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

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HOMOGENEOUS?*

In the first quarter of this century the structure of the Jewish community of ancient Rome was often sharply disputed¹. 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 titlature of their officials². This view is essentially Schürer's. We find it first promulgated in his early, ground-breaking work *Die Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom* (1879)³ and re-stated some twenty or so years later in his monumental *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes*⁴. In the 1930's it received the powerful backing of Frey⁵. Leon added his authority in 1960⁶ and since then virtually every writer on ancient Roman Jewry has been content to follow suit⁷. 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.

³ E. Schürer, *Die Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom in der Kaiserzeit nach den Inschriften dargestellt*, Leipzig 1879, 15–31.

⁴ E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*⁴, 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 *CIJ I*]², lxxxii–cxi.

⁶ H. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Philadelphia 1960, 167–194.

⁷ I. Muñoz Valle, "El testimonio de las inscripciones sobre el régimen de las comunidades judías en la Roma imperial" in *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica* 4, 1972, 151–163; W. Wiefel in *The Romans Debate*, ed. K. P. Donfried, Minneapolis 1977, 105–108; R. Penna, *NTS* 28, 1982, 327–330; H. Solin, *ANRW* II 29, 2, 1983, 696–698; C. Vismara in *Società romana e impero tardoantico, II, Roma: politica, economia e paesaggio*, ed. A. Giardina, Rome-Bari 1986, 357; P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*², Tübingen 1989, 368. Only Applebaum has deviated slightly. Though content to assume that the synagogues of Rome were largely homogeneous, he does not rule out altogether the existence of a central council at Rome. See S. Applebaum in S. Safrai and M. Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century* I, Assen 1974, 492–501.

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 Transiberinum. But he nowhere refers to, let alone details, the administrative structure of the community⁸. 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 πρώτους. 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 (*CIJ* 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 presbyteroi⁹. But the wording of Acts is far too imprecise for firm identifications of any kind to be made. Conceivably the πρώτοι 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 community¹⁰ but they are, thanks to Jewish copying of Roman epigraphic practices¹¹, unusually rich in the number of references they contain to public honours/offices (*honores*). Of the positions

⁸ Applebaum (499) toys with the idea that τῆς Ἰουδαϊκῆς (*sc.* πολιτείας) at *Leg.* 157 might mean Jewish rights as in a *politeuma* and thus indicate that the Jews of Rome had a centralised structure similar to that possessed by the Jews of Alexandria. Examination of the context, however, suggests that the phrase in question means no more than the Jews' traditional Torah and Temple oriented way of life. For this restricted meaning of *politeia*, see Hengel in *ZNTW* 57, 1966, 176–181.

⁹ Penna 330 and 342, n. 69. Presbyteroi, however, are not certainly attested at Rome and will be assumed in this paper not to have existed there. The word occurs only once and uncertainly (it has been restored in *CIJ* I² 378) and may well indicate no more than the advanced age of the deceased. So, correctly, E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman, Edinburgh 1986 [hereafter referred to as Schürer (revised)], III 102, citing *CIJ* I² 400 as evidence.

¹⁰ For the approximately six hundred inscriptions relating to the Jews of Rome, see *CIJ* I² and *SEG* 26, 1157–1202.

¹¹ To be seen most clearly in *CIJ* I² 265 — *archonti et archisynagogo honoribus omnibus fuctus (sic)*.

referred to, the majority is found in other Diasporan communities. Archisynagogoi and 'ordinary' archontes¹², for instance, crop up all over the Diaspora¹³. And life archons¹⁴ and Fathers/Mothers of the Synagogue, gerousiarchs and grammateis, phrontistai and prostatai, hiereis, hyperetai and psalmodoi, are not unattested elsewhere¹⁵. But quite a few are unique to Roman Jewry. Besides the archigerousiarches — a fairly recent addition to the list¹⁶, there are the child archon (ἄρχων νήπιος¹⁷) and child grammateus (γραμματεὺς νήπιος¹⁸), the mellarchon¹⁹ and mellogrammateus²⁰, and the exarchon²¹, archon of all honour (πάσης τιμῆς²²) and archon of high rank (*alti ordinis*²³). 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 eleven²⁴, 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 archisynagogos²⁵ and hyperetes²⁶. And inscriptions from other Diasporan communities have proved to be not altogether without value (primarily for the offices of archisynagogos and archon²⁷). 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 διὰ 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.

