.8.2, 13, 14) speaks of "elders" as if they were synagogue officials. A further complication arises from the possibility that presbyteroi is equal in meaning to such terms as seniores<sup>25</sup> or maiores.<sup>26</sup> It is this spectrum of meanings and possible synonyms which makes it very difficult to utilize ancient literature to help define the title presbytera/presbyteros as it occurs in our inscriptions. For the following, those parallels are preferred which are closest chronologically, geographically and linguistically to the presbytera/presbyteressa inscriptions. The following passages do not all necessarily refer only to male elders; women could be included in some of them.

The oldest presbyteros inscription is CII 1404 (the Theodotos inscription<sup>27</sup>), a pre-70 Palestinian inscription written in Greek. We have seen that the geographical range of the title was considerable, and that the chronological extension was well into the Byzantine era. Thus, New Testament references would be quite appropriate as parallels. Luke 7:3-5 is of special interest, for it could well be a close parallel to the Theodotos inscription:



Ἀκούσας δὲ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς αὐτὸν πρεσβυτέρους τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐρωτῶν αὐτὸν ὅπως ἐλθῶν διασώσῃ τὸν δοῦλον αὐτοῦ. οἱ δὲ παραγενόμενοι πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν παρεκάλουν αὐτὸν σπουδαίως λέγοντες ὅτι ἄξιός ἐστιν ᾧ παρέξῃ τοῦτο· ἀγαπᾷ γὰρ τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν καὶ τὴν συναγωγὴν αὐτοῦς ὥκοδόμησεν ἡμῖν.

When he (the centurion) heard of Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his slave. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue."

As in the Theodotos inscription, "elders" occurs in the plural. The elders' reference to the centurion's having built the synagogue, as well as the fact that the centurion chose them to go to speak to Jesus, makes it likely that the centurion considered the elders to be the official representatives of the Jewish community and that his negotiations for the building of the synagogue had been with them. A significant difference, of course, is that these elders, being in the provincial town of Capernaum (Luke 7:1), could well have served as the Jewish elders of the city, while the elders who founded the synagogue of Theodotos could hardly have been the elders of the city of Jerusalem.

The New Testament references to Christian elders are striking in that they occur especially, although not exclusively, in a Jewish-Christian context (Acts 11:30; 15:2,4,6,22-23; 16:4; 21:18; Jas 5:14; etc.). These elders usually appear in the plural as a decision-making body of the church. Apparently Jewish-Christians continued to organize themselves on a presbyteral constitution for some time, for Epiphanius (died 403) says that the Ebionites had teachers whom they called presbyteroi and archisynagogoi and who made such decisions as whom the young men would marry (Panarion 30.18.2).<sup>28</sup> The many other New Testament references to elders, especially to elders as members of the Sanhedrin, are not likely to be useful parallels to our inscriptions.

Another major source of information on Jewish elders is the Theodosian and Justinian Codes, for the term presbyterus occurs several times in texts found therein.<sup>29</sup> A law from the Theodosian Code (16.8.2), from November 29, 330, reads:

Idem A. ad Ablavium p(raefectum) p(raetori)o. Qui devotione tota synagoga Iudaeorum patriarchis vel presbyteris se dederunt et in memorata secta degentes legi ipsi praesident, immunes ab omnibus tam personalibus quam civilibus muneribus perseverent, ita ut illi, qui iam

forsitan decuriones sunt, nequaquam ad prosecutiones aliquas destinantur, cum oporteat istiusmodi homines a locis in quibus sunt nulla compelli ratione discedere. Hi autem, qui minime curiales sunt, perpetua decurionatus immunitate potiantur. Dat. iiii kal. decemb. Constant(ino)p(oli) Gallicano et Symmacho cons.<sup>30</sup>

The same Augustus to Ablavius, Praetorian Prefect. If any persons with complete devotion should dedicate themselves to the synagogues of the Jews as patriarchs and elders and should live in the aforementioned sect and preside over the administration of their law, they shall continue to be exempt from all compulsory public services that are incumbent on persons, as well as those that are due to the municipalities. Likewise, such persons who are now perchance decurions shall not be assigned to any duties as official escorts, since such people shall not be compelled for any reason to depart from those places in which they are. Moreover, such persons who are not decurions shall enjoy perpetual exemption from the decurionate.

Given on the third day before the kalends of December at Constantinople in the year of the consulship of Gallicanus and Symmachus (November 29, 330).<sup>31</sup>

Like Cod. Theod. 16.8.4 (December 1, 331)<sup>32</sup> this law exempts certain Jewish officials from compulsory public services and from the burdensome decurionate.<sup>33</sup> Whereas Cod. Theod. 16.8.4 frees "priests, heads of the synagogues, fathers of the synagogues and all others who serve the synagogues" from compulsory public service, our law speaks of "patriarchs and elders." The two laws together form, with the exception of "patriarchs," a list of several of the more common titles of synagogue leadership. This law states that the patriarchs and the elders "preside over the administration of their law," thus informing us of at least one function of the elders. The "administration of their law" could be a continuation of certain decision-making functions assigned to elders in the bible (on blood redemption: Deut 19:11-13; expiation for an unknown murderer's crime: Deut 21:2-9; the stubborn and rebellious son: Deut 21:18-21; defamation of a virgin: Deut 22:13-21; levirate: Deut 25:5-10).

Cod. Theod. 16.8.13 (July 1, 397) reads:

Idem AA. Caesario p(raefecto) p(raetori)o. Iudaei sint obstricti caerimoniis suis: nos interea in conservandis eorum privilegiis veteres imitemur, quorum sanctionibus definitum est, ut privilegia his, qui inlustrium patriarcharum dicioni subiecti sunt, archisynagogis patriarchisque ac presbyteris ceterisque, qui in eius religionis sacramento versantur, nutu nostri numinis perseverent ea, quae venerandae Christianae legis primis clericis sanctimonia deferuntur. Id enim et divi principes Constantinus et Constantius, Valentinianus et Valens divino

arbitrio decreverunt. Sint igitur etiam a curialibus muneribus alieni pareantque legibus suis. Dat. kal. iul. Caesario et Attico cons.<sup>34</sup>

The same Augustuses to Caesarius, Praetorian Prefect. Jews shall be bound by their own ritual. Meanwhile, in preserving their privileges, We shall imitate the ancients by whose sanctions it has been determined that privileges shall be preserved for those who are subject to the rule of the Illustrious Patriarchs, for the heads of the synagogues, the patriarchs, and the elders, and all the rest who are occupied in the ceremonial of that religion, namely those privileges according to the consent of Our Imperial Divinity, which by virtue of their holy office are conferred on the chief clergy of the venerable Christian religion. The foregoing, indeed, was decreed by the divine imperial authority of the sainted Emperors Constantine and Constantius, Valentinian and Valens. Such Jews shall therefore be exempt from the compulsory public services of decurions and shall obey their own laws.

Given on the kalends of July in the year of the consulship of Caesarius and Atticus.<sup>35</sup>

Of importance for our question is the parallelization of Christian clerics with "those who are subject to the Illustrious Patriarchs, . . . the heads of the synagogues, the patriarchs, and the elders." As in Cod. Theod. 16.8.2, the concern here is clearly with official synagogue functionaries, and not with bearers of honorific titles. The context further makes clear that the functions are specifically religious ones, both through the comparison with Christian clerics, and by the phrase "all the rest who are occupied in the ceremonial of that religion."

