

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.<sup>161</sup> Outside of Palestine some churches seem to have had one (e.g., the Church of St. John Studios in Constantinople [463],<sup>162</sup> the Church of the Acheiropoietos in Salonika [470],<sup>163</sup> the Umm-es-Surab in the Hauran, Syria [489],<sup>164</sup> and the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople [537]<sup>165</sup>), while others seem not to have (e.g., St. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna [490],<sup>166</sup> Maria Maggiore in Rome [432-440]<sup>167</sup>). Galleries in churches, of course, could serve a number of purposes, and should therefore not be identified as "women's galleries."<sup>168</sup> There is, however, some evidence that some Christian communities did institute a separation of the sexes.<sup>169</sup> These varied in form and sometimes applied only to the laity.<sup>170</sup> There is no reason to assume that this practice was ancient or universal or that the earliest Christians adopted it from the Jews.<sup>171</sup> 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

that is the temple with a staircase. Robert Amy made a very thorough survey of temples with staircases, especially of those in Syria, Lebanon and Trans-Jordan.<sup>172</sup> What is significant for our question is that staircases do not disappear in the course of time. Where they are present in the ruins, they have as good a chance of surviving raids by builders in search of material as do columns, piers, or courses of ashlar stones. This fact should be particularly significant for those archaeologists who would reconstruct galleries in Palestinian synagogues even when no staircase is to be found.

If the evidence points so heavily against the reconstruction of a gallery and against the assumption that women and men were strictly separated in the ancient synagogue, why is the opposite the prevailing view? The most likely reason is that modern scholars are still using the contemporary Orthodox synagogue as their *tertium comparationis* rather than allowing for the possibility that in antiquity certain customs were different from today's customs. Further, archaeologists have looked to certain Galilean synagogues for their point of departure, assuming that the reconstructed women's gallery was based on firm evidence.

Has no one called all of this into question? As a matter of fact, five prominent scholars, over a period of the last eighty-one years, have offered their reasons for calling into question the existence of a separate gallery or women's section in the ancient synagogue.

The first was Leopold Löw,<sup>173</sup> who pointed out that the Talmud makes no mention of it, and that a number of stories make mention of women participating in the synagogue services. He also discusses a number of the passages dealt with above and comes to the conclusion that there was no women's section in the ancient synagogue.

Löw was followed by Ismar Elbogen,<sup>174</sup> who referred to several of the same texts and concluded that women and men probably sat separately, but that the rows for women and for men were side by side. Elbogen does assume, however, that the galleries in the Galilean synagogues were probably for women, although he adds that this is not certain.

Richard Krautheimer<sup>175</sup> also believed that the ancient synagogue did not have a strict separation of the sexes, suggesting that this probably came in gradually.

Asher Hiram<sup>176</sup> argued on various grounds that the ancient synagogue in Israel did not have a gallery, whether for women or not. As a technical argument, Hiram points out that the

Palestinian synagogues were built of ashlar stones with no cement of any sort and that such buildings could not have supported the lateral pressure which would have been exerted by a gallery. As an archaeological argument against the gallery, Hiram cites the ancient coins which bear the images of synagogues, noting that no gallery is visible on them. He further proposes the economic argument that a gallery is rather expensive and the architectural argument that a gallery would have been aesthetically unpleasing. If there was a gallery, Hiram concludes, then it must have been over the transverse aisle and have functioned as a classroom. If there was a pseudo-gallery, it could have been used for storage purposes. By rejecting the theory of the gallery, Hiram does not totally exclude the possibility that the women sat in a side room, as he believes they did at Hammat Gader.

Finally, and in the greatest depth, Shmuel Safrai<sup>177</sup> has called the existence of the women's gallery into question. Safrai accepts the existence of galleries, but argues that these were not for women and that, in fact, no reference to a general separation of the sexes in synagogue worship can be found in ancient Jewish literature. Safrai also discusses a significant number of texts which show that women went to the synagogue and participated in the services.

It is time that scholars of Judaica and archaeologists take these arguments seriously.

### Conclusions

The archaeological survey has demonstrated that the ancient synagogue ruins in Palestine yield little evidence for galleries. The ancient Diaspora synagogues yield none. While there are side rooms, especially in Diaspora synagogues, there is no archaeological reason to assume that these were for women. It should be stated here that it is not my thesis that one can prove that all ancient synagogues were built without galleries. Rather, it is my thesis that at nearly all sites the evidence is totally insufficient to reconstruct a gallery. Even if these galleries were for women, the architectural and cultural picture emerging would still be vastly different from the one current in modern scholarship. As for the side rooms, it is not my thesis that one can prove that these were not for women, but rather that all evidence is lacking to support the hypothesis that they were for women. Even if the one or the other were a women's section, the cultural picture emerging would still be vastly different from the one current in modern scholarship.

Ancient Jewish literature yields no hint of a strict separation of the sexes in the synagogue. Thus, even if a gallery were to have existed in a particular synagogue, this would not prove that it was a women's gallery. By the same token, ancient literature should caution us from identifying unidentified side rooms as women's sections.

The parallel of Christian churches shows that they do not give us reason to reconstruct a gallery in the ancient synagogues in Israel. The development of the arrangement of the sexes was uneven and regionally influenced. Earliest Christianity does not seem to have had a separation of the sexes.

Ancient pagan temples with stairs show that stairs do not disappear more quickly than other architectural elements.

This has not been the first attempt to call the existence of the women's gallery and the women's section in the ancient synagogue into question. Rather than simply relying on the consensus of scholarship, it is time to rethink the prevailing view, to produce evidence where it exists and to alter one's hypothesis where it does not. It is therefore inappropriate to reject the possibility of women leaders in the ancient synagogue on the grounds that women were not even admitted into the main prayer hall.

## CHAPTER VII

### FURTHER BACKGROUND ISSUES RELATING TO WOMEN

#### LEADERS IN THE ANCIENT SYNAGOGUE

##### A. Women's Participation in Synagogue Worship Services

The lack of an adequate understanding of women's participation in the life of the ancient synagogue has hindered research on the Jewish inscriptions in which women bear titles. Even the following, very cursory survey of several salient points should shed light on the context from which they arose. The basis for all other participation is attendance at the synagogue services. Women's attendance at synagogue worship services is taken for granted in the ancient sources.<sup>1</sup> The New Testament gives several of the earliest attestations of this. In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus heals a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years. According to the evangelist, the framework of the miracle is a sabbath service: "Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath" (Luke 13:10).

The Acts of the Apostles also attest to women's presence at worship services. When Paul and Silas traveled to Philippi, they followed their usual custom of searching out the local synagogue (Acts 16:12b-14):

Ἔμην δὲ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ πόλει διατρίβοντες ἡμέρας τινάς. τῇ τε ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων ἐξήλθομεν ἔξω τῆς πύλης παρὰ ποταμὸν οὗ ἐνομιζομεν προσευχὴν εἶναι, καὶ καθίσαντες ἐλάλοῦμεν ταῖς συνελθούσαις γυναῖξιν. καὶ τις γυνὴ ὀνόματι Λυδία, πορφυρόπωλις πόλεως θυατείρων σεβομένη τὸν θεόν, ἤκουεν, ἧς ὁ κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου.

We remained in this city for some days; and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a synagogue (proseuchē); and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.

There is a general tendency among scholars to assume that it is not an actual synagogue service which is meant, but rather some sort of outdoor prayer meeting. The reasons for the hesitancy to translate proseuchē as "synagogue" are: 1) the "we supposed" (hou enomizomen) of v. 13; 2) the use of proseuchē instead of