

**FROM DURA
TO SEPPHORIS:
STUDIES IN JEWISH ART AND
SOCIETY IN LATE ANTIQUITY**

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Female leadership in the ancient synagogue

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Jewish women in the ancient Mediterranean lived side by side with communities in which women carried out religious functions, including ritual functions, for example, as high priestesses of the imperial cult and female functionaries in the Isis religion.¹ Similarly, Christian women at this time acted as apostles, prophets, teachers, stewards, deacons, church widows, elders and bishops.² Did Jewish women also function as religious and community leaders?³ If we considered only Rabbinic sources, we would have the impression that Jewish women did not, but the evidence from ancient inscriptions shows that Judaism resembled other religious and ethnic groups in recognizing women's contributions. In what follows, I analyze the epigraphical evidence for each title and ascertain the range of meaning that each title may have had.

1. Leadership titles borne by Jewish women during the Roman and Byzantine periods

A. Head of the synagogue

A Greek inscription (probably 2nd c. C.E.) from Smyrna, Ionia, reads:⁴

Rufina, a Jew, head of the synagogue (*archisynagōgos*), 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 so, 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.

Rufina, a woman of some wealth, acts here on her own behalf, without mention of a husband.

The following Greek inscription (4th/5th c.), comes from Kisamos in Crete:⁵

- 1 For an overview, see R. S. Kraemer, *Her share of the blessings: women's religions among pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Oxford 1992) 80-92; ead. (ed.), *Maenads, martyrs, matrons, monastics: a sourcebook on women's religions in the Greco-Roman world* (Philadelphia 1988) 207-17. For the Isis religion, see F. Mora, *Prosopografia Isiaca* (Leiden 1990); and S. K. Heyob, *The cult of Isis among women in the Graeco-Roman world* (Leiden 1975). For the Roman imperial cult, see esp. S. J. Friesen, *Twice neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the cult of the Flavian imperial family* (Leiden 1993) 81-92; and R. A. Kearsley, "Asiarchs, archiereis, and the archiereiai of Asia," *GRBS* 27 (1986) 183-92. See also the very important recent work by R. van Bremen, *The limits of participation: women and civic life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods* (Amsterdam 1996). Van Bremen warns against attributing political power to the women who held a range of civic and religious titles in the Greek cities of the East, especially Asia Minor. She does conclude, however, that they carried out cultic rôles in public.
- 2 See especially the fine comprehensive study by U. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum* (Göttingen 1996). See also E. S. Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the scriptures* vol. 2, *A feminist commentary* (New York 1994); K. J. Torjesen, *When women were priests* (San Francisco 1993); A. Jensen, *God's self-confident daughters* (Louisville, KY 1996); Kraemer, *Her share* (supra n.1) 174-90; ead., *Maenads* (supra n.1) 221-42; and E. S. Fiorenza, *In memory of her: a feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (New York 1983).
- 3 This article is an update and summary of my *Women leaders in the ancient synagogue: inscriptional evidence and background issues* (Brown Judaic Studies 36, Chico 1982). For reviews and discussions of that work, see the appendix below. See also earlier literature supporting the view that these women had actual leadership functions: A. T. Kraabel, *Judaism in Western Asia Minor under the Roman empire, with a preliminary study of the Jewish community at Sardis, Lydia* (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 1968) 43-50; D. Irvin, "The ministry of women in the Early Church: the archaeological evidence," *Duke Divinity School Review* 45 (1980) esp. 76-79; S. Cohen, "Women in the synagogues of antiquity," *Conservative Judaism* 34.2 (1980) 23-29; J. and L. Robert, *REG* 77 (1964) no. 413; and L. Robert, *Hellenica* 1 (1940) 26-27. For the view that these titles were honorific, see esp. T. Rajak and D. Noy, "Archisynagogoi: office, title and social status in the Greco-Jewish synagogue," *JRS* 83 (1993) 75-93.
- 4 *CIJ* 741; *IGR* vol. 4, 1452; Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 218, no. 84. See P. W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish epitaphs: an introductory survey of a millennium of Jewish funerary epigraphy (300 BCE-700 CE)* (Kampen 1991) 59-60.
- 5 *CIJ* 731c (Kastelli Kissamou, Crete); Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 218, no. 85; first published by A. C.

Sophia of Gortyn, elder (*presbytera*) and head of the synagogue (*archisynagōgissa*) of Kisamos (lies) here. The memory of the righteous one forever. Amen.

Sophia bears two titles. No husband is mentioned.

A donative inscription (probably 6th c.), carved into the top of a chancel screen post, comes from Myndos in Caria (Turkey), and reads:⁶

[From Th]eopempte, [he]ad of the synagogue (*archisynagōgos* or *archisynagōgissa* — the title appears in abbreviated form: [*ar*]chisyn), and her son Eusebios.

This inscription commemorates Theopempte's donation to her synagogue. The presence of the son indicates that Theopempte was or had been married, but his lack of a title shows that if his father bore a title, it did not automatically pass on to the son.

A Greek inscription found at the beginning of this century in the town of Nevsehir, Cappadocia, Turkey, is now lost. Apparently, the first line of the inscription is missing:⁷

[Tomb of (female name)] the Jew, the i[n]fant head of the synagogue (*archisynagōgisa*). May she sleep in peace.