Cod. Theod. 16.8.14, given on April 11, 399, discussed above in the context of heads of the synagogue,<sup>36</sup> says that it is customary "that heads of the synagogue or the elders of the Jews or those whom they themselves call apostles, who are dispatched by the patriarch at a certain time to collect gold and silver, should bring back to the patriarch the sum which has been exacted and collected from each of the synagogues" (ut archisynagogi sive presbyteri Iudaeorum vel quos ipsi apostolos vocant, qui ad exigendum aurum adque argentum a patriarcha certo tempore diriguntur, a singulis synagogis exactam summam adque susceptam ad eundem reportent), and continues by saying that this custom is now abolished. This text gives us one of the official functions of elders in this period; given this function, it is not unreasonable to posit that elders normally had some responsibility for the finances in the synagogue. This text makes clear that money was collected through the synagogues, and not, independently of them, from the Jewish community at large. This particular constellation, heads of the synagogues and elders,<sup>37</sup> reminds one of Epiphanius's reference to the Jewish-Christian

elders (presbyteroi) and heads of the synagogue (archisynagōgoi), a roughly contemporary attestation of the same synagogal organization.

These three fourth-century laws are especially valuable due to the specificity of the information they give. All three place the elders in the context of religious activities: 16.8.2: "preside over the administration of their law;" 16.8.13: ". . . and the elders, and for all the rest who are occupied in the ceremonial of that religion;" 16.8.14: ". . . the elders of the Jews . . . should bring back to the patriarch the sum which has been exacted and collected from each of the synagogues." This does not exclude the possibility that elders also had civic, representative functions, but in the eyes of the Roman lawgiver, it seems that the religious ones were considered primary.

Two further laws should be briefly considered in this context. Cod. Just. 1.9.15, dates from the year 418 and reads:

Si qua inter Christianos et Iudaeos sit contentio, non a senioribus Iudaeorum, sed ab ordinariis iudicibus dirimatur.<sup>38</sup>

When any dispute arises between Christians and Jews, it shall not be decided by the elders of the Jews, but by the ordinary judges.<sup>39</sup>

The Latin seniores here is most likely the equivalent of the Greek presbyteroi of our inscriptions and of the three laws just cited. This text is a further attestation to the judicial functions of Jewish elders.

Corpus Iuris Civilis, Novellae 146.1, from the year 553, forbids pericope masters, elders and teachers (archipherekitai . . . presbyteroi . . . didaskaloi) to hinder the reading of the Greek bible in the synagogue by means of excommunications (anathematismoi).<sup>40</sup> This is a further attestation of the synagogal, religious functions of the elders.

In rabbinic literature there are a number of references to elders (zəqənīm), although it is not certain that the rabbinical authorities meant the same thing with zəqənīm as our inscriptions meant with presbyteroi. B. Qidd. 32b, in a baraita (i.e., Tannaitic, that is, pre-220), defines elder: "an elder is nothing other than a scholar" (אֵין זָקֵן אֶלָּא חָכָם).<sup>41</sup> According to a saying attributed to R. Jose the Galilean (b. Qidd. 32b), who flourished around 110, "an elder is one who has acquired wisdom" (אֵין זָקֵן אֶלָּא מִי שִׁקְנָה חָכְמָה), which is a play on the letters of זָקֵן: (זָקֵן) חָכְמָה. This definition complements what we have

learned from the Greek and Latin texts discussed thus far. The references to judicial activity (*Cod. Theod.* 16.8.2; *Cod. Just.* 1.9.15), although these texts are much later, fit in well with the definition of elder as scholar.

The Manual of Discipline from Qumran makes reference to a special seating place for elders (IQS 6:8-9): "The priests should sit first, and the elders second and then all of the rest of the people; each should sit in his proper place" (הכהנים ישבו) (לרשונה והזקנים בשנית ושאר כול העם ישבו איש בתכונן).<sup>42</sup> The Tosefta also speaks of elders having a special seating place (*t. Meg.* 4.21 [Zuck. 227]): "How did the elders sit? With their faces towards the people and their backs towards the sanctuary." (כיצד היו זנקים יושבין? פניהם כלפי העם ואחוריהם כלפי קודש).<sup>43</sup> The difficulty with this text is that it probably does not refer to a synagogue service. It does, in any case, refer to elders seated together in a group at a worship gathering. Two possible non-literary corroborations of a separate seating place for elders are the semi-circular steps in the apse of the Sardis synagogue, for they could have served as seats for the elders,<sup>44</sup> and an inscription (CII 663; Lifshitz, *Donateurs* no. 101; probably 4th C.<sup>45</sup>) from a synagogue in Elche, Spain, for the inscription could indicate that the archons and elders were to sit in that portion of the synagogue in which the inscription was found.<sup>46</sup> The geographical and chronological spread represented by these two literary and two possible archaeological attestations of a special seating place for Jewish elders during the worship service or other public gathering make it likely that the practice was more widespread than these few pieces of evidence would make us think. This is not to imply, however, that "elder" meant the same in each place. The Qumran elders probably had rather different functions from the elders mentioned in the Tosefta passage and from those in the Elche inscription. In spite of these possible differences, two elements are constant and confirm what other sources have told us: the context is a religious one and elders are mentioned in the plural, as if they formed a council.

It is not possible to discuss the many further rabbinic passages referring to *zēgānīm*, but it is also questionable, on the basis of geography and chronology, whether they are appropriate parallels to our inscriptions. For example, according to certain rabbinic passages, the ordination of elders was limited to the Holy Land,<sup>47</sup> which would mean that all Diaspora inscriptions with the title "elder" refer to unordained elders. It is

methodologically questionable, however, to take rabbinic statements concerning the Diaspora as objective, unbiased reports of actual Diaspora practice. Perhaps ordinations in fact occurred in Rome or in Asia Minor, but were not recognized--or not known--by the rabbis, which would not necessarily mean that these ordinations were not recognized in the communities in which they occurred. Since evidence for the ordination of elders in the Diaspora is lacking, however, we should probably assume that the question is irrelevant for our inscriptions (excepting CII 931: Jaffa; 1277: Jerusalem; 1404: Jerusalem).

## 2. Inscriptional References to the Title

The title presbyteros occurs in over twenty ancient Jewish inscriptions. They come from as far west as Elche, Spain (CII 663) and as far east as Dura Europos, Syria (CII 829). The chronological range is also considerable. The Theodotos inscription (CII 1404) found in Jerusalem is from the Second Temple period, and presbyteros inscriptions from later centuries attest that the title remained in use for some time.

Most of the inscriptions mentioning presbyteroi tell us little or nothing about the office.<sup>48</sup> Several inscriptions mention elders as donors.<sup>49</sup> Since we have seen donors bearing each of the titles discussed thus far, as well as no title at all, it would be incautious to assume that elders were responsible in a special way for the upkeep of the synagogue. CII 803<sup>50</sup> is the most informative of the donative inscriptions. The plural "elders" indicates a council of elders, the number of which is larger than three; only Eisakios and Saulos are mentioned here by name. Possibly the gerusiarch Theodoros is a sort of president of the council of elders. The relationship between the heads of the synagogue and the gerusiarch and the elders is not clear, but the inscription gives the impression that these are the three main titles of leadership in the synagogue in question.

That more than one elder functioned at a time is also clear from CII 731f,<sup>51</sup> an inscription which is difficult to reconstruct, but which clearly has hoi presbyteroi in the first legible line. CII 663<sup>52</sup> also speaks of elders in the plural.

CII 800<sup>53</sup> records the son of an elder, who is himself a scribe and president of the ancients (hoi palaioi). Should one assume two councils, one of elders and one of ancients? This seems unlikely. Given the lack of evidence, one cannot come to a

more exact understanding of the organizational structures of that community.

In CII 1404<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup>

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 presbyteres 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 presbyteres 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



feminine!). . . ."<sup>56</sup> To those willing to accept the possibility that the six, possibly seven, inscriptions in which women bear the title "elder" are evidence that ancient Jewish women could fulfill certain official functions, the following reconstruction is suggested.

