MARGARET H. WILLIAMS

THE STRUCTURE OF ROMAN JEWRY RE-CONSIDERED – WERE THE SYNAGOGUES OF ANCIENT ROME ENTIRELY HOMOGENEOUS?


© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn
THE STRUCTURE OF ROMAN JEWRY RE-CONSIDERED —
WERE THE SYNAGOGUES OF ANCIENT ROME ENTIRELY
HOMOGENEOUS?*

In the first quarter of this century the structure of the Jewish community of ancient Rome was often sharply disputed. But these days the consensus is that there is nothing very much to argue about — Roman Jewry had no central council comparable to that possessed by the Jews of Alexandria; the individual synagogues of Rome, though wholly autonomous, were largely homogeneous both in their structure and the titulature of their officials. This view is essentially Schürer's. We find it first promulgated in his early, ground-breaking work Die Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom (1879) and re-stated some twenty or so years later in his monumental Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes. In the 1930's it received the powerful backing of Frey. Leon added his authority in 1960 and since then virtually every writer on ancient Roman Jewry has been content to follow suit. But, for all the weight of scholarly opinion behind it, this view needs to be challenged. For it has many weaknesses, not the least of them that it fails to account for all the evidence. In this paper, no attempt will be made to address the question whether there was a central council for all Roman Jewry. The

* For helpful comments upon this paper, I would like to thank the members of the New Testament seminar at the University of Aberdeen, to whom it was presented in October 1993, and Professor J. A. Crook of St John's College, Cambridge.

1 See, for instance, J. Juster's criticisms in Les Juifs dans l'empire romain I, Paris 1914, 420–421 of Schürer's views on the subject.

2 For the latest statement of this view, see P. W. van der Horst, Ancient Jewish Epitaphs, Kampen 1991, 85–97.


4 E. Schürer, Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi, Leipzig 1901–1909, 81–89. No attempt was made, however, to explain the problematic new evidence (e.g. the titles exarchon and archon alti ordinis) which had appeared meantime.

5 A summary of J. B. Frey's views is to be found in the introduction to Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum I, Rome 1936, reprinted with a prolegomenon by B. Lifshitz, New York 1975 [hereafter CIJ1], lxxxii–cxi.


sole concern will be the internal structure of the synagogues of Rome. It will be argued that the principal difficulties that beset the conventional interpretation of the evidence disappear, if it is assumed that the synagogues of Rome, founded at different times and by Jews from different parts of the Jewish world, were not quite as homogeneous as is generally thought. First, though, the evidence itself must be surveyed and the problems requiring solution identified.

Of necessity, the entire focus in this paper will be on inscriptions, since the literary record provides no hard information about how the Jewish community of Rome was structured. Philo gives a general picture of the organisation of the Jews in Rome in the days of Augustus — in the *Legatio ad Gaium* 152ff. we learn that even by that early date the Jews had established numerous *proseuchai* in the Transtiberinum. But he nowhere refers to, let alone details, the administrative structure of the community. Only one literary source would seem to mention Jewish officialdom in the capital. At Acts 28.17 we are told that when Paul came to Rome in the 60's A.D., he made contact from prison with the leaders of the Jewish community — τοὺς ὄντας τῶν Ἰουδαίων πρῶτους. But beyond the fact that these men were in contact with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem (Acts 28.21) and able to set up a meeting between Paul and the local Jews, who they were and what office(s) they held, is not revealed. Frey claimed (*CII* I² cvi) that they must have been the gerousiarchs (*i.e.* the administrative heads) of the various synagogues of Rome. Others have opted for archisynagogoi, archons, phrontistai and even presbyteroi. But the wording of Acts is far too imprecise for firm identifications of any kind to be made. Conceivably the πρῶτοι τῶν Ἰουδαίων may simply have been prominent members of the community and not even office-holders at all.

But if the literary evidence is unusually thin for a major Diasporan community in early imperial times, the epigraphic material more than compensates. Not only are there more inscriptions relating to the Jews of Rome than to any other Diasporan community but they are, thanks to Jewish copying of Roman epigraphic practices, unusually rich in the number of references they contain to public honours/offices (*honores*). Of the positions...
referred to, the majority is found in other Diasporan communities. Archisynagogoi and 'ordinary' archontes, for instance, crop up all over the Diaspora. And life archons and Fathers/Mothers of the Synagogue, gerousiarchs and grammateis, phrontistai and prostatai, hieris, hyperetai and psalmodoi, are not unattested elsewhere. But quite a few are unique to Roman Jewry. Besides the archigerousiarches — a fairly recent addition to the list, there are the child archon (οὗτος ηπίος) and child grammateus (γραμματεύς ηπίος), the mellarchon and mellogrammateus, and the exarchon, archon of all honour (πάσης τιμῆς) and archon of high rank (alti ordinis). In addition to the hundred or so references to these public positions, an unparalleled number of specific congregational (i.e. synagogal) names is revealed. At eleven, it far outstrips the total produced by all the other Diasporan communities of the empire put together.