If the titles of these women were functional, what might their work in the synagogue have entailed?⁸ From Jewish and Christian literary sources and Jewish inscriptions, we can obtain a rough outline of the office of head of the synagogue. In reconstructing each of the offices presented in this article I draw upon a wide variety of sources from a broad chronological range that suggest various functions. I do not thereby exclude regional differences or chronological development. Heads of the synagogue seem to have had responsibility for inviting members of the congregation to read from Scripture⁹ and to preach.¹⁰ Exhorting and teaching,¹¹ as well as, together with the *presbyters*, collecting money to be sent to the Patriarch,¹² occur in the ancient sources as activities of the *archisynagōgos*. The *archisynagōgos* seems to have been the leading synagogue functionary, judging by the fact that the title occurs at the head of ancient lists of synagogue officials,¹³ as well as by the etymology of the word itself (*archos*, chief, ruler). The evidence suggests that more than one *archisynagōgos* could serve in a synagogue at a time.¹⁴ The method of selection is not clear. The existence of *archisynagōgoi* who were sons of

Bandy in *Hesperia* 32 (1963) 227-29, pl. 54, no.1 (photo). See also van der Horst (supra n.4) 37-38, who notes that the phrase "the memory of the righteous one forever" is an allusion to Prov. 10:7 and that other Jewish epitaphs also allude to or cite that verse. The same point is made by J. W. van Henten, "A Jewish epitaph in a literary text: 4 Macc 17:8-10," in J. W. van Henten and P. W. van der Horst (edd.), *Studies in early Jewish epigraphy* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 21, Leiden 1994) 51, n.29.

6 CIIJ 756; Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 218, n. 86; first published by T. Reinach, "La pierre de Myndos," *REJ* 42 (1901) 1-6 (photo).

7 First published in the Karamanli language by G. Mavridis, in *The scientific, literary, and technical illustrated almanac of 1913, especially for Anatolian Greeks, published by the 'Papa Giorgios' Association of the inhabitants of Nevsehir* (1913). I thank V. N. Makrides, who kindly alerted me to the existence of these inscriptions, and C. Thomas, who will republish them and whose translation I am using here.

8 On the meaning of *archisynagōgos*, see esp. van der Horst (supra n.4) 92-93. On female heads of synagogues, see *ibid.* 105-6. Space does not permit citing all of the relevant literature for the meaning of this and other titles borne by women. In addition to the literature cited thus far, see the survey discussion of *archisynagōgos* in E. Schürer, *The history of the Jewish people in the age of Jesus Christ* (rev. edn., Edinburgh 1987) vol. 2, 433-36.

9 T Megillah 4:21 (ed. Zuckerman, 227; sometimes numbered as 3:21).

10 Acts 13:15.

11 Luke 13:10-17; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 137; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.18.2; see also Acts 18:12-17; as well as BT Pesahim 49b, which documents that a synagogue head was learned in the law.

12 CTh 16.8.14 (= A. Linder, *The Jews in Roman imperial legislation* [Detroit 1987] 216-17), 16.8.17 (*ibid.* 224-25).

13 CIIJ 766, 803, 1404.

14 Mark 5:22; Acts 13:15; CIIJ 766, 803.

*archisynagōgoi*¹⁵ and of infant *archisynagōgoi*¹⁶ raises the possibility that the office was hereditary, but inscriptions mentioning an *archisynagōgos*-for-life¹⁷ suggest that others did not hold the office for life and that the latter were therefore selected in a way other than by inheritance. Wealthy persons in Roman society demonstrated their power and thereby gained influence through beneficence. Donations to the synagogue may well have accompanied — or even have been the prerequisite for — appointment as head of the synagogue (see, e.g., Theopempte above), although we also know of many donors who bore no titles. The Patriarch may possibly have had a role in the selection.¹⁸

In the past, scholars generally interpreted all of the titles attributed to women as honorific. However, most scholars now writing on Jewish women who bore the title "head of the synagogue" deem it to have been a functional title.¹⁹

B. Leader

A *columella* (also called *kioniskos*, i.e., a small column, flat on top and without a capital, used as a gravestone) embellished with a seven-branched menorah, from Thebes in Phthiotis in Thessaly, contains the following Greek inscription of uncertain date:²⁰

Tomb of Peristeria, leader (*archēgisa*).

MENORAH

One cannot be precise in defining the exact meaning of Peristeria's title.²¹

C. Elder

In 8 Greek inscriptions women bear the title *presbytera* and in one a woman most likely bears the title *presbytis*.²²

A Greek inscription (no earlier than the 4th or 5th c.) from Bizye in Thrace bears an *etrog* (a citron fruit liturgically used during Sukkot) and a seven-branched menorah, and reads:²³

ETHROG MENORAH

Tomb of Rebeka, the elder (*presbytera*), who has fallen asleep.

Three inscriptions found in a Jewish catacomb in Venusia, i.e., Venosa in Apulia in S Italy (in the province of Basilicata), mention Jewish women elders.²⁴ They probably all date from the 5th c.