Jewish women elders were most likely members of a council of elders. This council may have had some oversight of synagogue finances; until 399 elders annually collected money in the synagogue to be sent to the patriarchs. We should imagine that women elders were as involved in these financial matters as their male counterparts. If the women elders of our inscriptions were members of synagogues in which the elders sat in the front facing the people, then we should assume that these women sat among their colleagues facing the people. Although some may find it difficult to imagine that women could have been full members of a judicial council, the existence of the presbytera inscriptions at least raises this question. Could Jewish women actually have been scholars? Could they have had some say about the reading of the bible in the synagogue? Again, the technical terminology of our inscriptions raises these possibilities. Those maintaining their impossibility should at least consider how limited our knowledge of Jewish women in ancient Crete, Thrace, Italy and Libya actually is.



## 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>

[Ενθάδε 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[t]els. "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** Ἐνθάδε κεῖτε Σιμπ[λικία μήτηρ? συ-]  
 2 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 Αύξα-  
νίου πα-  
6 τρός καὶ  
πάτρονος  
8 τῆς πόλεως.

L. 1: read κεῖται.

Ll. 4-5: Frenkel, Lifshitz: Αύξανίου; Bognetti: Αύσανίου;  
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 Αύξάνειος πατήρ  
2 καὶ πατρῶν 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 ʿabbaʿ (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 Shaʿul (m. Menah. 8:3; 11:5; m. Mid. 2:5; 5:4; m. B. Mes. 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 ʿab bēt dīn, a title borne by the head of the Sanhedrin during the Second Temple period. The ʿab bēt dīn was second in line to the nāṣīʾ.<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 hiercia/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

Augustus. The terminology (chrēstē, pasiphile, alypos) and form of our inscriptions (name followed by adjectives, chaire, approximate age at death, year, day of Egyptian month) are very similar to the terminology and form of the other Tell el-Yahudiyyeh inscriptions, both of those from the time of Augustus and of the others, which range from the second century B.C.E. through the first century C.E.

As with the other inscriptions in which women bear titles, modern scholars have been at pains to point out that hierisa here has no real meaning, e.g., Jean-Baptiste Frey, "This is not to say that Marin had an actual function as a priestess in the Jewish community, but rather that she belonged to the descendants of Aaron, to the priestly family . . . ." <sup>6</sup>

For the interpretation of hierisa, it is rather significant that the Marin inscription was found in Tell el-Yahudiyyeh, i.e., the ancient Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis, for it was in Leontopolis that Onias IV, the legitimate heir to the Jerusalem high priesthood, founded a Jewish temple during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra II (181-146 B.C.E.), when he saw that he had no chance of attaining the Jerusalem high priesthood due to events surrounding the Maccabean revolt. <sup>7</sup> He founded the temple, probably around 160 B.C.E., by renovating and purifying an Egyptian temple. (On the Onias temple, see Josephus, J.W. 1.1.1 § 33; 7.10.2-4 §§ 420-436; Ant. 12.9.7 §§ 387-388; 13.3.1-3 §§ 62-73; 13.10.4 § 285; 20.10.3 § 236.) Josephus reports (Ant. 13.3.3 § 73) that "Onias found some Jews who, like him, were priests and Levites to minister there" (εὗρε δὲ Ὀνίας καὶ Ἰουδαίους τινὰς δημοίους αὐτῷ καὶ ἱερεῖς καὶ λευίτας τοὺς ἐκεῖ θρησκεύοντας, cf. Ant. 13.3.1 § 63; J.W. 7.10.3-4 §§ 430-434). The temple of Onias existed, and Jewish priests served at it, until 73 C.E. or shortly before 73, when the Romans closed it (Josephus, J.W. 7.10.2-4 §§ 420-436).

The later rabbis are still familiar with the temple of Onias, the sacrificial service of which they view with some ambivalence, but which they are willing to recognize as valid under certain limited circumstances. (See m. Menah. 13:10; t. Menah. 13.12-14 [Zuck. 533]; b. Meg. 10a; b. Menah. 109; y. Yoma 43c.64-43d.6; y. Sanh. 19a.9.) One should view the Onias temple in the context of other Jewish temples outside of Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> The very existence of these various cultic sites raises the question of pluralism within the Jewish cult.



Four, possibly five, men bear the title hiererus in inscriptions from the Monteverde catacomb: CII 346, 347 (twice), 375, 355 (?). These will be discussed below.<sup>11</sup>

As for the meaning of hierisa, modern commentators follow the pattern we have seen elsewhere. Harry J. Leon writes:

One woman, Gaudentia (315), is styled a hierisa. This is apparently the equivalent of the Hebrew cohenet and probably designates the wife (or daughter) of a hiererus. It could hardly point to a priestly function for a woman, since no priestesses are to be found in the Jewish worship. Father Frey thought that the title must denote a feminine member of the priestly family of Aaron.<sup>12</sup>

Frey himself writes, "ἱέρεια, literally 'priestess,' cannot, in the present case, mean anything other than a member of the priestly family of Aaron."<sup>13</sup>

#### Beth She'arim

CII 1007.<sup>14</sup> Painted in red above and to the right of arcosolium 2 of Hall K in Catacomb 1, 38 cm in length and 26 in height, with the height of the letters varying from 3 to 5 cm.

Σαρα θυγάτηρ  
2 Ναιμίας μη-  
τηρ ἱερέως  
4 κύρα Μαρ[ε]λης  
[ἐν]θα κ[ε]ῖται?].

L. 4. read κύρας.

Sara, daughter of Naimia, mother of the priest, Lady Maria, lies here.

The inscription should probably be dated to the fourth century C.E.<sup>15</sup> Schwabe and Lifshitz argue that Sara's corpse had been brought from abroad, perhaps from Palmyra, for burial in Beth She'arim.<sup>16</sup> The specific evidence for this case, however, namely nails and chips of wood found in her resting place, is not particularly convincing. The title kyra, "Lady," is not uncommon among the Greek inscriptions of Beth She'arim.<sup>17</sup> The name of Sara's father, Naimia, is the equivalent of the Hebrew Nehemyah.<sup>18</sup> Note that Sara's father is not called a priest.<sup>19</sup> On the meaning of hierieia, Schwabe and Lifshitz write:

Particularly the use of the title ἱέρεια is most interesting. Sarah, the mother of Miriam the priestess, was not a priestess herself and neither was her daughter. Miriam was a cohenet, i.e., the wife of a cohen. The relatives of the deceased wanted to indicate in the epitaph that Sarah was the mother of a cohen's wife. We cannot find a better proof

of the high social status of the priests in the Jewish community.<sup>20</sup>

Since Sara's father is not called a priest, it is indeed unlikely that Sara was the daughter of a priest, and therefore a priest herself. Why Maria, however, who is called a priest, should not after all be one, is unclear. The meaning of cohenet (kōhenet) will be discussed below.<sup>21</sup>

CII 1085. Frey, on the basis of a communication with Moshe Schwabe, gives the following transcription:

.... [τηρή[ας?]  
2 καὶ Σάρα[ς θυγατρός?  
N]αϊμίας καὶ  
4 Μαρῆ[ας ....]22

[Tomb of . . . ], priest (?), and of Sara,  
[daughter of?] Naimia and of Maria . . . .

Schwabe and Lifshitz (Beth She'arim no. 68) state that the inscription is set above an arcosolium in room III of Hall K in Catacomb 1, and is 26 cm in length and 10 cm in height, with the letters being 3 cm high. According to them, line 1 is incised, and lines 2-4 are painted in red. Their reading is:

Καὶ Σάρα [θυγά-]  
2 [τηρ N]αϊμίας καὶ [μητήρ?]  
Μαρῆ[ας τερ]ε[ας?]23

And Sara, daughter of Naimia and mother of the priest Maria.

