

"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