Tomb of Beronike (or: Beronikiane) elder (*presbitere*) and daughter of Ioses.

15 *JWE* 1.70 (= *CIJ* 584); *CIJ* 1404.

16 *JWE* 1.53 (= *CIJ* 587) and the inscription from Nevsehir mentioned above.

17 *CIJ* 744, 766.

18 Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom* 15; cf. *CTh* 16.8.15 (= Linder [supra n.12] 220-22), which refers to the Patriarch's ability to appoint other officials.

19 See Appendix below.

20 *CIJ* 696b; Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 218, no. 87; first published by G. Sotiriou and H. Riemann, *AA* 52 (1937) 148; see also van der Horst (supra n.4) 106.

21 L. Robert considers the title *archēgis(s)a* to be the female equivalent of *archēgos*, which occurs only once in the Jewish inscriptions (*CIJ* 731g), but which seems to have its Latin equivalent in *principalis* (id. [supra n.3] 26-27; *CIJ* 681). In the Septuagint, *archēgos* translates a number of Hebrew words meaning "leader", "chief", or "official", among them *rosh* (Ex. 6:14; Num. 13:3, 14:4; etc.), *qatzin* (Judg. 11:6, 11[B]; etc.) and *otzar* (Judg. 5:15[B]; 1 Chron. 26:26; etc.).

22 On female elders, see van der Horst (supra n.4) 106-7.

23 *CIJ* 692; Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 219, no. 88; first published by R. M. Dawkins and F. W. Hasluck, "Inscriptions from Bizye," *ABSA* 12 (1905-6) 179-80, no. 5 (facsimile).

24 On the Venosan Jewish inscriptions, see D. Noy, "The Jewish communities of Leontopolis and Venosa," in van Henten and van der Horst (supra n.5) 172-82; *JWE* 1.42-116; L. Levi, "Le iscrizione della 'catacomba nuova' di Venosa," *Rassegne mensile di Israel* 31 (1965) 358-64; B. Lifshitz, "Les juifs à Venosa," *Rfil* 90, n.s. 40 (1962) 367-71; H. J. Leon, "The Jews of Venusia," *JQR* n.s. 44 (1953-54) 267-84; F. Lenormant, "La catacombe juive de Venosa," *REJ* 6 (1883) 200-7.

The second, a Greek epitaph that the inscriber painted in red on the plaster of the wall of the tomb, reads:²⁵

Tomb of Mannine, elder (*presbitere*), daughter of Longinus, father, granddaughter of Faustinus, father, (aged) 38 y[ea]rs.

Noy notes that Mannine “appears to be buried in her own family’s arcosolium, whether or not she was married”.²⁶ Mannine’s title, “elder”, differs from that of her father and grandfather, which is “father”, suggesting that she had not inherited her title from Longinus.²⁷

The third inscription, painted in red on the plaster above the grave, is Greek with *shalom* at the end in Hebrew, and reads:²⁸

Tomb of Faustina, elder (*presbitere*). Peace.

Both Jewish and Christian women held offices in this region of S Italy in late antiquity. Perhaps the Venosan Jewish community had a particular tradition of granting women official functions. From Venosa alone, we find three women bearing the title “elder”, one with the title “fatheress”,²⁹ and one with the title “mother”.³⁰ At just the same time, Pope Gelasius wrote a letter to the bishops of Lucania (known now as Basilicata, the provenance of the Venosan inscriptions commemorating female office holders), Bruttium (Calabria), and Sicily, complaining about Christian women officiating at the altar and participating in offices assigned to men. Fourth- and 5th-c. inscriptions memorializing female Christian elders in Sicily and S Italy confirm Pope Gelasius’s complaints.³¹

Recent excavations at Nocera Superiore in southern Italy have yielded two Greek grave inscriptions from the 6th c. that confirm that Jewish women bore titles independently of their husbands. A marble block commemorates the husband, whose name is separated from his title by the carving of a menorah:

Pedeneious MENORAH the scribe (*grammateus*).

A second inscription commemorates his wife:³²

Myrina, the elder (*presbytera*), wife of Pedoneious. MENORAH

A grave inscription (4th/5th c. or possibly later), found on a *loculus* (a burial space for one person) in a Jewish catacomb in Oea, Tripolitania, consists of three columns separated by palm branches and placed beneath a menorah and a *lulav* (palm branch used ritually during the festival of Sukkot):³³

] MENORAH LULAV [				
Tomb of Makaria	PALM	Mazauzala,	PALM	Rest.
(or: the blessed)	BRANCH	elder (<i>presbeterēsa</i>	BRANCH	God is with the
		[sic]). She		holy and the
		lived [...] years.		righteous ones.

25 *JlWE* 1.62; *CIJ* 590; *CIL* IX 6230; Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 219, no. 88. The Greek of the text is heavily latinized. See also van der Horst (supra n.4) 106-7.

26 *JlWE* 1.62.

27 See R. S. Kraemer, “A new inscription from Malta and the question of women elders in the diaspora Jewish communities,” *HThR* 78 (1985) 433. Kraemer also notes that, in antiquity, many people would have viewed 38 years as old, which means that *presbitere* (i.e., *presbytera*) could have referred to her age. On the other hand, numerous Jewish inscriptions commemorate persons far older than 38.