Note that Frey has a line above the first line of Schwabe and Lifshitz. The difference between the two transcriptions should be sufficient evidence for the illegibility of this one inscription. A major difficulty with the Schwabe and Lifshitz transcription and reconstruction is that it is based on the assumption that two women, both by the name of Sara, both daughters of men named Naimia, and both mothers of priests named Maria, were buried at approximately the same time in the same hall, an assumption which is rather unlikely. Due to the uncertain reading of this inscription, it will not be considered as evidence for the title hierieia.

## B. Possible Interpretations of hierieia/hierissa

There exist several possibilities for interpreting this term in our inscriptions:

1. Hiereia/hierissa is simply the Greek equivalent of kōhenet (Aramaic: kahantta<sup>2</sup>)

Kōhenet is not a biblical but a rabbinic term. Although linguistically kōhenet is the feminine of kōhēn (Aramaic: kahāna<sup>2</sup>), it is not exactly parallel in meaning to kōhēn. A man becomes a kōhēn in one way, by birth. Kōhēn can therefore be defined as "son of a kōhēn," who must, of course, be married to a Jewish woman.<sup>24</sup> A woman becomes a kōhenet in two ways, by birth and by marriage. Kōhenet can therefore be defined as "daughter of a kōhēn" (bat kōhēn) or as "wife of a kōhēn" (ʿešet kōhēn).

The priest's daughter<sup>25</sup> had certain priestly rights, such as the right to eat from the priestly dues, a right which is laid down in the Bible (Lev 22:12-13):

רבח כהן כי תהיה לאיש זר  
הוא בתרומת הקדשים לא תאכל:  
רבח כהן תהיה אלמנה וגרושה וזרע אין לה  
ושבה אל-בית אביה כנעוריה מלחם אביה תאכל  
וכל-זר לא-יאכלו בו:

If a priest's daughter is married to an outsider she shall not eat of the offering of the holy things. But if a priest's daughter is a widow or divorced, and has no child, and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food; yet no outsider shall eat of it.

The presupposition here is that the priest's daughter, while a child, may eat of the priestly offerings. Unlike her brother, however, the daughter of a priest can lose her right to eat of the priestly offerings by marrying a common Israelite; if he marries a common Israelite, he may continue to eat the priestly dues, but if she does so, she relinquishes that right. If she marries a priest, however, she may continue to eat of the priestly offering, but this right is a derived one, i.e., due to her priestly husband and not to her own priestly descentance (also a derivation, of course).

The Holiness Code in Leviticus places the sexual activity of priests' daughters and wives in the context of the holiness of the male priests. Lev 21:9 reads:

רבח איש כהן כי תחל לזנות את אביה  
היא מחללת באש תשרף:

And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.



Thus, the holiness of the priest can be damaged by the sexual activity of his daughter; his holiness is to be preserved by executing the daughter whose sexual activity is not within the bounds of patriarchally-sanctioned marriage.

Similarly, the prospective wife of a priest must reflect his holiness (Lev 21:7):

אשה זונה וחללה לא יקח ואשה גרושה מאישה לא יקח  
כי-קדוש הוא לאלהיו.

The (priests) shall not marry a harlot or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God.

The priest must marry a widow or a virgin to preserve his own holiness. A prostitute, a rape victim or a divorced woman would endanger his holiness. Ezekiel warns priests to marry only Israelite virgins, but allows them priests' widows (Ezek 44:22). The high priest is allowed to take only "a virgin of his own people, that he may not profane his children among his people" (Lev 21:14). The issue in these laws is the holiness of the priestly semen, which should not be allowed to enter a "vessel" previously profaned by pre- or extra-marital sexual intercourse, whether the intercourse had been forced or not. The distinction between the divorced woman and the priest's widow is not immediately clear; perhaps the divorced woman was considered more likely to engage in prostitution or other non-marital sexual intercourse than a widow, a view common in patriarchal societies.

The questions raised in these biblical laws, namely, the right to eat of the priestly dues and the profanation of the priest through his wife or daughter, form the background of much of the rabbinic discussion on the kōhenet. Further marriage limitations, i.e., limitations on who could become a kōhenet through marriage, are also spelled out. For example, a hālūṣâ (a childless widow whose brother-in-law refused to marry her according to the duty of levirate marriage; see Deut 25:5-10) may be forbidden to a priest (m. Yebam. 2:4; cf. 1:4:<sup>26</sup> the School of Shammai forbids it; the School of Hillel allows it), as may a woman taken in levirate marriage (m. Yebam. 1:4: the School of Shammai allows it; the School of Hillel forbids it). A kōhenet who by accident (through a mix-up) had had intercourse with the wrong husband was also forbidden to marry a priest (m. Yebam. 3:10).

Lev 22:13 had already established that the daughter of a priest could lose her priestliness by marrying a non-priest. The

Mishnah (Yebam. 7:4-6) lists a number of further causes for which a bat kōhēn can lose her right to eat of the priestly heave-offering (tērūmā) or by which she may not attain it in the first place. For example, the brother-in-law whose duty it is to marry the widowed, childless bat kōhēn (m. Yebam. 7:4) is a hindrance for her; since she is bound to him, she cannot return to her father's house and eat the heave-offering. As we saw above, if her brother-in-law refuses to marry her, she becomes a hālūṣā and priests are forbidden to marry her; thus, she also loses the possibility of regaining the right to eat heave-offering by marrying a priest.

A central text on the kōhenet is m. Soṭa 3:7:

בת ישראל שנשא לכהן, מנחה  
נשרפה; וכהנת שנשאה לישׂראל,  
מנחתה נאכלת. מה-בין כהן  
לכהנת? מנחת כהנת נאכלת, מנחת  
כהן אינה נאכלת; כהנת מהחללה,  
וכהן אין מהחלל; כהנת מטמאה  
למחים, ואין כהן מטמא למחים;  
כהן אוכל בקדשי קדשים, ואין  
כהנת אוכלת בקדשי קדשים.

A daughter of an Israelite who is wed to a kōhēn: her meal-offering is burned; and a kōhenet (i.e., a daughter of a priest) who is wed to a common Israelite: her meal-offering is eaten.

In what manner does a kōhēn differ from a kōhenet? The meal-offering of a kōhenet is eaten, and the meal-offering of a kōhēn is not eaten; a kōhenet may forfeit her priestly rights, but a kōhēn does not forfeit his priestly rights; a kōhenet may become defiled because of the dead, but a kōhēn must not contract defilement because of the dead; a kōhēn may eat of the most holy sacrifices, but a kōhenet may not eat of the most holy sacrifices.

This text<sup>27</sup> is specifically concerned with pointing out that the priestliness of a kōhenet implies less than the priestliness of a kōhēn. Thus, the commandment to burn the meal-offering of a priest (Lev 6:16, "Every meal-offering of a priest must be a whole-offering; it is not to be eaten.") is taken to refer to the son of a priest, but not to the daughter of a priest. The kōhenet who marries a non-priestly Israelite is to eat the meal-offering as if she had not been born into the priestly class. In contrast, the non-priestly Israelite woman who is married to a priest is considered to be of priestly class, and her meal-offering is burned.

Similarly, a daughter of a priest may lose her right to eat the heave-offering (tērūmā) by having sexual intercourse with a man forbidden to her. Such a sexual connection also implies that

she may never marry a priest. The son of a priest, however, who marries a woman forbidden to him, such as a prostitute or a divorced woman (see Lev 21:7), loses his priestly rights only for the period during which he is married to her. If he divorces her or if she dies, he may once again claim his priestly rights. Thus, while a daughter of a priest can "profane herself" permanently, a son of a priest cannot. The Babylonian Talmud (Soṭa 23b) gives Lev 21:15 ("that he may not profane his seed among his people") as scriptural proof for the permanency of a male priest's priestliness: a priest can profane his seed but not himself, i.e., the children of such a union are not of the priestly class, but he himself remains a priest (cf. b. Mak. 2a; m. Bek. 7:7).