Dearth of epigraphic data, then, is not a problem. Where the difficulty lies is in their interpretation. Most of the inscriptions (nearly all are epitaphs) are exceedingly brief, containing little more than the name and honor(es) of the deceased and, in a minority of cases, those of his (her) relatives. While some do give the name of the congregation in which these people had been or still were active, not a single one gives any information about what they did. In one or two cases, the literary record has been of some assistance — e.g. the NT references to the archisynagogos and hyperetes. And inscriptions from other Diasporan communities have proved to be not altogether without value (primarily for the offices of archisynagogos and archon). But on the whole these sources have contributed

12 Those designated simply as archons in the sources are referred to in this paper as 'ordinary' archons, so that they may be distinguished clearly from those archons who bear more elaborate titles.
13 For examples, see Schürer (revised) II 434 (archisynagogos only) and III 98–100 (both offices).
14 The synagogal functionaries described simply as διά βίου are usually assumed to have been men appointed to the archonship for life. For full discussion, see Schürer, Gemeindeverfassung, 23–24 and Schürer (revised) III 99–100, n. 44.
15 For various Diasporan examples of these offices, see Applebaum 492–498; Schürer (revised) III 98–102; van der Horst 89–97.
17 CII I2 88 and 120.
18 CII I2 146. cf. 99 (as corrected in Leon 277); 180;284.
19 CII I2 85; 284; 325; 402; 457 and 483.
20 CII I2 121 and 279.
21 CII I2 317 and 465.
22 CII I2 85; 324; 337 and probably 216. So, correctly, Frey CII I2 ad loc. and Leon 176, n. 2.
23 CII I2 470.
24 For full list and discussion of dubious cases, see Leon 140–159.
26 Luke 4.20. For discussion of the rare rabbinic references to the synagogal functions of the rosh ha-knesset and hazzan (synonyms, so it is assumed, for the archisynagogos and hyperetes), see M. Goodman, State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132–212, Totowa 1983, 123–124.
little to the explication of the Roman evidence. Guesswork, therefore, has had to be the order of the day, helped by such other resources as are available. Three should be noted here: (1) the etymology of the titles themselves; (2) Greek and Roman usage (all the terms mentioned above were either directly borrowed from or modelled upon those found in the Graeco-Roman world); (3) general Jewish practice. Given such a variable and uncertain base for interpretation, it is hardly surprising that many of the titles have been given quite different explanations. To list them all would be as tedious as it is unnecessary. No more than a general over-view will be attempted here. My main purpose is to highlight the limitations of the evidence and pinpoint some of the problems arising from the conventional interpretation of it, before suggesting an alternative approach.

We shall consider first those positions which are found only at Rome, starting with the easiest and most junior of them — namely the child archons and infant grammateis. Assumed to have been the direct analogues of the child decurions found so frequently on the Roman municipal scene, they are generally (and surely correctly) seen as honorary officials — boys given prominence and marked out for advancement by the community because of the wealth and status of their fathers. The ages of some (e.g. eight and six) show that they cannot themselves have been functional figures. Equally uncontroversial are the mellarchontes and mellogrammateis. They were simply archons and grammateis elect (some of these too were young children), who had expired before they could take up office. Numerous parallels for Jewish terminology here can be found in Graeco-Roman society. But the remaining uniquely Roman titles have proved less easy to explain. Who exactly were the archon and the archon and how did they differ from 'ordinary' and life archons? The general response to these questions has been most unsatisfactory. Most scholars have offered no explanation at all for the titles or been content to opine that their holders, though clearly of a higher status than 'ordinary' archons, were "decorative figures with little real authority." Why each synagogue should have three kinds of such archons (the life archon too is always assumed to have been of senior but