28 *JlWE* 1.71; *CIJ* 597; *CIL* IX 6209; Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 219, no. 88.

29 *JlWE* 1.63; *CIJ* 606: Alexsanra, *pateressa*.

30 *JlWE* 1.116; *CIJ* 619d: Faustina, *mē]tēr*.

31 See Eisen (supra n.2) 129-37; see also *JlWE* 1.59.

32 First published by M. Conticello De’ Spagnolis (*non vidi*).

33 *SEG* 27 (1977) no. 1201; Y. Le Bohec, “Inscriptions juives et judaïsantes de l’Afrique romaine,” *AntAfr* 17 (1981) 173, no. 4; Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 219, no. 88; first published by P. Romanelli, “Una piccola catacomba giudaica di Tripoli,” *QAL* 9 (1977) 111-18 (drawing).

A Greek grave inscription (4th/5th c.) from Malta refers to a male gerusiarch and to his wife, who was an elder:³⁴

[Male name] gerousiarch, lover of the commandments, and Eulogia, elder (*presbytera*), his spouse.

This inscription further demonstrates that women could have different titles than their husbands and thereby calls into question the theory that women derived their titles from their husbands. The husband, as gerusiarch, was apparently the presiding officer over a council of elders, while his wife Eulogia herself was an elder.

Finally, a Greek inscription (probably 3rd or 4th c.) from the Monteverde catacomb in Rome bears a seven-branched menorah:³⁵

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

MENORAH

Presbytis (Greek: ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΝΙΣ) should probably be read as *presbytis* (Greek: ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΙΣ) or *presbytes* (Greek: ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΗΣ). Within early Christianity, the title *presbytis* (in addition to *presbytera*) could refer to a female office holder.³⁶ The literary and epigraphical sources for the title *presbyteros*³⁷ yield an outline, albeit shadowy, of the possible range of functions of an elder. The Roman lawgiver appears to have viewed Jewish elders as primarily religious functionaries, parallel to Christian clerics.³⁸ Functions included collecting money in the synagogue to be sent to the Patriarch,³⁹ activities related to the worship service⁴⁰ as well as judicial activities.⁴¹ The evidence points to councils of elders.⁴²

D. Mother of the synagogue

In 5 inscriptions a woman bears the title "mother" or "mother of the synagogue", and one inscription speaks of a "fatheress" (*pateressa*). All are from Italy. A Latin inscription (3rd/4th c.) from Rome, known since the 16th c., was carved in a sarcophagus that is now lost. A *shofar*,

34 JIWE 1.163; Kraemer (supra n.27) 431-38; first published by A. Ferrua, "Antichità cristiane: le catacombe di Malta," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 100.3 (1949) 505-15 (inscription on 513-14); G. H. R. Horsley, *New documents illustrating early Christianity* (North Ryde, NSW 1989) vol. 5, 149, no. 122; M. Buhagier, *Late Roman and Byzantine catacombs and related burial places in the Maltese Islands* (BAR S302, Oxford 1986) 121, 394, no. 14, 403 fig. 119a.

35 JIWE 2.24; CIJ 400 (photo); J. G. Westerholz (ed.), *The Jewish presence in ancient Rome* (Jerusalem 1995) 111, no. 22 (photo); Kraemer, *Maenads* (supra n.1) 219, no. 88; N. Müller in N. A. Bees (ed.), *Die Inschriften der jüdischen Katacombe am Monteverde zu Rom* (Leipzig 1919) 55, no. 48, first published by G. S. Graziosi, "La nuova sala giudaica nel Museo Cristiano Lateranense," *Nuovo Bulletino di Archeologia Cristiana* 21 (1915) 31, no. 51.

36 See Eisen (supra n.2) 112-37.

37 On "elder", see esp. van der Horst (supra n.4) 91, 106-7; Schürer (supra n.8) vol. 2, 427-33; S. Applebaum, "The organization of the Jewish communities in the diaspora," in S. Safrai and M. Stern (edd.), *The Jewish people in the first century* (Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, Philadelphia 1974) vol. 1.1, 491-95; G. Bornkamm, "Presbys, presbyteros, etc.," *TWNT* 6 (1959) 651-83 or *TDNT* 6 (1968) 651-80; C. H. Roberts, "Elders: a note," *JThS* n.s. 26 (1975) 403-5; A. E. Harvey, "Elder," *JThS* n.s. 25 (1974) 318-32, esp. 320-26; H. Zucker, *Studien zur jüdischen Selbstverwaltung im Altertum* (Berlin 1936) 173-90; S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer* (Berlin 1922) 116-17, 147-48, 167, 246, 307, 393; J. Juster, *Les juifs dans l'empire romain* (Paris 1914) vol. 1, 440-47; H. Lietzmann, "Zur altchristlichen Verfassungsgeschichte," *ZNW* 50, n.s. 20 (1914) 97-153, esp. 113-32.

38 CTh 16.8.13 (= Linder [supra n.12] 202-4).

39 CTh 16.8.14 (= ibid. 216-17), 16.8.17 (ibid. 224-25).

40 *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Novellae* 146.1 (= ibid. 402-11).

