

## 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, archikybernetēs 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

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

Ῥουφεινα Ἰουδαία ἀρχι-  
2 συνάγωγος κατεσκεύασεν τὸ ἐνσώριον τοῖς ἀπε-  
4 λευθέροις καὶ θρέμμασιν μηδενὸς ἄλλου ἐξουσίαν ἔ-  
6 χοντος θάψαι τινά. εἰ δέ τις τολμήσει, δώσει τῷ ἱερωτάτῳ τα-  
8 μεῖψ (δηνάρια) ἅψ καὶ τῷ ἔθνει τῶν Ἰουδαίων (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 ἀρχισυναγωγός, 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 δικαίας  
6 ἕς ἑώρα. Ἀμήν.

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

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 ἡ ἀρχισυναγωγος as in the previous inscription, and ἡ ἀρχισυναγωγισσα 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: archegissa, 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.).

[Ἐὰν ὁ Θεοπέμπτῃς  
2 [ἀρ]χισυν(αγῶγου) καὶ τοῦ υἱ-  
οῦ αὐτῆς Εὐσεβίου.

L. 2: read καὶ.

[From Th]eopempte, 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 inscripational 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