28 References in the Theodosian code (e.g. at 16.8.4) to such dignitaries as archisynagogoi, hieres and Fathers of the Synagogue, yield no information about their function. On this text and these offices, see A. Linder, The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, Michigan 1987, 135–137.
29 For a comprehensive discussion of older views, see Leon ch. VIII passim.
31 CIJ I² 88 and 146.
32 A comparable figure is the three year old archisynagogos from Venosa — CIJ I² 587. On this inscription, see now G. H. R. Horsley, New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity IV, MacQuarie University 1987, 214 and 218 and D. Noy, Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe I, Cambridge 1993, no. 53.
33 Note the two year old mellarchon in CIJ I² 402.
35 Implicit in both titles and shown quite clearly in the case of the archon πάσης τιμής by CIJ I² 337 — the cursus of Eupsychos.
honorary status), their titles couched in quite different languages, is never made clear. Occasionally alternative explanations have been offered for these awkward titles. Frey, for instance, taking τιμὴ in its secondary meaning of value or price, argued that the archon πᾶσης τιμῆς was the synagogal assessor/collector of all dues and taxes — le receveur général\(^{37}\). Quite recently it has been proposed that the archon alti ordinis was not a Jewish official at all\(^{38}\). Few have been wholly convinced by either explanation\(^{39}\). And almost as unsatisfactory has been the handling of the titles, exarchon and archigerousiarch. The former usually is either assumed to have denoted a former 'ordinary' archon\(^{40}\) or just left unexplained. As for the latter, it is generally regarded as a mystery\(^{41}\).

Those titles which are found both at Rome and in other Diasporan communities understandably have caused fewer difficulties but even so are far from problem-free. For convenience, they will, with one exception, prostates, be treated here in the conventional manner — i.e. as being either honorary or administrative or cultic. It will, however, become apparent in the course of the discussion that these neat divisions are rather artificial and somewhat at odds with the evidence\(^{42}\).

**Honorary:** Two positions need consideration here — those of life archon and Father/Mother of the Synagogue. The former, to my knowledge, has never been seen as anything other than honorary, on the assumption that in Roman, as so often in modern society, 'life' appointees must have been non-functional\(^{43}\). However, evidence from the Greek world, where life officials are fairly widely attested, suggests that such men may quite literally have performed their (usually not very onerous) public duties for life\(^{44}\). Probably the main difference between senior archons like our (archon) διὰ βίου too and those of the 'ordinary' variety will have lain in status rather than function\(^{45}\). People with the titles Father or Mother of the Synagogue are also often assumed to have been decorative figures, largely on the grounds, that if a woman could bear one of these titles, the position can hardly have been anything other!\(^{46}\) More plausible, surely, given general Roman usage,

\(^{37}\) *CIJ* I\(^2\) lxxix–xcii.


\(^{39}\) For cogent criticisms of Frey, see Leon 177; for doubts about di Stefano Manzello's thesis, see van der Horst 90, n. 18.

\(^{40}\) See, for instance, Leon 189–190; van der Horst 90.

\(^{41}\) For a typical response, note Schürer (revised), III 98.

\(^{42}\) On the futility of trying to apply such modern distinctions as sacred and secular to the synagogal way of life, see J. T. Burchaell, *From Synagogue to Church*, CUP 1992, 206.

\(^{43}\) Leon 174; van der Horst 89.

\(^{44}\) A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian*, Oxford 1940, 175.

\(^{45}\) For the clear precedence taken by a life archisynagogos over an 'ordinary' one, see the Acmonian inscription *MAMA* VI 264.

is the view that they were the patrons of the communities with which they were associated.

Administrative: We will begin with the most senior and least controversial figure — the gerousiarch. This official is universally assumed to have chaired the committee which managed the day-to-day running of the synagogue and thus been the administrative head of the community. That each community had a gerousiarch and that the committee over which he presided was called the gerousia is generally regarded as axiomatic. Actually, gerousiarchs are certainly attested only for three congregations and the term gerousia itself never mentioned. But, assuming that some sort of committee did exist, who sat on it and what did they do? It is widely (and surely correctly) claimed that 'ordinary' archons constituted the bulk of the executive. Not only are they found in most Roman congregations but they are attested far more frequently than any other official (about fifty times). As to what they did, there is no evidence at all. However, it is generally thought that between them they maintained the fabric of the synagogue and the other buildings the community sometimes possessed, organised the charitable activities for which the Jews were renowned and collected all the dues to which they are known to have been liable — e.g. the half-shekel tax for the upkeep of the Temple at Jerusalem. Though the number of 'ordinary' archons on each board is unknown, it is almost universally agreed that there was more than one and that they were elected by their respective congregations — probably annually. Another elected member of the executive was the phrontistes. Referred to only twice in our sources, it is usually (and correctly) contended, that he enjoyed a higher status than any of the archons. Although there is no evidence for what the Jewish phrontistai of Rome did, general Greek usage strongly suggests that their duties lay in the sphere of property management. Finally mention should be made of the functionary who allegedly underpinned the activities of all the above — viz. the grammateus. Whether he was a board member or merely a humble employee is disputed. What is agreed is that there was only

---


48 Frey, *CIJ* I² lxxxv, followed, *inter al.*, by Penna (cit. n. 7) 329 and Wiefel (cit. n. 7) 107.

49 For details, see Leon 182. That *CIJ* I² 408 refers to a gerousiarch of the synagogue of the Tripolitans is now regarded as doubtful. See Lifshitz, *proleg.* to *CIJ* I² 36.

