

adjoining side rooms in the Diaspora synagogues. It is arbitrary to assign one or the other to women.

B. Is there Literary Evidence for a Women's Gallery or a Separate Women's Section?

No scholar is of the opinion that ancient Jewish literature attests to a general regulation that the sexes be separate in synagogue worship. All admit that this regulation cannot be found in ancient Jewish sources. Eliezer Sukenik, for example, writes:

The ancient literature nowhere mentions a specific regulation to the effect that men and women must be kept separate at public worship; still less is it prescribed that the women's section shall be built in the form of a gallery.¹⁴⁸

In spite of this consensus, scholars have argued that even without a regulation, it was in fact the case that the sexes were kept separate in the synagogue worship. What is the literary evidence for a factual separation?

In the Second Temple there existed a women's forecourt (ʿezrat hannāšim; gynaikōnitis),¹⁴⁹ which contrasted with the forecourt of Israel. This meant that women were normally only allowed into the women's forecourt, but not beyond that;¹⁵⁰ only the men were allowed into the inner forecourt of Israel. What is often overlooked, however, is that the women's forecourt was not reserved for women. It was the large outer court where both sexes mingled together freely. It was not an area where women could pray quietly by themselves, undisturbed by men, for the men had to pass through this area in order to enter the forecourt of Israel. Therefore it can hardly be taken as an example of the separation of the sexes. "Women's" here does not mean reserved for women, but rather restrictively that women could not pass beyond this outer court. Thus, the men had a court reserved for them, but the women did not. This is a totally different model from the one presupposed by those archaeologists who reconstruct a women's gallery with a separate entrance in the Galilean synagogues.

Once a year, however, an actual separation of the sexes was ordained. This was during the water-drawing celebration on the night following the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

B. Sukk. 51b-52a reads:

"במוצאי יום טוב כו'". מאי תיקון גדול?
 -אמר רבי אלעזר, כאוחה ששנינו,
 חלקה יתה בראשונה והקיפה גזוזטרא,
 והחקינה שיהו נשים יושבות מלמעלה ואנשים מלמטה.
 חנו רבנן: בראשונה היו נשים מכפנים ואנשים מבחוץ,
 והיו באים לידי קלות ראש, החקינה שיהו נשים יושבות מבחוץ
 ואנשים מכפנים. ועדיין היו באין לידי קלות ראש.
 החקינה שיהו נשים יושבות מלמעלה ואנשים מלמטה.
 היכי עביד הכי? והכתיב "הכל בכחב מיד ה' עלי השכיל!"
 -אמר רב, קרא אשכחו ודרוש, "וספדה הארץ משפחות משפחות לבד
 משפחה בית דוד לבד ונשיהם לבד".
 אמרו, והלא דברים קל וחומר:
 ומה לעתיד לבא שעוסקינן בהספד ואין יצר הרע שולט בהם
 אמרה תורה אנשים לבד ונשים לבד,
 עכשיו שעוסקינן בשמחה ויצר הרע שולט בהם
 על אחת כמה וכמה.

"At the conclusion of the first festival day, etc." (m. Sukk. 5:2). What was the Great Enactment? -- R. El'azar replied, As that of which we have learned. Originally [the walls of the women's forecourt] were smooth, but [later the court] was surrounded by a gallery, and it was enacted that the women should sit above and the men below.

Our Rabbis have taught, Originally the women used to sit within [the women's forecourt] while the men were without, but as this caused levity, it was instituted that the women should sit without and the men within. As this, however, still led to levity, it was instituted that the women should sit above and the men below.

But how could they do so? Is it not written, "All this [do I give you] in writing as the Lord has made me wise by his hand upon me"? (1 Chr 28:19)-- Rav answered, They found a scriptural verse and expounded it: "And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart" (Zech 12:12). Is it not, they said, an *a fortiori* argument? If in the future when they will be engaged in mourning and the evil inclination will have no power over them, the Torah nevertheless says, "men separately and women separately," how much more so now when they are engaged in rejoicing and the evil inclination has sway over them.¹⁵¹

The text describes a temporary (wooden) gallery which was erected for the annual all-night celebration of the water-drawing ceremony on Sukkot. It would have surrounded the women's forecourt, so that the men were on the floor of the women's forecourt of the temple and the women in a gallery surrounding it. R. El'azar's words are a nearly exact quotation of m. Mid. 2:5.¹⁵² They are followed by a baraita (i.e., Tannaitic saying), and the two sayings serve to explain each other, that is, the reader is meant to take the *gēzūztārā'* (Greek: *exōstra*) as the architectural concretization of the women sitting above. The gemara raises the question as to how this innovation in the temple architecture could be allowed, quoting 1 Chr 28:19 as proof that the (First) Temple should not be changed. The third century Babylonian Amora Rav answers that Zech 12:12 can serve as a proof text for the

validity of this innovation. The explanation is that the text refers to a future period of mourning and requires a separation of the sexes even when mourning, that is, when one would not expect the evil inclination to arouse their sexual desires. How much more is it necessary to separate the sexes when they are engaged in celebrating this special festival--a time when one would expect sexual desire to arise.