41 CTh 16.8.2 (= ibid. 267-72); CJ 1.9.15 (= ibid. 267-72). For the Rabbinic definition of an elder as a scholar, albeit not with reference to synagogue elders, see BT Qiddushin 32b.

42 JIWE 1.181 (= CIJ 663), CIJ 731 f., 803, 1404; Luke 7:3-5; Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-29; 16:4; 21:18; James 5:14; 1QS 6:8-9; cf. the benches in the Sardis synagogue; A. T. Kraabel, "The diaspora synagogue," in *ANRW* II.19.1 (1979) 477-510, esp. 487.

lulav and seven-branched menorah decorate the epitaph:⁴³

Veturia Paulla (or: Pauc[u]lla), placed in her eternal home, who lived 86 years, 6 months, a proselyte of 16 years, under the name of Sara, mother of the synagogues (*mater synagogarum*) of Campus and Volumnius. In peace her sleep!

SHOFAR LULAV MENORAH

A marble sarcophagus fragment from Trastevere, Rome, contains a Greek inscription (probably 3rd c.) that should most likely be reconstructed to mention a mother of the synagogue. Three small examples of an ivy-leaf decoration (*hedera*) embellish the stone:⁴⁴

Here lies [Mar-? Jul-?]ia Marcel[la, mo]ther of the syna[gogue] ([*mē*]tēr syna[gōgēs]) of the Auguste[sians.] May [she?] be remembered (?). HEDERA [... I]n peace h[e]r [sle]ep! HEDERA

A Greek inscription (perhaps 3rd or 4th c.) from Vigna Randanini in Rome should probably also be reconstructed to mention a mother of the synagogue. The marble fragment bears a seven-branched menorah:⁴⁵

MENORAH Here lies Simp[licia, mother (?)] of the
[sy]nagogue ([*mētēr sy*]nagōgēs), who loved her
husband. [Husband's name and office]
of the synagogue to his own wife.

A Latin inscription (4th c. or earlier) on a limestone tablet from Venetia in Brescia has been known since at least the 15th c.⁴⁶

To Coelia Paterna, mother of the synagogue (*mater synagogae*) of the Brescians.

A Greek epitaph (5th c.) on a marble plaque from Venosa attests to a mother, but we do not know whether she was the mother of a synagogue, of the Jewish community, or of the city:⁴⁷

Here lies Faustina, mother (*mētēr*), wife of Auxanios, father and patron of the city.

An epitaph (5th or early 6th c.) from Venosa contains the unusual title "fatheress". The scribe first traced the letters on wet plaster and then painted them in red. The Latin inscription closes with *shalom* in Hebrew:⁴⁸

Here lies Alexsanra, "fatheress" (*pateressa*), who l[iv]ed approximately [. . .] Peace!

The title *pateressa*, which could mean "fatheress" of the synagogue or of the Jewish community, is simply the feminine of *pater*.

In addition to the epigraphical evidence, one Christian literary work, namely *De alteratione ecclesiae et synagogae*, refers to Jewish mothers of the synagogue.⁴⁹ This document attests that the title *mater synagogae* was known well beyond the Jewish community.

43 JIWE 2.577; CIJ 523; CIL VI 29756; A. Konikoff, *Sarcophagi from the Jewish catacombs of ancient Rome* (Stuttgart 1986) 11-14, pl. 2 (photo of 16th c. manuscript). JIWE 2.577 provides references to the earliest attestations of this inscription. See also T. Rajak, "Reading the Jewish catacombs of Rome," in van Henten and van der Horst (supra n.5) 235; van der Horst (supra n.4) 72, 107, 109-10. On the suggestion "Pauc[u]lla," see G. Mussies, "Jewish personal names in some non-literary sources," in van Henten and van der Horst, *ibid.* 260.

44 JIWE 2.542; CIJ 496 (photo); first published by G. Gatti, "Nuove scoperte nella città e nel suburbio," *NSc* 1900, 88. See also Konikoff, *ibid.* 54-55.

45 JIWE 2.251; CIJ 166 (photo); first published by R. Garrucci, *Cimitero degli antichi Ebrei scoperto recentemente in Vigna Randanini* (Rome 1862) 52. The stone is now more damaged than when it was first published.

46 JIWE 1.5; CIJ 639; CIL V 4411; A. Garzetti, *Inscriptiones Italiae* (Rome 1984) X.5.1, 135-36, no. 204 (photo). See also G. L. Gregori, *Brescia romana: ricerche di prosopografia e storia sociale* (Vetera 7, Rome 1990) vol. 1, 74. JIWE 1.5 provides references to the earliest attestations of this inscription.

47 JIWE 1.116; CIJ 619d.

48 JIWE 1.63; CIJ 606; CIL IX 6231. See also van der Horst (supra n.4) 107-8. Noy and others correct the name to Alexsanr(i)a or Alexsan(d)ra. On principle, I prefer not to standardize ancient names.