Further, a kōhenet, unlike a kōhēn, is allowed to touch a corpse. The Babylonian Talmud (Soṭa 23b) gives Lev 21:1 as scriptural proof for this distinction between kōhēn and kōhenet: "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron ( . . . that none of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people)," is taken to mean "the sons of Aaron" and not "the daughters of Aaron."

Finally, a kōhēn may eat of the most holy sacrifices, while a kōhenet is not allowed to do so. The scriptural proof adduced by the Babylonian Talmud (Soṭa 23b) is Lev 6:11: "All male descendants of Aaron may eat ( . . . of the offerings made by fire . . . )."

M. Soṭa 3:7 makes clear that at least one rabbinic view was that the priestliness of a woman was much more fragile and open to profanation than that of a man. There was no circumstance under which a man could lose his priestliness; the priestliness of a woman, however, could be forfeited forever by one act of sexual intercourse, whether desired or forced. Further, according to this view, the priestliness of a woman did not imply the same degree of sanctity as the man's priestliness. Thus, the prohibition of touching a corpse and the right to eat of the most holy sacrifices did not apply to the kōhenet. Nevertheless, there is a recognition that the kōhenet, be she a priest's daughter or a priest's wife, has the right to eat of the heave-offering.<sup>28</sup> Her eating of the heave-offering is surrounded by purity regulations, such as that she not eat of it during her menstrual period (m. Nid. 1:7).

In light of this background, one is rather surprised to read the following passage (b. Hul. 131b-132a):

עולא הוה יהיב מתנחא לכהנחא. איחיביה רבה לעולא, "מנחת כהנת נאכלת, מנחת כהן אינה נאכלת", ואי אמרת כהן ואפילו כהנת, והכתיב, "וכל מנחת כהן כליל תהיה לא תאכל". אמר ליה, רבי מטונך; אהרון ובניו כתוביו בפרשה. דבי רבי ישמעאל תנא, "כהן" ולא כהנת, וילמוד סתום מן המפורש. דבי ר' אליעזר בן יעקב תנא, "כהן", ואפילו כהנת, הוי מיעוט אחר מיעוט ואין מיעוט אחר מיעוט אלא לרבות. רב כהנא אכל בשביל אשחור; רב פפא אכל בשביל אשחור; רב יימר אכל בשביל אשחור; רב אידי בר אבין אכל בשביל אשחור. אמר רבינא, אמר לי מרימר... והלכתא כוותיה דעולא.

'Ulla used to give the priestly dues to the kōhenet. Rava raised the following objection to 'Ulla. We have learned: "The meal-offering of a kōhenet is eaten, and the meal-offering of a kōhen is not eaten" (m. Sotā 3:7). Now if you say that kōhen includes a kōhenet too, is it not written, "And every meal-offering of a priest must be a whole-offering; it is not to be eaten" (Lev 6:16)? He replied, "Master, I borrow your own argument, for in that passage are expressly mentioned Aaron and his sons."

The School of R. Ishmael taught: "Unto the kōhen" (Deut 18:3), but not unto the kōhenet, for we may infer what is not explicitly stated from what is explicitly stated.

The School of R. Eli'ezer ben Jacob taught: "Unto the kōhen" (Deut 18:3), and even unto the kōhenet, for we have here a limitation following a limitation, and the purpose of a double limitation is to extend the law.

R. Kahana used to eat (the priestly dues) on account of his wife. R. Papa used to eat them on account of his wife. R. Yemar used to eat them on account of his wife. R. Idi bar Avin used to eat them on account of his wife.

Ravina said, Meremar told me <sup>29</sup>. . . that the halakha is in accordance with 'Ulla's view.

The issue here is whether the kōhenet (priest's daughter) who has married a non-priest is allowed to eat the priestly dues (Deut 18:3-4). According to the passages discussed thus far, the answer seems to be a clear no. A priestly woman who has married a non-priestly man forfeits her priestly rights. Yet this text reports on a tradition according to which priests' daughters who had "profaned themselves" (cf. m. Sotā 3:7) were in fact allowed to continue to eat the priestly dues. Even more surprising is the tradition that a number of non-priestly rabbis<sup>30</sup> ate the priestly dues on account of their priestly wives, which means that not only did these women not forfeit their priestly rights upon marriage to a non-priest, but that they were even able to pass these rights on to their husbands. Two scriptural arguments are made for giving priests' daughters the priestly dues even

if they are married to sons of non-priests. The arguments are both based on Deut 18:3, which reads:

רוֹזָה יִהְיֶה מִשְׁפַּט הַכֹּהֲנִים  
מֵאִחַ הָעָם מֵאִחַ זִבְחֵי הַזֶּבֶחַ אִם־שׂוֹר אִם־שֶׁה  
וְנָתַן לָהֶן הַזֶּרַע וְהַלְחִיִּים וְהַקֶּבֶה:

And this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach.

The arguments are:

1. Deut 18:3 speaks of "priests" (m.) and "priest" (m.) as the recipients of the priestly dues; according to 'Ulla, these terms, in contrast to the "Aaron and his sons" of Lev 6:16, which refer to the meal-offering and is the scriptural basis for burning the meal-offering of kōhānīm (m.) and letting kōhānōt (f.) eat their meal-offering (m. Sota 3:7), can include women.
2. According to the School of R. Ishmael, the grammatical gender of "priest" in Deut 18:3 implies the exclusion of women.
3. According to the School of R. Eli'ezer ben Jacob, the use of both "priests" (m.) and "priest" (m.) in Deut 18:3, both of which exclude women, has the effect that the double exclusion implies an inclusion.

These two strands of tradition, i.e., that the priestliness of a kōhenet is lasting and that it is not, must be left to stand side by side. There is no reason to try to harmonize the two.

It is not possible to discuss all of the passages in which kōhenet appears, but even the few passages cited show that:

1. The rabbis recognized that a kōhenet had certain rights and duties; 2. There were divergent views as to how derivative and fragile a woman's priestliness was, so that whether she could lose her priestly rights is not univocally answered.<sup>31</sup>

There would be no difficulty in identifying hierieia/hierissa as the Greek equivalent of kōhenet. Such an identification would in no way imply congregational leadership or a cultic function, other than the right to eat the priestly offerings (and possibly the right to pass this right on to their husbands). It would also imply the respect due to a member of the priestly caste.

## 2. Hierieia/hierissa in the Inscriptions Means "Priest" in the Cultic Sense of the Term

Some may find this hard to believe. Female cultic functionaries do not fit our image of ancient Judaism. To be

sure, seventy-five and eighty years ago there were those who argued that women could have held some official position in the ancient Israelite cult,<sup>32</sup> but their view gradually fell out of scholarly favor.<sup>33</sup> This is not the place for a thorough, critical examination of the question of female priests in ancient Israel, but it is necessary to survey briefly some of the evidence cited by scholars at the turn of the century, as well as by several contemporary scholars who have argued that women may at one time have served as priestesses in ancient Israel. The relevance of the early material for the later should be clear. Earlier practices could have lived on for centuries, and biblical priestesses could have functioned as a model for the post-biblical period.

Two biblical texts which have been cited as evidence for priestesses in ancient Israel are Exod 38:8 and 1 Sam 2:22. Exod 38:8 reads:

ייעש את הכיור נחשת ואת כנר נחשת  
במראה הצבאית אשר צבאו פתח אהל מועד:

And he (Bezalel) made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the mirrors of the ministering women (hassob'ot) who ministered (sab'u) at the door of the tent of meeting.

The root sb, in addition to the more usual meaning of "to wage war," can also mean "to serve in the cult," as it does in Num 4:3,23,30; 8:24, where it refers to the cultic service of Levites.