50 See Vismara (cit. n. 7) Tabella B — *Cariche attestate nella comunità*.

51 Leon 173; van der Horst 89.

52 On the evidence for archontal activities in other parts of the Diaspora, see Applebaum (cit. n. 7) 495.

53 Schürer (revised) III 99. Leon (175–176) argued that some congregations (e.g. the Siburesians) had only one archon at any one time. His case, never strong, has been virtually destroyed by new readings of several vital pieces of evidence — e.g. *CIJ* I² 22 and 35a. For these, see Lifshitz, *proleg.* to *CIJ* I² 26 and Moretti in *RAC* 50, 1974, 218–219.

54 Deducible from *CIJ* I² 337 and 494.

55 See Frey *CIJ* I² xcii, who accordingly dubbed the phrontistes *l'Administrateur des biens*.

56 For the latter (minority) view, see Applebaum (cit. n. 7) 495.
one per congregation\textsuperscript{57} and that he was the community's secretary-cum-archivist-cum-notary\textsuperscript{58}. Both claims however, are rather suspect, given the very large number (around thirty) of attested grammateis and the presence in their ranks of several very young children\textsuperscript{59}.

\textbf{Cultic:} Of the four types of functionary generally placed in this category — \textit{viz.} archisynagogoi, hyperetai, psalmodoi and hieries — only the first need be considered here, as the others, largely liturgical figures, are fairly uncontroversial\textsuperscript{60}. As to the role played by the archisynagogos, opinion these days broadly divides between those who see him simply as the official who was mainly responsible for the regulation of the synagogue services and thus — his title notwithstanding — not the head of the congregation at all\textsuperscript{61} and those who believe he was a figure who performed wide-ranging duties and was of the very highest standing within the community\textsuperscript{62}. The latter view surely is more likely to be correct. Evidence from elsewhere in the Diaspora (\textit{e.g.} Acmonia) indicates that the role of the archisynagogos could embrace the administrative (\textit{e.g.} care of the synagogue fabric) as well as the cultic. His very title, as well as the testimony of Luke and Acts, imply that he occupied a position of leadership within the community\textsuperscript{63}. And non-Jewish uses of the word add further support — in certain pagan religious associations, the archisynagogos was indubitably the leader\textsuperscript{64}. But divided as opinions are about the role and status of the archisynagogos, on one point there is complete agreement — each Roman synagogue had one. It should be noted, however, that archisynagogoi are specifically mentioned only in connection with two congregations\textsuperscript{65}.

Finally we must consider an official, mentioned just twice in our sources\textsuperscript{66}, who has so far defied all attempts to classify him — \textit{viz.} the prostates. Who was he? What did he do? Two interpretations have been offered — neither of them entirely satisfactory. Some have

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{57} Leon 184; van der Horst 91. \textsuperscript{58} On his likely duties, see, most recently, A. J. Saldarini, Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society, Wilmington 1988, 272–273. \textsuperscript{59} To van der Horst's list of grammateis (91–92), add CIJ I\textsuperscript{2} 31 and the unpublished inscription cited by A. Ferrua at RAC 51, 1975, 362. For 'ordinary' grammateis as young as seven years old, see CIJ I\textsuperscript{2} 99 (as corrected in Leon 277) and 180. \textsuperscript{60} For the hyperetes, see CIJ I\textsuperscript{2} 72 and the psalmodos, Fasola (cit. n. 16) 19–20. Hieries are mentioned in CIJ I\textsuperscript{2} 364; 375. Generally they are seen (\textit{e.g.} by Leon 192–193 and van der Horst 96) as largely honorary figures, whose high status was derived their from their Aaronic descent. The solitary hierissa of CIJ I\textsuperscript{2} 315 was probably the wife or daughter of such a person. See Leon 193 and Burtchaell 245–246. \textsuperscript{61} Schürer (revised) II 435 and III 100; van der Horst 92. \textsuperscript{62} Leon 171–172; U. Rappaport in 	extit{Enc. Jud.} III cols. 335–336; Burtchaell 242–244. For the (unconvincing) view that the position was largely honorific, see T. Rajak and D. Noy, "Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue" in JRS 83, 1993, 75–93. \textsuperscript{63} supra nn. 25 and 27. \textsuperscript{64} For specific examples, see Horsley, New Docs. IV 215 nos. 17 and 19. In general, see F. Poland, \textit{Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens}, Leipzig 1909, 355–357. \textsuperscript{65} CIJ I\textsuperscript{2} 383 (synagogue of the Vernaclesians) and 504 (Calcaresians). \textsuperscript{66} CIJ I\textsuperscript{2} 337 and 494.}
suggested that he was the patron of the synagogue, on the grounds that in a Greek context prostates sometimes does mean just that\(^{67}\). There are, however, no certain instances of this usage in Jewish epigraphy\(^{68}\). Further, if Fathers and Mothers of the Synagogue — after archons, the most widely attested of all Jewish 'officials' at Rome\(^ {69}\) — are correctly seen as the patrons of their communities, we may reasonably doubt whether there was any niche for the prostates qua patron. Others think he may have been the synagogue's legal representative to the community at large — in Frey's words *un défenseur et protecteur légal*\(^ {70}\). That is unlikely. Not only are Diasporan parallels to seek but the literary record suggests that such there was no need for such a figure. Advocacy of Jewish interests tended to be performed either by influential lay members of the community such as Philo (in the case of the Alexandrian Jews) or powerful external intermediaries like the Jewish king, Herod the Great\(^ {71}\).