49 PL 42.1134.

Scholars in the past generally assumed that both "mother of the synagogue" and "father of the synagogue" were honorific titles.⁵⁰ Krauss's argumentation for this is specific: "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".⁵¹ If one does not use gender as the primary criterion for distinguishing between honorific and functional titles, there are good reasons to take mother/father of the synagogue as a title of actual leadership. A law promulgated in the year 331 frees a number of Jewish functionaries from the corporal duties of the empire: "priests (*hiereis*), heads of synagogues (*archisynagogi*), fathers of synagogues (*patres synagogarum*) and the others who serve in synagogues (*ceteri, qui synagogis deserviunt*)".⁵² If the title *pater synagogae* was purely honorific, it is puzzling to find it in this list. A further piece of evidence for the functionality of the title is a Latin inscription from Castel Porziano in S Italy.⁵³ While there is no reason from within either the inscriptions mentioning mothers of the synagogue or those mentioning fathers of the synagogue⁵⁴ to view the titles as honorific, it is quite difficult to ascertain precisely which functions they might have implied. We will have to be content with counting the mothers and fathers of the synagogue among the top officials without knowing their exact duties. Two further titles attributed to women, "patron" (or "president") and "priest" (or "woman of priestly class"), may or may not have designated functions or honors in the ancient synagogue.⁵⁵

50 E.g., E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (4th edn., Leipzig 1909) vol. 3, 88-89; Juster (supra n.37) vol. 1, 448-49; H. J. Leon, *The Jews of ancient Rome* (Philadelphia 1960) 194; cf. Frey, *CIJ* p.XCVI, who is forced (by the evidence I have cited) to conclude that the title must imply an active rôle in administration, but the existence of mothers of the synagogue sways his interpretation in the direction of charity administration.

51 Krauss (supra n.37) 166.

52 *CTh* 16.8.4 (= Linder [supra n.12] 134-38).

53 *JWE* 1.18 (= *CIJ* 533), in which a man designated *pater* seems to be among the three main leaders of the community.

54 *JWE* 2.288 (= *CIJ* 88), *ibid.* 560 (= *CIJ* 319), *ibid.* 578 (= *CIJ* 509), *ibid.* 584 (= *CIJ* 536), etc.

55 An inscription on a marble block found in Aphrodisias lists the names and titles of the most prominent members of the Jewish community, particularly those connected with what may have been a soup kitchen or a burial society. Suggestions for the date of the inscription include the 3rd c. (J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and god-fearers at Aphrodisias* [Cambridge 1987] 20-22) or the 5th or even 6th c. (M. P. Bonz, "The Jewish donor inscriptions from Aphrodisias: are they both 3rd-c., and who are the *theosebeis*?" *HSCP* 96 [1994] 281-99, esp. 285-91). Lines 9-10 of the inscription read: "Iael, president (or: patron; Greek: *prostates*) and [her] son Iosouas, archon (?)", on which see B. Brooten, "'Iael *prostates*' in the Jewish donative inscription from Aphrodisias," in B. Pearson *et al.* (edd.), *The future of Early Christianity: Festschrift for Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis 1991) 149-62; and *ead.*, "The gender of *Iael* in the Jewish inscription from Aphrodisias," in H. W. Attridge, J. J. Collins and T. H. Tobin (edd.), *Of scribes and scrolls ... presented to John Strugnell on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday* (Lanham, MD 1990) 163-73.

In four inscriptions women bear the title *hiëreia*, *hieris(s)a*, or *hierisē*. The oldest, a Greek epitaph on a stele, dated to 27 B.C.E. is from Tell el-Yahudiyyeh in Lower Egypt: "O Marin, priestess (*hierisa*), good and a friend to all, causing pain to no one and loving of your relatives, farewell! (She died at the age of) approximately 50 (years), in the third year of Caesar (Augustus), on the 13th day of Payni (= June 7, 27 B.C.E.)" (W. Horbury and D. Noy, *Jewish inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* [Cambridge 1992] 84; *CIJ* 1514; first published by C. E. Edgar, "More tombstones from Tell el-Yehoudieh," *AnnServAntÉgypte* 22 [1922] 13; see also van der Horst [supra n.4] 52, 108 [who suggests Marion for Marin]; A. Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* [Tübingen 1985] 131-32, 162, n.190; J. and L. Robert, "Bulletin épigraphique," *REG* 61 [1948] no. 259). A Greek epitaph (3rd-4th c.), inscribed on a marble plaque from the Monteverde catacomb in Rome, reads: "Here lies Gaudentia, priest (*hierisa*), (aged) 24 years. In peace her sleep!" *MENORAH TORAH SHRINE* (*JWE* 2.11; *CIJ* 315 [photo]; Westenholz [supra n.35] 41, 111, no. 21; first published by G. S. Graziosi [supra n.35] 31, no. 49; see also van der Horst [supra n.4] 96, 108; Müller [supra n.35] 43-44, no. 35).

A Greek epitaph (probably 4th c.), painted in red letters in a catacomb at Bet She'arim, reads: "Sara, daughter of Naimia, mother of the priest (*hiëreia*), the lady Mar[i]a, [lies here]" (*CIJ* 1107; first published

2. Women's participation in ancient synagogue life

The ancient sources take women's attendance at synagogue worship services for granted.⁵⁶ Further, according to Tannaitic halakah, women are obligated to pray;⁵⁷ prayer in the synagogue is one of the ways of fulfilling that obligation.

