

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: ʿāb or ʿābī), 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. 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.<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 Elaëa, 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 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