Such is the evidence for the organisation of Roman Jewry and the views most commonly taken of it. Among the many problems arising, two are particularly noteworthy. (1) Several titles receive no adequate explanation — *e.g.* prostates, exarchon, archigerousiarches. (2) A number of rather baffling overlaps are entirely unaccounted for — *e.g.* the existence within each congregation of no less than three senior archons, two with Greek titles and one with a Latin one.

The source of these and other difficulties, it seems to me, is the assumption, nowhere questioned, that all the synagogues of Rome must have been alike. But evidence for such homogeneity is demonstrably lacking. What is more, everything we know about the Roman Jewish community in particular and synagogal structures in general tells us that a considerable degree of diversity is to be expected, not total uniformity.

If we consider the evidence for the history of the synagogues of Rome, we find that they were founded over a period of several centuries — the first coming into existence in the

\(^{67}\) Benefactor inscriptions, mainly from the second/third centuries A.D., clearly illustrate this usage. For recent examples, see Horsley, New Docs. IV 242 nos. 5–6 and 10–11 (Ephesus); *SEG* 38, 1238 (Galatia); *SEG* 39, 1055 (Naples). Phoebe, the Christian deaconess of Cenchreae, described by Paul at Romans 16.2 as προστάτης πολλῶν ... και ἐμοὶ σώματος, is also best seen as a benefactress. On προστάτης in general, see now O. Montevecchi in Aegyptus 61, 1981, 103–106.

\(^{68}\) To the list of epigraphically attested Jewish *prostatai* at P. Trebilco, Jewish Communities in Asia Minor, Cambridge 1991, 229, n. 28, add *SEG* 29, 537 — a first cent. example from Larissa in Thessaly and *SEG* 36, 970, A line 9 — Aphrodisias (early third century?).

\(^{69}\) See Vismara (cit. n. 7) *Tabella B*.

\(^{70}\) Frey *CIJ* I\(^2\) xciv.

\(^{71}\) E. M. Smallwood, The Jews under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian, Leiden 1976, 242–246 (Philo) and 140–141 (Herod). Professor J. A. Crook has pointed out to me that in the Graeco-Roman world generally προστάτης was not the word used when people wanted to talk about a legal adviser/assistant to the community. Other terms were employed, most notably σύνδεικος and συνήγορος.
first century B.C., others being established as late as the Severan period — *i.e.* the late second / early third century A.D. As for the origin of their members, the evidence is clear that they came not just from Palestine but from all over the Diaspora. Given the differences in titulature and organisation that have been found in various parts of the Jewish world over the whole of that period, it would be astonishing if the synagogues that these immigrants founded at Rome were all exactly alike. Obviously the organisation of each will have been similar, for the simple reason that there were certain basic functions, religious and social, which each community will have had to carry out. But we need not assume that the officials to whom those tasks were entrusted, everywhere bore the same titles. They did not in the rest of the Diaspora, as the various terms used for the servitor of the synagogue, for instance, show all too clearly. Besides hyperetes, we find neokoros and hazzan. And leadership terms are similarly diverse. Nor need we assume that the structure of each and every synagogue at Rome must have been identical. Leadership arrangements varied from one part of the Diaspora to another, some communities, for instance, having several archisynagogoi, others just one. Synagogal committees also were differently constituted. In some Diasporan communities, a variety of members is attested. In others, all board members appear to have borne the same title. At Berenice we find an entirely different arrangement. There, archons alone seem to have managed affairs and no distinction was made between leadership and board. However, different numbers of them have been found at different periods, reflecting, so it is thought, changes in the size of the community. Why should there not have occurred at Rome similar variations between synagogues and a similar fluidity of practice within individual congregations?

