

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 476.³⁸ 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.³⁹

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."⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³

Harry J. Leon, who rejects Berliner's identification of pater and parnās as ungrounded,⁴⁴ reports on Berliner's theory that the mother of the synagogue "cared for women, especially the sick and dying"⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ In the same vein, several scholars imagine that the role could have been one of patronage.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹

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).⁵²

It is unlikely that the holder of an honorific title would be included in the group of persons to whom immunitas⁵³ 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."⁵⁴

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).⁵⁵ 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: ʿāb or ʿābī), which occurs as an honorific title in rabbinic sources.⁵⁶ 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. Meṣ. 4:12; 6:7; m. B. Bat. 2:7,13; m. Sanh. 10:1; etc.), Abba Guria (m. Oidd. 4:14) or Abba Gorion (m. Oidd. 4:14). Although according to a baraita in b. Ber. 16b one may call only the three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) "father" and the four matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah) "mother," the use of these terms was not infrequent. According to a further baraita (b. Ber. 16b; y. Nid. 49b.45-47), one should not call slaves "mother so-and-so" or "father so-and-so," but in the house of Rabban Gamliel one did so. Thus, the honorific use of both "father" and "mother" is attested.

Also of interest is the term 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 nāṣīʿ.⁵⁷

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 537⁵⁸) was father of the Carcaresians; Julianus (CII 88⁵⁹) and Quintus Claudius Synesios (CII 319⁶⁰) of the Campesians, Gadias (CII 510, 535⁶¹) of the Hebrews; Pancharios (CII 509⁶²) of the synagogue of Elaëa, and Domnus (CII 494⁶³) 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 508⁶⁴) is called father of synagogues (patēr synagōgion), Assterias (CII 93⁶⁵) 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 319,⁶⁶ the epitaph of Irena, wife of Clodius, the brother of Quintus Claudius Synesios, 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 694⁶⁷), 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 twice⁶⁸), patēr (CII 590 twice,⁶⁹ 599,⁷⁰ 619c,⁷¹ 619d⁷²), patēr paterōn (CII 619b⁷³), mētēr (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" (patēr paterōn) 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).⁷⁴ 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 533⁷⁵) 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 739⁷⁶ 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 720⁷⁷ with its mention of a father of the people-for-life (patēr laou dia biou).⁷⁸ 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)⁷⁹ to a priestess of Venus being addressed as mother (mater).⁸⁰ One also finds mothers and fathers of various sorts of guilds (collegia)⁸¹ and of cultic clubs, especially of oriental cults. While it could be that the mothers and fathers were patrons of the professional guilds⁸² the evidence from cultic clubs seems to point to cultic leaders of some sort.⁸³

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,⁸⁴ and that the patres could have a pater over them, who would be called pater patrum/pater pateron, PP in abbreviated form.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

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 χο-
ρηστή πα-
4 σίφιλε κ-
αί ἄλυπε κ-
6 αὶ φιλογίτ-
ων χαῖρε, ὥ-
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."¹ 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).² The name Marin is a form of Marion³ and also occurs in other Greek inscriptions.⁴

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