1 Sam 2:22 reads:

ועלי זקן מאד ושמע את כל אשר יעשו  
בניו לכל ישראל ואת אשר ישכבין  
את הנשים הצבאות פתח אהל מועד:

Now Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing in Israel, and how they lay with the women who ministered (hassob'ot) at the door of the house of meeting.<sup>34</sup>

Whether this text refers to ritual, polyandrous sexual activity, normally called "cultic prostitution" by modern scholars, is unclear. If so, then we must assume that ritual sexual activity at a YHWH cultic site (Shiloh) was at least tolerated. An alternative explanation is that the sexual intercourse between the sons of Eli and the women ministering at the tent was not ritual in any way, and that the cultic service of these women consisted of some other sort of activity.

As might be expected, a number of modern scholars have suggested that the "women who ministered at the door of the tent

of meeting" in Exod 38:8 and 1 Sam 2:22 were actually house-keepers. S. R. Driver speaks of "the performance of menial duties by the women."<sup>35</sup> A. Eberharder speculates that the women may have been the wives and daughters of the priests, who would seem to have a special calling "to perform those tasks at the temple which required feminine diligence and sense of aesthetics."<sup>36</sup> Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg writes: "The women mentioned here (and in Exod 38:8) have the responsibility for seeing to it that the entrance, which is especially important for what goes on at the sanctuary, is kept clean."<sup>37</sup>

These two texts, both of which refer to the pre-Jerusalem temple period, must be treated very cautiously. Rather than calling them evidence, I would prefer simply to say that they raise questions. The problem of over-interpretation actually lies not in suggesting that these women may have been cultic functionaries, but rather in knowing that they must have performed those menial duties which the modern commentators assign to their wives, daughters and housemaids.

It has been suggested that several biblical figures were possibly priestesses. Zipporah, for example, daughter of a Midianite priest and wife of Moses (Exod 2:16, 21), performed the ritual of circumcision on her son in order to avert the destructiveness of the Lord (Exod 4:24-26). F. M. Cross suggests that she was "apparently a priestess in her own right."<sup>38</sup> One must note, however, that circumcising is not usually considered to be a priestly activity, although it may have been in that period.

Benjamin Mazar suggests that Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, in whose tent Sisera sought refuge (Judg 4:17-20), could have functioned as a priestess at the sacred precincts related to the terebinth of Elon-bezaananim:

It may be concluded that Sisera fled from the battle to the tent of Jael not only to seek the peace which reigned between Jabin the king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite, but also because of the special exalted position of Jael, and because her dwelling place, Elon Bezaannaim, was recognized as a sanctified spot and a place of refuge where protection was given even to an enemy. As for Sisera's murder at a sanctified spot, in violation of all rules of hospitality, it may be explained only as the fulfillment of a divine command by a charismatic woman; thus: "Blessed above women shall the wife of Heber be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (Judg 5:24).<sup>39</sup>

Mazar's conclusion is based on the background of the family of Heber the Kenite, on the religious significance of terebinths,<sup>40</sup> as well as on the verse in the Song of Deborah, "In the days of

Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, caravans ceased and travelers kept to the byways" (Judg 5:6). This parallelization of Shamgar and Jael led the medieval Jewish commentator Rashi to note, "'In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael' indicates that even Jael was a judge in Israel in her days" (מלמד שאף יעל שפטה את ישראל בימיה).<sup>41</sup>

Judg 5:24 reads, "Blessed above women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of the women in the tent most blessed" (תברך מנשים יעל אשה חבר הקני מנשים באהל תברך). It is worth noting that Targum Jonathan translates this verse as follows:

והחברך מברכה נשיא מבתא יעל אחה חבר  
שלמאה כחדא מנשיא דמשמשן בבחי מדרשין תחברך.<sup>42</sup>

Let the blessed one of goodly women, Jael the wife of Heber, be blessed; her perfection is as one of the women who minister in the houses of learning. Blessed is she!

The root *šmš* means "to minister," "to officiate," "to wait upon." In Hebrew it is used of the high priest and the common priests in reference to their Yom Kippur functions in the temple (e.g., *m. Yoma* 7:5; *y. Yoma* 44b.40-42), to the high priest's exercising the office of high priest (e.g., *b. Yoma* 47a), to the functions of the segan, i.e., the adjutant high priest (e.g., *y. Yoma* 41a.3-4), and to other administrative functions (e.g., *y. Sotā* 24a.24-25). In the targums, *šmš* is also used to mean priestly activity. For example, for 1 Sam 1:3, "the two sons of Eli, Hophni, and Phineas, were priests of the Lord" (שני בני עלי חפני), Targum Jonathan reads, "the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, ministered before the Lord" (חריין בני עלי).<sup>43</sup> Seen against the background of the use of *šmš* to refer to priestly activity, the "women who minister (*dimšamšin*) in the houses of learning" of Targum Jonathan gains added interest, whereby the "houses of learning" remains an enigma. Doubtlessly some scholars will want to see the ministry of these women as consisting of sweeping the floor and rearranging the mats after the pupils and their learned teachers had finished the day's lesson, but such an interpretation would seem to be biased by a particular view of women. Could they have been teachers in the houses of learning?

In summary, Jael's family background, the fact that she is mentioned together with Shamgar (Judg 5:6) and the fact that Sisera sought refuge in her tent (Judg 4:17-21; 5:25-27) point to the possibility that Jael was a charismatic and perhaps even a priestly figure. Targum Jonathan's use of *šmš* could indicate



that even in later periods the remembrance of Jael as a priestly figure was still alive, although what ministering in the houses of learning could have meant is unclear.

The figure of Miriam should also be mentioned here. Miriam, who is called a "prophet" (*nēbi'ā*), is said to have led the Israelite women in religious dancing and singing (Exod 15:20-21). Num 12 reports on a struggle for spiritual influence and authority which pitted herself and Aaron against Moses. The prophet Micah also seems to view Miriam as a prophet: "I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Mic 6:4). These and further biblical references to Miriam (Num 20:1; 26:59; Deut 24:9; 1 Chr 5:29) are in need of a systematic study in order to ascertain what the exact nature of Miriam's cultic role may have been, whereby cultic does not necessarily imply priestly. Further, one must answer the difficult questions of dating, and thereby of original historical context (and of historicity), of the Miriam texts, before it is possible to describe adequately the development of the Miriam tradition.<sup>44</sup>

One later chapter of the Miriam tradition deserves at least brief mention. Philo of Alexandria reports on a group of women called the Therapeutrides (*De vita contempl.* 2), who devoted their lives to the study of scripture (*De vita contempl.* 28). These celibate women (*De vita contempl.* 68) lived in a type of dual monastery together with their male colleagues, the Therapeutai. Philo emphasizes that they flourished in his time (20 B.C.E.--after 40 C.E.) in many countries, including non-Greek ones (also in Palestine?), but that they were especially numerous in the area of Alexandria (*De vita contempl.* 21). According to Philo, the Therapeutrides and Therapeutai closed their sabbath meal by singing together (*De vita contempl.* 87-88):

Τούτο δὲ ἰδόντες καὶ παθόντες, ὁ λόγου καὶ ἐννοίας καὶ ἐλπίδος μεῖζον ἔργον ἦν, ἐνθουσιῶντές τε ἄνδρες ὁμοῦ καὶ γυναῖκες, εἰς γενόμενοι χορὸς, τοὺς εὐχαριστηρίους ὕμνους εἰς τὸν σωτῆρα θεὸν ᾄδον, ἐξάρχοντος τοῦ μὲν ἀνδράσι Μωυσεως τοῦ προφήτου, ταῖς δὲ γυναῖξι Μαριαμ τῆς προφήτιδος. Τούτῳ μάλιστα ἀπεικονισθεῖς ὁ τῶν θεραπευτῶν καὶ θεραπευτρίδων, μέλεσιν ἀντήχοις καὶ ἀντιφώνοις πρὸς βαρὺν ᾄχον τῶν ἀνδρῶν ὁ γυναικῶν ὁδὺς ἀνακιρνάμενος, ἐναρμόνιον συμφωνίαν ἀποτελεῖ καὶ μουσικὴν ὄντως.