Here we have the precise model that scholars have assumed for the synagogues. Is this not sufficient evidence for assuming a similar arrangement in the synagogue? Aside from the fact that a rather uneven development is described here, a development based on anything but a stable notion of how the sexes should be arranged, it is of special note that the Babylonian Talmud brings this gallery into connection with a special holiday, i.e., a night when many people would be present and dancing and wine would be an integral part of the festival. One can hardly draw generalizations from this special arrangement--not for the regular temple service and even less for synagogue worship.¹⁵³

A further possible reference is found in v. Sukk. 55b.14-23 according to which the famous Diplostoon (Hebrew: dippéle 'istēbā'; Greek: diple stoa)¹⁵⁴ in Alexandria was destroyed by the Emperor Trajan. After he had killed the men, Trajan offered the women mercy if they would surrender, to which the women answered, "Do to those above ('ilyā') as you have done to those below ('ar'āyā')." This seems to be a very clear case of the separation of the sexes. What is often overlooked, however, is that the parallels in Lam. Rab. 1:45 (on 1:16) and 4.22 (on 4.19)¹⁵⁵ have the terms reversed: "Do to those below (i.e., the women) as you have done to those above." Sukenik dismisses this reversal:

Right or wrong, the Palestinian narrator cannot conceive of the Community Centre in Alexandria otherwise than with a gallery, and that reserved for the women.

Accordingly it would seem that the reading of the parallels in the ordinary edition of Lamentations Rabba, 58b and 68d, where the terms are reversed, is due to a misapprehension. In Buber's edition, p.83, they are simply replaced by 'men' and 'women.'

It is even possible that in Palestinian Aramaic the male and female halves of any congregation were designated colloquially as ארעיא, literally 'those of the ground (floor)' and עיליא, 'those of the upper (floor)' respectively.¹⁵⁶

At the historical level, it is not clear that this account is based on historical fact. Sukenik and those who follow him,

however, are less interested in the early second-century Alexandrian Diplostoon than in the third- and fourth-century Palestinian synagogues. But if this is the case, then how can one so rapidly dismiss the parallels, where "those above" and "those below" are reversed, making the women "those below"? If the interest is in ancient Israel rather than Alexandria, then this discrepancy must be taken very seriously. Further, it is not even clear that 'ilayé' and 'ar'ayé' are spatial terms at all. Marcus Jastrow, for example, takes them to mean "inferior" (i.e., the women) and "superior" (i.e., the men) respectively, and lists v. Sukk. 55b as an "incorrect version"!¹⁵⁷ A further possibility is that the image behind this haggadah is that of a castle or a fortress, where the men fought up above and only when they were killed did the Roman soldiers reach the women below.¹⁵⁸ In light of the ambiguity of the terminology and the lack of agreement in the sources, this passage and its parallels cannot be taken as evidence either for a gallery in the Alexandrian Diplostoon or for galleries in ancient synagogues in Israel.

A further passage of interest is found in Philo of Alexandria. In describing the life of the Therapeutrides and Therapeutai, Philo writes (De vita contempl. 32-33; cf. also 69):

Τὸ δὲ κοινὸν τοῦτο σεμνεῖον, εἰς ὃ ταῖς ἑβδομαῖς συνέρχονται, διπλοῦς ἐστὶ περιβόλος, ὃ μὲν εἰς ἀνδρῶνα, ὃ δὲ εἰς γυναικωνῆτιν ἀποκριθεῖς· καὶ γὰρ καὶ γυναῖκες ἐξ ἕθους συνακροῶνται τὸν αὐτὸν ζῆλον καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν προαίρεσιν ἔχουσαι. ὃ δὲ μεταξὺ τῶν οἰκῶν τοῦχος τὸ μὲν ἐξ ἐδάφους ἐπὶ τρεῖς ἢ τέσσαρας πῆχεις εἰς τὸ ἄνω συμφυκοδόμηται θωρακίου τρόπον, τὸ δὲ ἄχρι τέγους ἀνάγειον ἀχανές ἀνεῖται, δυοῖν ἕνεκα, τοῦ τε τὴν πρέπουσαν αἰδῶ τῇ γυναικείᾳ φύσει διατηρεῖσθαι καὶ τοῦ τὴν ἀντίληψιν ἔχειν εὐμαρῆ καθεζομένης ἐν ἐπηκόῳ, μηδενὸς τὴν τοῦ διαλεγομένου φωνὴν ἐμποδίζοντος.