If we now turn to the Jewish inscriptions from Rome and proceed on the assumption that the eleven synagogues mentioned in them were not alike in every respect, the problems

---

72 *e.g.* the Agrippesians, Augustesians and Volumnesians, all founded probably during the principate of Augustus. On these, see now W. Horbury in *Templum Amicitiae*, Essays on the Second Temple presented to Ernst Bammel, ed. W. Horbury, Sheffield 1991, 134–135 and 148, n. 64.

73 On the synagogue of Severus, see Frey *CII* I 2 lxix.


75 Schürer (revised) II 438.

76 Besides gerousiarch and archisynagogos, we might note, *inter al.*, prostates (*CII* 1441) and pater (*CII* I 2 533). Both also occur as leadership terms in Greek religious associations — the source of much synagogal terminology. For these particular titles, see Poland, 363–367 (prostates) and 371–373 (pater).


78 At Side in Pamphylia, we find archons, phrontistai and presbyteroi — see L. Robert, *Rev. Phil.* 32, 1958, 36–47.

79 In one community (name unknown) in Egypt, they are called *prostatin (i.e. prostatai)*. See *CPJ* I proleg. 101. The leaders are called *roshei ha-knesset*.

80 Applebaum (cit. n. 7) 495.

81 Applebaum 487.
identified above largely disappear. Take, for instance, the puzzling terms prostates, exarchon and archigerousiarches. If we assume that each synagogue did not necessarily have a gerousiarch as its administrative head and an archisynagogos as the community leader\(^{82}\) but that Jewish leadership titles were as varied as those found in contemporary Greek associations\(^{83}\), satisfactory explanations for all three are readily forthcoming.

We will start with prostates — a common word among the Greeks for the presiding officer of a religious association\(^{84}\) and, as the epigraphic record\(^{85}\) and certain intertestamental texts\(^{86}\) show, a leadership term in use among Diasporan Jews long before the Jewish community in Rome itself became established\(^{87}\). In the latter, it occurs twice — once without reference to a specific congregation and once in connection with the Agrippesians\(^{88}\). As noted above, two interpretations are routinely offered here — the prostates was either a patron of the community or its advocate in a strictly legal sense. But why hypothesize meanings which have no certain parallels within Diasporan Jewry, when a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the word already lies to hand? Without strain, the prostates of the Agrippesians can be seen as the leader/president of that community. Archisynagogoi are not attested in that congregation — an argument from silence, admittedly. But there are positive grounds also for supposing that the term prostates could have been chosen by that particular congregation as an alternative to archisynagogos\(^{89}\). The Agrippesians were probably among the oldest congregations of Rome, their foundation almost certainly pre-dating 12 BC — the date of the death of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa. Yet the term archisynagogos did not gain wide currency until well into the first century A.D. It was, as Horsley has pointed out, a latecomer among Jewish synagogue titles\(^{90}\). Before that, other titles were used for community leaders. In second century Xenephyris in Egypt, for instance, the prostatai (two of them) were the eponymous officials of the Jewish community\(^{91}\). Thus the Agrippesians, as an early congregation, will probably have chosen a term other than archisynagogos for the president of their community, which, given current

\(^{82}\) This arrangement is attested only in one congregation at Rome — the Calcaresians. See *CIJ*\(^2\) 504.

\(^{83}\) For numerous examples, see Poland 351–375.

\(^{84}\) Poland 363–367.

\(^{85}\) See *CIJ* II 1441, for a Jewish example from Egypt from the period 140–116 B. C. For full bibliography and discussion of this text, see now W. Horbury and D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Cambridge 1992, no. 24.

\(^{86}\) e.g. Shirach 45.24. On this and other literary references, see Trebilco (cit. n. 68) 229, n. 28.

\(^{87}\) This was only around the middle of the first century B. C. See Smallwood 131.

\(^{88}\) *CIJ*\(^2\) 100 and 365.

\(^{89}\) Prostates is unlikely to have been a variant for gerousiarch in the synagogue of the Agrippesians as that official is independently attested there. See *CIJ*\(^2\) 425.

\(^{90}\) Horsley, New Docs. IV 220.