¹⁶ First published by U. Fasola in *RAC* 52, 1976, 36–37.

¹⁷ *CIJ* I² 88 and 120.

¹⁸ *CIJ* I² 146. *cf.* 99 (as corrected in Leon 277); 180; 284.

¹⁹ *CIJ* I² 85; 284; 325; 402; 457 and 483.

²⁰ *CIJ* I² 121 and 279.

²¹ *CIJ* I² 317 and 465.

²² *CIJ* I² 85; 324; 337 and probably 216. So, correctly, Frey *CIJ* I² *ad loc.* and Leon 176, n. 2.

²³ *CIJ* I² 470.

²⁴ For full list and discussion of dubious cases, see Leon 140–159.

²⁵ Especially valuable are Luke 13.14 and Acts 13.15.

²⁶ Luke 4.20. For discussion of the rare rabbinic references to the synagogal functions of the *rosh ha-kneset* 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.

²⁷ See Leon 172, n. 1 and, more fully, W. Schrage in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Bromiley) VII, 846 for the evidence for archisynagogoi and Applebaum (*cit. n.* 7), 495 for archons.

little to the explication of the Roman evidence²⁸. 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 here²⁹. 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 fathers³⁰. The ages of some (*e.g.* eight and six³¹) show that they cannot themselves have been functional figures³². Equally uncontroversial are the mellarchontes and mellogrammateis. They were simply archons and grammateis elect (some of these too were young children³³), who had expired before they could take up office. Numerous parallels for Jewish terminology here can be found in Graeco-Roman society³⁴. But the remaining uniquely Roman titles have proved less easy to explain. Who exactly were the archon πάσης τιμῆς and the archon *alti ordinis* 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' archons³⁵, were "decorative figures with little real authority"³⁶. 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, hiereis 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*.

³⁰ Leon 179–180 and 185. For a detailed treatment of child magistrates in general, see M. Kleijwegt, *Ancient Youth*, Amsterdam 1991, 247–272.

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.

³⁴ For a discussion of various non-Jewish μέλλο-titles, see H. G. Pflaum in *Syria* 29, 1952, 325–326.

³⁵ Implicit in both titles and shown quite clearly in the case of the archon πάσης τιμῆς by *CIJ* I² 337 — the cursus of Euppsychos.

³⁶ S. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* II², Columbia University Press 1952, 199.

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 τιμή in its secondary meaning of value or price, argued that the archon πάσης 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 all³⁸. Few have been wholly convinced by either explanation³⁹. 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' archon⁴⁰ or just left unexplained. As for the latter, it is generally regarded as a mystery⁴¹.

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 evidence⁴².

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-functional⁴³. 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 life⁴⁴. 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 function⁴⁵. 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* I² lxxxix–xci.

³⁸ See I. di Stefano Manzello, "L. Maecius Archon, centurio alti ordinis. Nota critica su *CIL* VI. 39084 = *CIJ* I, 470" in *ZPE* 77, 1989, 103–112.

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. Burtchaell, *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.

⁴⁶ Schürer, *Gemeindeverfassung* 29; H. Vogelstein and P. Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* I, Berlin 1896, 43.

is the view that they were the patrons of the communities with which they were associated⁴⁷.

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 axiomatic⁴⁸. Actually, gerousiarchs are certainly attested only for three congregations⁴⁹ 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 congregations⁵⁰ but they are attested far more frequently than any other official (about fifty times)⁵¹. 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 Jerusalem⁵². 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 annually⁵³. 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 archons⁵⁴. 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 management⁵⁵. 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 disputed⁵⁶. What is agreed is that there was only

⁴⁷ Frey, *CIJ I*² xciv and Burtchaell 249–250. For a full discussion of these titles, see now B. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogues*, Brown Judaic Studies XXXVI, Chico California, 1982, ch. IV *passim*.

⁴⁸ Frey, *CIJ I*² lxxxv, followed, *inter al.*, by Penna (cit. n. 7) 329 and Wiefel (cit. n. 7) 107.

⁴⁹ For details, see Leon 182. That *CIJ I*² 408 refers to a gerousiarch of the *synagogue* of the Tripolitans is now regarded as doubtful. See Lifshitz, *proleg. to CIJ I*² 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 I*² 22 and 35a. For these, see Lifshitz, *proleg. to CIJ I*² 26 and Moretti in *RAC* 50, 1974, 218–219.

⁵⁴ Deducible from *CIJ I*² 337 and 494.

