

Pharisees who "sit on the seat of Moses" and who "love the best seats (prōtokathedriai) in the synagogues" (Matt 23:2, 6). The prohedria granted to Tation does not fit in with the hypothesis of a women's gallery. One could imagine that this inscription is unambivalent with respect to the honor bestowed upon a woman. Not so to Salomon Reinach, who writes:

The inscription of Phocaea shows us that this distinction [i.e., prohedria] was accorded not only to the wealthy and the learned, but that the community conferred it, by special decision, even upon women.¹³

It would seem that a woman who donates an entire building is, by definition, wealthy, and how Mr. Reinach can know that Tation was not a learned person is unclear to this author.

Another woman who donated an entire synagogue was Julia Severa (Appendix no. 6; probably 1st C.), probably a non-Jewish woman¹⁴ who was a high priestess, agōnothetis and eponymous magistrate (MAMA VI 153, 263, 265).¹⁵ Her name continued to be associated with the synagogue for some time, for the extant inscription does not commemorate the erection of the building, but rather its repair at a later date.

The one woman title-bearer who was also a donor is Theopempte (Appendix no. 4), head of the synagogue. The contribution of her and her son Eusebios was a chancel screen post, possibly also the chancel screen attached to it.

In summary, the references to women in Jewish donative inscriptions do not prove that women were synagogue functionaries in antiquity, but they do show that some women controlled considerable sums of money and were active in supporting the synagogue. This is an important piece of information when considering the question of whether women could have been members of boards of elders or whether mothers of the synagogue might have served on governing boards. One of the functions of such boards might have been to make budgetary decisions. Those in society who are appointed or elected to make budgetary decisions are often those who possess property or money themselves. These inscriptions show that some women in antiquity controlled money and would, therefore, have been good candidates for board membership.

C. Women as Proselytes to Judaism

Scholars have recognized for some time that women proselytes are mentioned relatively frequently in ancient sources.

Josephus, in speaking of the Jewish War, writes that the men of Damascus wanted to carry out a massacre against the Jews of Damascus, and that "their only fear was of their own wives, who, with few exceptions, had all become converts to the Jewish religion (πλὴν ὀλίγων ὑπηγμέναις τῇ Ἰουδαϊκῇ θρησκείᾳ), and so their efforts were mainly directed to keeping the secret from them" (J.W. 2.20.2 § 560). Because this report seems exaggerated to modern scholars, they often assume that these women, or at least the majority of them, had not become full Jews, but rather "God-fearers."¹⁶ It is not at all clear why this should be the case. Josephus further reports that the Jewish merchant Ananias converted King Izates of Adiabene in the following way (Ant. 20.2.3. §§ 34-35):

...πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας εἰσιὼν τοῦ βασιλέως ἐδίδασκεν αὐτάς τὸν θεὸν σέβειν, ὡς Ἰουδαίοις πατριὸν ἦν, καὶ δὴ δι' αὐτῶν εἰς γνῶσιν ἀφικόμενος τῷ Ἰζάτῃ κάμεινον ὁμοίως συνανέπεισεν...

. . . [Ananias] visited the king's wives and taught them to worship God after the manner of the Jewish tradition. It was through their agency that he was brought to the notice of Izates, whom he similarly won over with the co-operation of the women . . .

Izates' mother, Helena, independently of her son, also converted to Judaism. Helena was well-known for her help to the people of Jerusalem in a time of famine and was buried in Jerusalem.¹⁷ The Mishnah (m. Yoma 3:10) mentions Helena's gifts to the Jerusalem temple, and the Babylonian Talmud says that she was very careful to observe all of the commandments (b. Sukk. 2b). Josephus also reports on a Roman woman of high rank, Fulvia by name, who had become a Jewish proselyte and was tricked by three Jewish men into giving them purple and gold, which they promised to deliver to the temple in Jerusalem, but which they actually kept for themselves (Ant. 18.3.5 §§ 81-84). In contrast to all of these references to female proselytes, Josephus mentions only one male proselyte in the Diaspora, Izates.

Some have argued that Poppaea Sabina, the wife of Nero, was perhaps a proselyte or at least favorably inclined to Judaism (Josephus, Ant. 20.8.11 § 195), but this is rather uncertain.¹⁸

The ancient Jewish inscriptions also support the theory that it was especially women who were attracted to Judaism. Of the seven or eight inscriptions from Italy which mention Jewish proselytes, five refer to women (CII 21, 202, 222, 462, 523), and only two or three to men (CII 68, 256, possibly 576). As for the

"God-fearers," Kuhn and Stegemann¹⁹ count four inscriptions referring to women (CII 285, 524, 529, 642), and three referring to men (CII 5, 500, 642). According to their use of the term "God-fearer," CII 683a and 731e should be added to the list; the first refers to a man and the second to a woman. A. Thomas Kraabel, however, has recently called into question the existence of a clearly defined group of persons called by the technical term "God-fearers,"²⁰ and therefore caution is called for in the use of these materials.