This wonderful sight and experience (cf. Exod 14:26-29--the crossing of the Red Sea), an act transcending word and thought and hope, so filled with ecstasy both men and women that forming a single choir they sang hymns of thanksgiving to God their saviour, the men led by the prophet Moses and the women by the prophet Miriam. It is on this model above all that the choir of Therapeutai and Therapeutrides, note in

response to note and voice to voice, the treble of the women blending with the bass of the men, create an harmonious concert, music in the truest sense.

Thus, the ceremonial singing of the Therapeutrides and Therapeutai took as its model the singing of the Song of the Sea in Exod 15, in which the women were led by their prophet, Miriam, and the men by their prophet, Moses. From this text it is clear that the Miriam tradition played a role in the cultic life of the community.<sup>45</sup>

This very cursory survey of evidence for women in ancient Israel having performed religious functions that may have been priestly cannot replace the intensive philological and historical work required to answer the question whether there were in fact women priests in ancient Israel. The passages cited show, however, that the question is not as absurd as it seems at first sight. In spite of the overwhelmingly masculine nature of the ancient Israelite priesthood, there are scraps of scattered evidence which could indicate a more varied historical reality than we are accustomed to imagine. The Israelite priesthood, like other institutions in ancient Israel and in the Jewish Diaspora, was not monolithic. The above texts, as well as the three inscriptions in question, are themselves hints of a diversity in the institution of the priesthood.

In the narrow sense of priesthood, i.e., fulfilling cultic functions at a sacred site, Marin from Leontopolis in the Heliopolitan nome is the only one of the three women named in the inscriptions who could have been a temple functionary, for she is the only one to have lived in a city and in a time in which a Jewish temple existed. Cultic or priestly functions could have included singing psalms, providing musical accompaniment, performing priestly blessings, examining the priestly offerings and animals and performing sacrifices. While it may seem strange to some that a temple founded by the Jerusalem high priestly family, the Oniads, could ever have allowed the cultic service of women, we must remind ourselves how little we actually know of the temple of Onias, which did, after all, endure for nearly two and a half centuries. Could it be that practices such as allowing women to exercise cultic functions were among the reasons for the rabbis' hesitancy to recognize the sacrifices offered there as valid? Could it be that the Jews of Leontopolis, living in a country in which there were female priests,<sup>46</sup> had come, over the course of time, to accept as natural the cultic participation of Jewish women who claimed to be descendants of Aaron (or the

successors to Miriam?)? Our knowledge of the Jewish temple at Leontopolis is too meager to be able to give a definitive answer to these questions.

In addition to the temple of Onias, Josephus mentions other Jewish temples in Egypt. He quotes Onias IV as writing in a letter to Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra II (*Ant.* 13.3.1 § 66):

... καὶ πλείστους εὐρῶν παρὰ τὸ καθήκον ἔχοντας ἱερὰ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δύσοντας ἀλλήλοις, ὃ καὶ Αἰγυπτίους συμβέβηκε διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ τὸ περὶ τὰς θρησκείας οὐχ ὁμοδοξεῖν ...

... and I found that most of them have temples, contrary to what is proper, and that for this reason they are ill-disposed toward one another, as is also the case with the Egyptians because of the multitude of their temples and their varying opinions about the forms of worship . . .

Agatharchides of Cnidus (2nd C. B.C.E.) also speaks of Jewish temples in the plural (*hiera*),<sup>47</sup> as do Tacitus (1st C. C.E.; -- *templa*)<sup>48</sup> and Tertullian (2nd - 3rd C. C.E.; *templa*).<sup>49</sup> Whether *hiera/templa* in Agatharchides, Tacitus and Tertullian (and Josephus) means "temples" in the narrower sense of the term or simply "places of worship" is not absolutely certain.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps these terms were simply the equivalent of *proseuchai*, which was the usual term for synagogue in Egypt and also occurred elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the resistance to the possibility that *hiera/templa* meant "temples" in one or more of these texts probably has its origin in the belief that the existence of the Jerusalem temple excluded the possibility of other genuinely Jewish temples, that is, that the centralization of the cult was absolutely effective, a view which has little basis in the evidence.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps Marin served in one of these other Jewish *hiera* which Onias considered to be heterodox. Or perhaps she served in Onias's temple itself. According to the Josephus passage, the Jewish communities who supported these temples disagreed with each other concerning the proper form of worship. Could the temple service of women have been one of the points of the dispute, much as today Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative and Orthodox Jews are in disagreement as to whether women should be called up to read the Torah or should be ordained rabbis?

We cannot know precisely how Marin and her relatives and community understood the title *hierisa*. The existence of the Marin inscription should at least serve as a warning to any

scholar who would categorically deny that a woman may have functioned as a priest in a Jewish temple in Leontopolis. The mention in several ancient authors of Jewish "temples" should remind us just how little we know about Jewish worship in this period.

### 3. Hiereia/hierissa could denote a synagogue function

To some, synagogue function may seem as incredible an interpretation as cultic function. Is it not the case that the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 C.E. and the closing of the Jewish temple in Leontopolis in or shortly before 73 C.E. saw the end of priestly cultic service? Ancient sources show that the situation is not that simple. We know that priests continued to give the priestly blessing even after the destruction of the temple. (This practice has continued until our own day.)<sup>53</sup> The priestly blessing in the synagogue is a continuation of the priests' blessing of the people in the temple, a practice which is based on Num 6:22-27. Whether the priestly blessing in the synagogue was practiced already during the time of the Second Temple is not clear. There is evidence that the practice of having a priest be the first to read from the Torah during the synagogue service is an ancient one. M. Git. 5:8 reads:

ואלו דברים אמרו מפני דרכי שלום.  
כהן קורא ראשון, ואחריו לוי,  
ואחריו ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום.

These are the things which they ordained because of peace: a priest is the first to read (from the Torah) and after him a Levite, and after him a common Israelite, for the sake of peace.

Philo of Alexandria also attests to the priests being preferred as readers (Hypothetica 7.13):

Καὶ ὅττα συνέρχονται μὲν αἰεὶ καὶ συνεδρεῦουσιν μετ' ἀλλήλων· οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ σιωπῇ, πλὴν εἴ τι προσεπευφημῆσαι τοῖς ἀναγινωσκομένοις νομίζεται· τῶν ἱερῶν δὲ τις ὁ παρὼν ἢ τῶν γερόντων εἰς ἀναγινώσκει τοὺς ἱεροῦς νόμους αὐτοῖς καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ἐξηγεῖται μέχρι σχεδὸν δέιλης ὀψίας· καὶ τοῦδε ἀπολύονται τῶν τε νόμων τῶν ἱερῶν ἐμπείρως ἔχοντες καὶ πολὺ ὁ πρὸς εὐσέβειαν ἐπιδεδωκότες.

And indeed they do always assemble and sit together, most of them in silence except when it is the practice to add something to signify approval of what is read. But some priest who is present or one of the elders reads the holy

laws to them and expounds them point by point till about the late afternoon, when they depart having gained both expert knowledge of the holy laws and considerable advance in piety.