Jewish usage, could well have been prostates. Once chosen, it could have been retained for centuries. Jews, like others, tended towards conservatism in such matters.92

But was prostates the only variant leadership term employed by the early congregations of Rome? General linguistic considerations suggest that exarchon — a word firmly attested in connection with what is widely believed to have been the oldest Jewish congregation in Rome — viz. the synagogue of the Hebrews93 — is best understood in such a sense. The explanation most commonly given for the term — viz. the exarchon was a former (ordinary) archon — proves on close examination to be rather unlikely.

To speakers of English, habituated to the use of the prefix ex to denote former status, it seems entirely plausible, natural even, to assume that the exarchon must have been one who had once held the archonship. But was that usage current at the time when the congregation of the Hebrews would have used that title — i.e. during the late Republic and early Roman Empire? Greek civic and religious terminology — the source of nearly all synagogue titulature — yields no examples. Leon and other proponents of the 'former archon' hypothesis adduce the adjectives \( \varepsilon \varepsilon \delta \nu \beta \omicron \omicron \varsigma \) and \( \varepsilon \zeta \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \alpha \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \varsigma \). But besides being literary (they come from Aeschylus and Lucian respectively95) and very rare (one case of each), they are not apposite. LSJ translate them as "past one's youth" and "past athletic exercise" respectively. But a twenty eight year old, such as the exarchon Gaius Furfanius Rufus96, can hardly be described as "past the archonship", when men older than he often held the post97. As for the Latin words which are routinely and confidently cited as precedents — exconsul, exduumvir, expraefectus98, these prove curiously elusive. The closest example I have been able to find — a Roman inscription of the late 360's referring to Valentinian's former prefect, Symmachus — is too late for our purposes99 and anyway is not exactly parallel. (Symmachus, though assuredly no longer prefect at the time, is not described as expraefectus but as ex praefectis urbi.100) Indeed, Lewis and Short go as far as to claim that terms like "exconsul, excomes, exdux etc.", though frequently alleged, lack "good MS. authority"101. All of which leads me to conclude that the Jewish term exarchon, whether

92 Schürer (revised) III 95.
93 e.g. by La Piana, HTR 20, 1927, 356, n. 26; Leon 149 and Applebaum 492.
94 Leon 189 and van der Horst 90.
95 Aeschylus Septem 11 and Lucian Lex. 11.
96 CIJ I² 465.
97 As, for instance, in CIJ I² 343; 380 and 538.
98 Leon 189 and van der Horst 90 — but neither gives specific examples.
99 The inscriptive material from the catacombs is generally held to be no later than the third century A.D. See Solin (cit. n. 7) 684.
100 For a good discussion of the inscription in general (ILS 769) and this point in particular, see A. E. Gordon, Illustrated Introduction to Latin Epigraphy, University of California Press 1983, 174.
101 Latin Dictionary, s.v. ex II, A, 2.
rendered in Greek or Latin (we have one example of each\(^{102}\)), is unlikely to have meant 'former archon'.

What, then, did it mean? Analysis of Greek sources, where \(\epsilon \xi \acute{a} \rho \chi \omega\) and its derivatives \(\epsilon \xi \acute{a} \rho \chi \omega \nu\) and \(\epsilon \xi \acute{a} \rho \chi \omega \zeta\) are throughout quite common (examples occur all the way from Homer to Michael Psellus\(^{103}\)), suggests that, whether used in a cultural, cultic (pagan or Christian), military or political context, exarchos/exarchon invariably denotes the current, supreme leader\(^{104}\). (The prefix \(\epsilon \kappa\)- is thus performing its usual function in Greek verbal compounds — it has an intensive force.) The exarchon of the Hebrews, then, surely must be seen, not as a committee member, either past or present\(^{105}\), but as a leader of the congregation. But in what sense? 'Ordinary' archons are also attested in this congregation\(^{106}\). Etymology suggests that the exarchon must have enjoyed precedence over them. Probably, then, we should see the exarchon as the president of the synagogal board and the term a variant for gerousiarch.

Once it is accepted that the leading officials in the synagogues of Rome could very well have borne different titles, it becomes very easy to assign a meaning to the rare (only one attestation) term, archigerousiarch\(^{107}\). It too may be no more than a variant for the common term gerousiarch — only a late one. It occurs on an inscription which dates in all probability from the third century A.D.\(^{108}\). In the Koine, the prefix \(\alpha r c h i\)- often functioned as a completely gratuitous supplement to common nouns\(^{109}\). Archigerousiarches thus could be another example of this phenomenon\(^{110}\).