Where did women sit during the service? The literary and archaeological evidence does not support the traditional scholarly view that women sat in a gallery or side room. No ancient source speaks of a women's gallery or section in the synagogue. The Second Temple did have a women's forecourt, but it was not reserved for women; rather, the sexes mingled freely in this large outer court.⁵⁸ JT Sukkah 55a.72-55b.27 has been cited as evidence for a gallery,⁵⁹ but is not convincing, because the parallel texts⁶⁰ have the women below and not above.

As for the archaeological evidence, the earliest possible synagogue ruins from Israel clearly had no gallery or separate section for women (Masada, Herodium, Gamla), while the reconstruction of galleries at most sites (e.g., Bar'am, Capernaum, Meiron) is questionable. In the Diaspora synagogues, the assignment of one of the side rooms to women (e.g., Dura Europos, Hammam Lif, Delos) is not based on any evidence from the sites themselves.⁶¹ Therefore, we should simply admit that we do not know where women sat in the synagogue. There is insufficient evidence to posit a strict separation of the sexes.⁶²

Women actively donated to the synagogue, as numerous inscriptions attest.⁶³ Finally, we know that many women converted to Judaism in antiquity,⁶⁴ which sheds light not only on ancient Judaism in general, but also on the make-up of Diaspora communities.

by M. Schwabe, "Greek inscriptions from Beth She'arim," *Yediot* 5 [1937-38] 91 [Hebrew]; see also B. Mazar, M. Schwabe, B. Lifshitz, and N. Avigad, *Beth Shearim* vol. 1, B. Mazar, *Catacombs* 1-4; vol. 2, M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, *The Greek inscriptions*; vol. 3, N. Avigad, *Catacombs* 12-23 [Jerusalem 1973-76] vol. 2, 42-43, no. 66).

A recently published ossuary from the Qidron Valley in Jerusalem dates from the time of the Second Temple. A rosette decorates the ossuary, which contains a Greek inscription: "Belonging to Megiste the priest (*hierisē*)" (Ossuary 1006 from Cave 2; first published by T. Ilan, "New ossuary inscriptions from Jerusalem," *SCI* 11 [1991-92] 157-59; also published in G. Avni, Z. Greenhut, and T. Ilan, "Three new burial caves of the Second Temple period in Heceldama [Kidron Valley]," *Qadmoniot* 25 [1992] 104-5 [Hebrew]).

56 Luke 13:10-17; Acts 16:13-14; 18:26; JT Sotah 16d.38-52; BT 'Avodah Zarah 38a-b; JT Berakhot 9d.5-8; cf. BT Sotah 38a. See also F. Manns, "La femme et la synagogue à l'époque de Jésus," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 109 (1995) 159-65.

57 M Berakhot 3:3. See J. Hauptman, "Women and prayer: an attempt to dispel some fallacies," *Judaism* 42 (1993) 94-103; S. Safrai, "The synagogue," in Safrai and Stern (supra n.37) vol. 1.2, 919.

58 M Middot 2:5. Women did enter the Court of Israelites to offer sacrifice (T 'Arakhin 2:1). For more on this and on the question of a women's gallery generally, see Z. Safrai's letter to the editor in *Moment* 15 (April 1990) 6-9.

59 E. Sukenik, *Ancient synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London 1934) 47-48.

60 Lam. Rabbah 1:45 (on 1:16); 4:22 (on 4:19). L. Shiffman has written that "the text in the popular printed editions of *Lamentations Rabbah* is corrupt", an assertion for which he gives no evidence (*Moment* 15 [April 1990] 62). See further Brooten (supra n.3) 132-33, 260, n.155.

61 For literature on each of these sites, see F. Hüttenmeister and G. Reeg, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel* vol. 1, *Die jüdischen Synagogen, Lehrhäuser und Gerichtshöfe* (Beihefte zum TAVO B12/1, Wiesbaden 1977) s.v. "Bar'am", "Gamla", "Herodium", "Kefar Nahum", "Meron", and "Masada"; M. J. Segal Chiat, *Handbook of synagogue architecture* (Chico, CA 1982) on the same sites (Chiat disputes that Masada, Herodium and Gamla were actually synagogues); Kraabel (supra n.42) 480-83, 491-94.

62 S. Safrai ("Was there a women's gallery in the synagogue of antiquity?" *Tarbiz* 32 [1963-64] 329-38 [Hebrew; English summary p.ii]) also disputes, primarily on literary grounds, that there was a women's gallery in the ancient synagogue.