According to this description of a sabbath service at the time of Philo, which is presumably a reflection of Alexandrian practice, a priest or elder reads a scriptural passage and then delivers a sermon on it. In this passage, Philo is referring to general Jewish practice and not to one of the Jewish sects. The practice presupposed here is different from the rabbinic ideal expressed in m. Git. 5:8. According to Philo, one person reads the entire passage, whereas m. Git. 5:8 ordains that more than one person should read. Philo does not state that the priest has preference over the elder, but the priest is mentioned first. Perhaps a priest, if present, was given preference, and otherwise one of the elders read and preached.

In addition to the ancient evidence for these two priestly practices in the synagogue, i.e., the priestly blessing and the preference for priestly readers, the Theodosian Code contains a rather surprising reference to priests as synagogue functionaries. The word "priest" (in the plural: hiereis, used as a foreign word in the Latin text) occurs only once in reference to Jews in the Theodosian Code (16.8.4, given on December 1, 331):

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.<sup>54</sup>

The same Augustus to the priests, heads of the synagogues, fathers of the synagogues, and all those 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.<sup>55</sup>

This law has been discussed above in the context of mothers/fathers of the synagogues<sup>56</sup> and of heads of the synagogue.<sup>57</sup>

Important for the present context is the inclusion of hiereis among others who serve in the synagogue, including heads of the synagogues and fathers of the synagogue. There are two possible explanations for the Roman lawgiver's having included hiereis in this law:

1. Christians, in writing the law, used the general Christian and pagan term for official religious functionary, not realizing that Jewish priests were not synagogue functionaries.

2. The authors of the law were well-informed of the inner workings of the synagogue, and this law is therefore an attestation of the Jewish priest's having been a synagogue functionary in this period.

In support of the first possibility, the increasing use of hiererus for Christian office-holders should be mentioned. In a period in which Christians had come to use the specifically cultic title hiererus to refer to deacons, presbyters and bishops,<sup>58</sup> hiererus could have taken on the general meaning of "religious functionary." Thus, hiereris may reflect Christian, and not Jewish, usage. A modern parallel would be the use of "Islamic priest" to describe a mullah, which reflects the religious background of Western journalists, rather than Islamic usage. The position of hiereris, i.e., first in the list, could support this interpretation: the authors first employ the term which they consider to be the general term for "religious functionary," and then proceed to the specific titles of synagogue office known to them.

In support of the second explanation, one must note that the Christian authors had a deep enough knowledge of synagogue organization to employ two terms not in use in the Christian church: archisynagogi and patres synagogarum, although archisynagōgos would have been known to them from the New Testament.<sup>59</sup> Further, the imperial court writers would certainly not have had an interest in liberating more persons than necessary from the corporal duties. Their interest would rather have been to limit the liberation to those persons who were clearly synagogue functionaries.

It is difficult to decide which is the better explanation, particularly in the light of the fact that the term hiereris, as applied to Jews, occurs only once in the Theodosian Code. Although the second explanation is probably more convincing, it seems more prudent simply to let the two explanations both stand as good possibilities.

Evidence for special recognition of priests in non-temple worship services can be found at Qumran, where priests, together with the elders or the Levites and the elders, are commanded to sit in front (1 QS 6:8; 1QM 13:1). One must note, however, that the people of Qumran probably viewed their worship service as a substitute temple service, while it is not clear that synagogue congregants did. Further, according to the Manual of Discipline, there are to be three priests in the Council of the Community (1 QS 8:1). The Damascus Document ordains that of the ten judges

of the community, four must be from the tribe of Levi and Aaron (CD 10:4-5).<sup>60</sup>

This scattered evidence for priests having roles in the synagogue or worship service as synagogue functionaries should not be misunderstood as evidence for priests as synagogue functionaries, but Philo, from the period before the destruction of the temple; the rabbinic references to the priestly blessing and the first Torah reader's being a priest, which can be dated back to at least the redaction of the Mishnah in the early third century; and the fourth-century Theodosian Code reference to Jewish priests in the context of synagogue officials (which may not be reliable, however) do show that several streams within Judaism seem to have given priests certain rights and roles within the non-temple worship service.<sup>61</sup>

Does any of this mean that Jewish women of priestly caste had special roles in the worship service? This is by no means immediately obvious. Our starting point was the three hiereia/hierissa inscriptions. If male priests could, by virtue of their priesthood, exercise certain roles in the non-temple worship service, is it possible that female priests could likewise have performed certain functions in the worship service? There are certain hindrances to an acceptance of this proposition. For example, the male, i.e., exclusive, language of Num 6:23 ("Say to Aaron and his sons"; דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־בָּנָיו; LXX: Ἀδελφῶν Ααρων καὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτοῦ), was probably understood by all later exegetes to mean that men--but not women--of priestly caste are to recite the priestly blessing. The rabbis usually take exclusive biblical language to mean that women are in fact excluded.<sup>62</sup> This tradition of interpretation should be taken much more seriously by those of today who argue that "sons" really includes "daughters" and "man" really includes "woman." Against the background of the exclusion of women where the bible uses male terminology, it is surprising to find a rabbinic example of the exact opposite: taking the biblical "son" (bēn) in Deut 25:5 to mean "son or daughter." The context is the woman whose husband dies without a son and whose brother-in-law is therefore required to marry her in order "that his (i.e., the dead husband's) name not be blotted out of Israel" (Deut 25:6). The rabbis ruled that if the deceased husband had a daughter, then the brother-in-law was not required to marry the woman (b. B. Bat. 109a). Perhaps this inclusive tradition is an old one, for the LXX has sperma for bēn, and to paidion for habbēkōr (Deut 25:5-6). In sum, it is likely that most streams of Judaism

would have taken Num 6:23 ("sons of Aaron") to mean that only male priests should recite the priestly blessing, but the extension of "sons" to include "daughters" would not be a total anomaly in the history of Jewish exegesis.

Is it possible that priestly women could have been preferred readers of the Torah? Again, to most scholars of Judaism, this proposition sounds absurd, largely because of the general view that women were not allowed to read the Torah in the ancient synagogue at all. Can ancient sources shed any light on this question? An important passage is t. Meg. 4.11 (Zuck. 226):

והכל עולין למנין שבעה, אפילו אשה, אפילו קטן.  
אין מביאין את האשה לקרוא לרבים.<sup>63</sup>

Everyone can be counted in the minyan of the seven (who read the Torah in the worship service), even a woman, even a minor, but one does not bring a woman up to read to the congregation.

The Babylonian Talmud (Meg. 23a) has:

חנאו רבנן הכל עולין למנין שבעה,  
ואפילו קטן, ואפילו אשה, אבל אמרו חכמים,  
אשה לא תקרא בחורה מפני כבוד צבור.

Our rabbis taught: Everyone can be counted in the minyan of the seven, even a minor, even a woman; but the sages said: A woman does not read from the Torah due to the honor of the congregation.

It is clear that these texts forbid women from reading the Torah to the congregation. The enigma is that if they are clearly forbidden to read, why are women included in the quorum of the seven in the first place? Minors, who are also included, are in fact allowed to read (see m. Meg. 4:6), a practice which later receded with the rise of the bar-mitzvah. Why are women included here at all? Ismar Elbogen suggests that women were originally allowed to read, but that by the Tannaitic period, they were already excluded.<sup>64</sup> This would mean that the rabbinic inclusion of women in the quorum of the seven attests to a more ancient tradition, later suppressed, according to which women were allowed to read from the Torah in public.

Why the Babylonian Talmud gives the "honor of the congregation" as a reason for not allowing women to read is unclear. A possible parallel case could be a woman, a slave or a minor reading the Egyptian Hallel (Pss 113-118) to a man who is not able to read or to recite it from memory himself. The Mishnah ordains that such a man should repeat it after the woman,



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.

Εἰουδας  
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 Βυβλιτος.

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 hiericus/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 hiericus inscriptions have been found. In fact, other than the Roman and Beth She'arim inscriptions, few Jewish inscriptions with hiericus 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 hiericus 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 hiericia/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**