Rabbinic literature also makes mention of female proselytes (e.g., m. Ketub. 4:3; b. Ber. 8b; b. Roš. Haš. 17b; b. B. Qam. 109b; b. Hor. 13a; b. Yebam. 46a, 78a, 84b; b. Ketub. 37a; Ger. 2.1, 4). In fact, as the following law from the Theodosian Code makes clear, women continued to become proselytes to Judaism even well into the Christian era (Cod. Theod. 16.8.6; August 13, 339):

Imp. Constantius A. ad Evagrium.

(Post alia:) Quod ad mulieres pertinet, quas Iudaei in turpitudinis suae duxere consortium in gynaeceo nostro ante versatas, placet easdem restitui gynaeceo idque in reliquum observari, ne Christianas mulieres suis iungant flagitiis vel, si hoc fecerint, capitali periculo subiugentur.

Dat. id. aug. Constantio A. ii cons.²¹

Emperor Constantius Augustus to Evagrius.

(After other matters.) In so far as pertains to the women who were formerly employed in Our imperial weaving establishment and who have been led by the Jews into the association of their turpitude, it is Our pleasure that they shall be restored to the weaving establishment. It shall be observed that Jews shall not hereafter unite Christian women to their villainy; if they should do so, however, they shall be subject to the peril of capital punishment.

Given on the ides of August in the year of the second consulship of Constantius Augustus.²²

The only explanation for this law is that large numbers of Christian women had converted to Judaism. Had there only been isolated instances, such a law would be inexplicable. Placing Jewish missionary activity among Christian women under the death penalty must certainly have placed a damper on such activity; that the Roman lawgiver considered such a penalty necessary must indicate that the Jewish mission to women had been enjoying considerable success.

John Chrysostom attests, not to the conversion of women to Judaism, but to Christian women attending the Jewish New Year service in the Antioch of his time, as well as other synagogue services. Not surprisingly, Chrysostom condemns this practice with the sharpest of words, emphasizing that a Christian man is

the head of his wife and that he should keep his wife and his slave at home, not allowing them to go to the synagogue or the theater (*Adv. Jud.* 2.4-6; 4.3).²³

All of this evidence for women being attracted by and converting to Judaism sheds a new light, not only on ancient Judaism in general, but also on the question of the make-up of new communities of the Diaspora. If large numbers of women in the ancient world converted to Judaism, then it could have been the case that in some communities women formed the majority. Further, if large numbers of women became proselytes, then why should we imagine that men were the only proselytizers? In the imperial weaving establishment, for example, one could visualize women workers, Jewish by birth or by conversion, discussing religious questions with their fellow weavers, inviting them to religious services or festivals and finally arranging for their conversion.

Further, women's attraction to Judaism may have had something to do with the nature of the Judaism to which they were attracted. Is it possible that these forms of Judaism were less restrictive regarding women than some of its forms known to us through history? This does not mean that women could not or have not converted to religions oppressive of women, which is simply a fact in the history of religions. If Judaism was especially appealing to women in the Roman world, however, scholarship must face the question why this was so and re-evaluate our understanding of ancient Judaism accordingly. The attractiveness of Judaism to women cannot be explained as a result of the presence of Jewish women title-bearers, but it is plausible to imagine that active, leading Jewish women were influential in attracting non-Jewish women to join the Jewish community. One clear point of connection between proselytes and women title-bearers is CII 523, in which Veturia Paulla, who had converted to Judaism sixteen years before her death, is called the mother of two synagogues. It is not surprising that a convert, who would have been an especially active member of the synagogue, should also have been involved in the leadership of it.

CONCLUSION

The view that the titles in question were honorific is based less on evidence from the inscriptions themselves or from other ancient sources than on current presuppositions concerning the nature of ancient Judaism. Seen in the larger context of women's participation in the life of the ancient synagogue, there is no reason not to take the titles as functional, nor to assume that women heads or elders of synagogues had radically different functions than men heads or elders of synagogues. Of the functions outlined for each title, there are none which women could not have carried out. If women donated money, and even large sums of it, surely they were capable of collecting and administering synagogue funds. Nor is it impossible to imagine Jewish women sitting on councils of elders or teaching or arranging for the religious service. Even women carrying out judicial functions is not impossible in a tradition which reveres one of its women prophets (Deborah) as a judge. This is not to say that the women of these inscriptions might not have been exceptions. Indeed, they probably were. It is an exception today for women to hold positions of religious leadership. The point is not whether these women were exceptions or not, nor even whether they faced opposition or not--today's women rabbis, ministers and priests certainly do--but whether their titles were merely titles or whether they implied actual functions, just as for the men. It is my view that they were functional, and that if the women bearing these titles had been members of another Graeco-Roman religion, scholars would not have doubted that the women were actual functionaries. This collection of inscriptions should challenge historians of religion to question the prevailing view of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period as a religion all forms of which a priori excluded women from leadership roles.

Further steps in research would be to consider these Jewish women leaders in the larger context of the history of religions, comparing their functions with those of women leaders in other communities and religions, such as the Isis, Demeter or Dionysus religions. It would also be especially useful to study possible connections between Judaism and Jewish Christianity. For example, it is striking that several early Christian women leaders were Jewish: the apostle Junia (Rom 16:7), the teacher and missionary Prisca (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom 16:3-4; 1 Cor