But it is not only prostates, exarchon and archigerousiarches that receive unforced explanations under my hypothesis. A possible solution also presents itself for that enigmatic trio of senior archons — the archon \(a l t i \ ord i n i s\), the archon \(\pi \alpha \sigma \eta \zeta \ \tau i \mu \zeta\) and the so-called life archon (\(\delta \nu \zeta \ \beta i \nu \zeta\)). Could it not be that each held office in a congregation different from those to which the other two belonged? To prove this is impossible given the state of the evidence. Beyond the fact that each of these archons can be shown to be of a higher status than the 'ordinary' officials of that name\(^{111}\), we know very little about them. However, it

---

102 CII I\(^2\) 317 (Greek); 465 (Latin).
103 The best discussion of the two words is still Bees' in N. Müller and N. Bees, \(D i e \ I n s c h r i f t e n d e r j ü d i s c h e n K a t a k o m b e a m M o n t e v e r d e z u R o m\), Leipzig, 1919, 18–20.
104 It was for that reason that Juster (cit. n. 1) and S. Krauss, \(S y n a g o g a l e A l t e r t ü m e r\), Berlin 1922, 137–139 assumed (mistakenly — so, correctly, Leon 189) that the 'exarchon of the Hebrews' must have been the supreme leader of \(a l l\) Roman Jewry.
105 For pertinent criticisms of Frey's view (\(C I I \) I\(^2\) cvii) that the terms archon and exarchon were simply synonymous, see Leon 189–190 and van der Horst 90.
106 CII I\(^2\) 291.
107 SEG 26, 1178.
108 On the date of the catacomb in which it was found, see Fasola in \(R A C\) 52, 1976, 61–62.
109 For numerous examples, see G. H. R. Horsley, \(N e w \ D o c u m e n t s I l l u s t r a t i n g E a r l y C h r i s t i a n i t y\), MacQuarie University 1982, 18–19 and New Documents III 1983, 64.
110 Suggested by Solin (cit. n. 7) 697.
111 See supra nn. 35 and 45.
seems most unlikely that the archon *alti ordinis* can have been an official in a congregation whose cultural orientation was predominantly Greek. This title was not a casual borrowing from the Latin, as the other Latin synagogal titles at Rome were (*i.e.* *pater/mater synagogae*) but a deliberate coinage and one that reveals strong Roman influence. I thus conclude that L. Maecius, our solitary archon *alti ordinis* at *CIJ* I² 470, is unlikely to have belonged to any of the eleven congregations known to us by name. For the evidence relating to them is overwhelmingly Greek. Rather we should assume that he belonged to a highly Romanised congregation whose name has not survived. But what of the life archon and the archon *πάσης τιμῆς*? Did they belong to the same or different (but still predominantly Greek) congregations? Given the way that honours and titles tended to proliferate as the imperial period progressed, it cannot be ruled out that the same congregations may have appointed two kinds of 'senior' archon. However, what our (admittedly, very limited) evidence does show is that life archons are found only in those congregations which are known or believed to have been among the oldest at Rome. This raises the interesting possibility that the archon of all honour may have featured solely in later foundations. Although positive proof lacks, there is evidence from other parts of the Diaspora that the Jews were not unaffected by the trend towards more elaborate titulature.

To conclude. We have seen that the current interpretation of the evidence for the structure of the Jewish community of Rome is far from satisfactory. Besides being overschematic, it fails to accommodate all the evidence. Under the hypothesis that has been put forward here — namely that the synagogues of Rome are likely to have been no less varied in their structure and the titulature of their officials than those found elsewhere in the Jewish world — both these defects are remedied. I am, of course, aware that certain titles may be susceptible of other explanations. The terms archigerousiarches and archon *alti ordinis*, for example, might possibly be seen as pointers to the existence within the Jewish community of an echelon of higher officials. However, even if it were to be argued that some sort of Alexandrian-style central council did exist at Rome, the validity of the central idea of this paper — *viz.* that the synagogues of Rome are unlikely to have been homogeneous — would in no way be compromised.

Edinburgh

Margaret H. Williams

---

112 The only exception is *CIJ* I² 523, which is mainly in Latin. Significantly, that is the epitaph of a Roman proselyte.

113 On the likelihood of the existence of synagogues other than the ones whose names happen to be epigraphically attested, see van der Horst 88.

114 On this, see Hengel (cit. n. 8) 178, n. 104.

115 The Agrippesians (*CIJ* I² 503); Augustesians (*CIJ* I² 416); Volumnesians (*CIJ* I² 417) and Vernaclesians (*CIJ* I² 398). On the age of the first three, see Horbury, *supra* n. 72; on the last, see Leon 155.

116 To be seen, for instance, in the late fourth century inscription from Apamea — *DF* 38 = *CIJ* 803.