This common sanctuary in which they meet every seventh day is a double enclosure, one portion set apart for the use of the men, the other for the women. For women too regularly make part of the audience with the same ardour and the same sense of their calling. The wall between the two chambers rises up from the ground to three or four cubits built in the form of a breast work, while the space above is left open. This arrangement serves two purposes; the modesty becoming to the female sex is preserved, while the women sitting within ear-shot can easily follow what is said since there is nothing to obstruct the voice of the speaker.

Should we take this as a first-century example of a separation of the sexes? Yes, by all means, but that gives us no license to generalize that all or even most first-century Jews followed the example of the Therapeutai and Therapeutrides. The group which Philo is describing is a sect, a sect which follows

such unusual life customs as celibacy and the pursuit of the purely contemplative life, as the context of this passage clearly demonstrates. Scholars would not think of using this sect as proof that celibacy or the contemplative life were widespread in Judaism. Why should one view their separation of the sexes during worship in a different way? It may well be that their celibacy and the desire to preserve it were what gave rise to this custom. Further, the divider described does not fit in with any synagogue remains known to us. One cannot use a room divider of about 4.5 to 6 meters in height as proof for a women's gallery or separate room for women. Finally, the very tenor of Philo's description of this group of people suggests that he was telling his readers something they did not already know. Whether written for Jewish or for non-Jewish readers, the report on this exotic sect is an introduction to customs not widely practiced. Philo's detailed description arouses the impression that we have before us a rare custom rather than one so widespread that describing it is unnecessary.¹⁵⁹

A further text worth noting here reflects a fourth-century Babylonian practice (*b. Qidd. 81a [mid.]*):¹⁶⁰ אבוי דייר גופלי. "Abaye placed jugs around (them); Rava placed reed around (them). Avin stated, The sorest spot of the year is the festival season." The context of this passage is a discussion of women and men mixing with each other. The jugs and reed were two means of separating the men from the women, i.e., they could be placed on the floor forming a sort of boundary between the two groups. Rashi says that the jugs were pottery shards and that these or reeds were placed in rows between men and women at such gatherings as a sermon or a wedding. The statement, "The sorest spot of the year is the festival season," is a reference to the type of frivolity discussed above in the context of the water-drawing ceremony.

Note that this text makes no reference to the synagogue. If Rashi is right, the gatherings were not necessarily synagogue services, but rather large public gatherings of various sorts. Given all the discussion by archaeologists of permanent architectural features designed to separate women from men, it is especially noteworthy how temporary a jug or reed divider looks to us. This text, therefore, rather than providing support for the thesis of a women's gallery or section in the ancient synagogue, lends credence to the thesis that the separation of the sexes was occasionally practiced at certain large public

gatherings and was facilitated by means of temporary dividers, as for example, reed or jug dividers.

This survey of the literary evidence adduced by scholars in support of a women's gallery or women's section has shown that none of this evidence is convincing. The women's forecourt in the temple was not just for women. The gallery erected in the women's forecourt was just for women but was rarely used. The story concerning Trajan and the women is ambiguous in its terminology and contradictory in its versions. The separation practiced by the Therapeutrides and the Therapeutai cannot be used as evidence for general Jewish practice. The passage concerning the separation of women from men by means of jugs or reeds is not related to the synagogue and actually underscores the temporary nature of the divider. There is, therefore, no convincing literary support for the existence of a women's gallery or women's section.

C. Further Considerations

In order to set the study of the synagogues in its proper context, it is necessary to compare them briefly with churches and temples. As to Christian practice, there was some variety and a certain development. The vast majority of the Byzantine churches in Palestine do not seem to have had a gallery.¹⁶¹ Outside of Palestine some churches seem to have had one (e.g., the Church of St. John Studios in Constantinople [463],¹⁶² the Church of the Acheiropoietos in Salonika [470],¹⁶³ the Umm-es-Surab in the Hauran, Syria [489],¹⁶⁴ and the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople [537]¹⁶⁵), while others seem not to have (e.g., St. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna [490],¹⁶⁶ Maria Maggiore in Rome [432-440]¹⁶⁷). Galleries in churches, of course, could serve a number of purposes, and should therefore not be identified as "women's galleries."¹⁶⁸ There is, however, some evidence that some Christian communities did institute a separation of the sexes.¹⁶⁹ These varied in form and sometimes applied only to the laity.¹⁷⁰ There is no reason to assume that this practice was ancient or universal or that the earliest Christians adopted it from the Jews.¹⁷¹ The evidence points to its being an independent Christian development which occurred in an uneven and regionally varied way.

It is impossible to give any kind of a survey of temples here, and it also does not seem necessary since ancient synagogues do not bear a great deal of resemblance to ancient Graeco-Roman temples. One type is worth mentioning, however, and