63 B. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives* (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 7, Paris 1967) nos. 5 (= *CIJ* 728), 7 (= *ibid.* 730), 13 (= *ibid.* 738), 29 (= *ibid.* 756), 30, 33 (= *ibid.* 766), 41-46 (= *ibid.* 806-11), 51 (= *ibid.* 816), 54, 55, 70 (= *ibid.* 964; = Hüttenmeister and Reeg [supra n.61] 24-26), 100;

Conclusion

The traditional view that the titles in question were honorific is based less on evidence from the inscriptions themselves or from other ancient sources than on certain presuppositions concerning the nature of ancient Judaism. Seen in the larger context of women's participation in the life of the ancient synagogue, we have strong reasons to interpret the titles as functional and to assume that female heads or elders of synagogues had functions parallel to those of male heads or elders of synagogues. Of the functions outlined for each title, there are none that women could not have carried out. If women donated money, and especially large sums of it, surely they were capable of collecting and administering synagogue funds. It is not impossible to imagine Jewish women sitting on councils of elders, teaching or arranging for the religious service. This is not to say that the women of these inscriptions might not have been exceptions. Indeed, they probably were. Even today, it is still an exception for women to hold positions of religious leadership. Yet this collection of inscriptions should challenge historians of religion to question the prevailing view of Judaism in the Greco-Roman period as a community all forms of which excluded women from leadership rôles.

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Appendix: reviews and discussions of B. Broton, *Women leaders in the ancient synagogue*

J. Baskin in Y. Haddad and E. Findly, *Women, religion and social change* (Albany, NY 1985) 10; J. T. Burtchaell, *From synagogue to church: public services and offices in the earliest Christian communities* (Cambridge 1992) 245 no. 98; S. J. D. Cohen, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 39 (1984) 240-43; U. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum* (Göttingen 1996) 38-39; P. Elbert, *JThS* 35 (1984) 503-4; L. H. Feldman in S. Fine (ed.), *Sacred realm* (Oxford 1996) 56-58, 61-62, 66, fig. 3.7; F. García Martínez, *JSJ* 14 (1983) 55-56; D. J. Halperin, *JAOS* 105 (1985) 343-44; G. H. R. Horsley, *New documents illustrating Early Christianity* (North Ryde, NSW 1987) vol. 4, 214-20; L. H. Kant, "Jewish inscriptions in Greek and Latin," *ANRW* II.20.2 (1987) 694-98; A. T. Kraabel, *CBQ* 46 (1984) 341-42; Kraemer (supra n.1) 117-23; L. I. Levine, *The ancient synagogue: the first thousand years* (New Haven 2000) 471-90; J. Maier, *Biblische Zeitschrift* 32 (1988) 118-19; G. Mayer, *Die jüdische Frau in der hellenistisch-römischen Antike* (Stuttgart 1987) 89-91; C. Meyers, *BSOAS* 46 (1983) 542-43; B. G. Nathanson, *JBL* 104 (1985) 369-71; T. Rajak, "The Jewish community and its boundaries," in J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak (edd.), *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman empire* (London 1992) 22-24; T. Rajak, *L'eylah. A journal of judaism today* (Sept. 1991) 42-44; S. C. Reif, *Society for Old Testament Studies Booklist* 1984, 121-22; L. V. Rutgers, *The Jews in late ancient Rome* (Leiden 1995) 134-35; J. Scheid, "The religious roles of Roman women," in P. S. Pantel (ed.), *A history of women in the West* vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA 1992) 418; M. Schlüter, *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 15 (1987) 163-67; P. Richardson, "From apostles to virgins: Romans 16 and the roles of women in the Early Church," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 2 (1986) 232-61; E. Schürer, *The history of the Jewish people in the age of Jesus Christ* (rev. edn., Edinburgh 1986) vol. 3.1, 101, 106-7; J. Strange, *BAR* 10 (1984) 14-15; J. Townsend, "Creation and gender in Rabbinic literature," *Encounter* 55.1 (1994) 9-12; P. R. Trebilco, *Jewish communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1991) 104-13; J. R. Wegner, *JR* 68 (1988) 327-29; J. R. Wegner, *Chattel or person? The status of women in the Mishnah* (Oxford 1988) 189.

ibid. 157-58, 183-84, 324, 325; E. Goodenough, *Jewish symbols in the Greco-Roman period* (New York 1953-68) vol. 3, fig. 894; etc.

- 64 See Josephus, *BJ* 2.560-61; 5.55; 5.147; *AntJ* 18.81-84; 20.35, 38, 49-53, 94-95, 101; *JJWE* 2.489 (= *CIJ* 21), 392 (= ibid. 202), 224 (= ibid. 222), 62 (= ibid. 462), 577 (= ibid. 523), *JJWE* 1.9 (= ibid. 642), *CIJ* 731e; *M Ketubot* 4:3; *BT Berakhot* 8b; *Rosh Hashanah* 17b; *Bava Qama* 109b; *Horayot* 13a; *Yevamot* 46a, 78a, 84b; *Ketubot* 37a; *Gerim* 2.4; *CTh* 16.8.6 (= Linder [supra n.12] 148-51). See also *JJWE* 2.626.ii (= *CIJ* 285), 626.iii (= ibid. 524) and 626.iv (= ibid. 529), which may or may not be Jewish. On Josephus, see especially S. Matthews, "High-standing women and mission and conversion: a rhetorical-historical analysis of the *Antiquities* and *Acts*" (Th.D. diss., Harvard Univ. 1997). Matthews analyzes the rhetorical function of representing high-standing gentile women as converts, arguing that this representation "serves to deflect attention from lower class female adherents/converts" (176, see also 78-83).