⁵⁵ See Frey *CIJ I*² xcii, who accordingly dubbed the phrontistes *l'Administrateur des biens*.

⁵⁶ For the latter (minority) view, see Applebaum (cit. n. 7) 495.

one per congregation⁵⁷ and that he was the community's secretary-cum-archivist-cum-notary⁵⁸. 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 children⁵⁹.

Cultic: Of the four types of functionary generally placed in this category — *viz.* archisynagogoï, hyperetai, psalmodoi and hiereis — only the first need be considered here, as the others, largely liturgical figures, are fairly uncontroversial⁶⁰. 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 all⁶¹ and those who believe he was a figure who performed wide-ranging duties and was of the very highest standing within the community⁶². The latter view surely is more likely to be correct. Evidence from elsewhere in the Diaspora (*e.g.* Acmonia) indicates that the role of the archisynagogos could embrace the administrative (*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 community⁶³. And non-Jewish uses of the word add further support — in certain pagan religious associations, the archisynagogos was indubitably the leader⁶⁴. 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 archisynagogoï are specifically mentioned only in connection with two congregations⁶⁵.

Finally we must consider an official, mentioned just twice in our sources⁶⁶, who has so far defied all attempts to classify him — *viz.* the prostates. Who was he? What did he do? Two interpretations have been offered — neither of them entirely satisfactory. Some have

⁵⁷ Leon 184; van der Horst 91.

⁵⁸ On his likely duties, see, most recently, A. J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, Wilmington 1988, 272–273.

⁵⁹ To van der Horst's list of grammateis (91–92), add *CIJ I*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*² 99 (as corrected in Leon 277) and 180.

⁶⁰ For the hyperetes, see *CIJ I*² 72 and the psalmodos, Fasola (cit. n. 16) 19–20. Hiereis are mentioned in *CIJ I*² 346; 347; 355 and 375. Generally they are seen (*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*² 315 was probably the wife or daughter of such a person. See Leon 193 and Burtchaell 245–246.

⁶¹ Schürer (revised) II 435 and III 100; van der Horst 92.

⁶² Leon 171–172; U. Rappaport in *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, "Archisynagogoï: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue" in *JRS* 83, 1993, 75–93.

⁶³ *supra* nn. 25 and 27.

⁶⁴ For specific examples, see Horsley, *New Docs.* IV 215 nos. 17 and 19. In general, see F. Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens*, Leipzig 1909, 355–357.

⁶⁵ *CIJ I*² 383 (synagogue of the Vernaclesians) and 504 (Calcaresians).

⁶⁶ *CIJ I*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 that⁶⁷. There are, however, no certain instances of this usage in Jewish epigraphy⁶⁸. Further, if Fathers and Mothers of the Synagogue — after archons, the most widely attested of all Jewish 'officials' at Rome⁶⁹ — 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 Great⁷¹.

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 ... καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ*, 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* I² 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 *σύνδικος* and *συνήγορος*.

first century B. C.⁷², others being established as late as the Severan period — *i.e.* the late second / early third century A.D.⁷³. As for the origin of their members, the evidence is clear that they came not just from Palestine but from all over the Diaspora⁷⁴. Given the differences in titlature 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 hazzan⁷⁵. And leadership terms are similarly diverse⁷⁶. 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 one⁷⁷. Synagogal committees also were differently constituted. In some Diasporan communities, a variety of members is attested⁷⁸. In others, all board members appear to have borne the same title⁷⁹. At Berenice we find an entirely different arrangement. There, archons alone seem to have managed affairs and no distinction was made between leadership and board⁸⁰. However, different numbers of them have been found at different periods, reflecting, so it is thought, changes in the size of the community⁸¹. 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 *CIJ* I² lxxxi.

⁷⁴ On the epigraphic evidence, see Moretti in *RAC* 50, 1974, 215–218 and C. Vismara in *DArch* N. S. 5, 1987, 119–121.

⁷⁵ Schürer (revised) II 438.

⁷⁶ Besides gerousiarch and archisynagogos, we might note, *inter al.*, prostates (*CIJ* 1441) and pater (*CIJ* I² 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).

⁷⁷ For multiple archisynagogoi at Antioch in Pisidia and Apamea, see Acts 13.15 and B. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et Fondateurs dans les synagogues juives*, Paris 1967, [hereafter *DF*] no. 38.

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 *CPJI 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 leader⁸² but that Jewish leadership titles were as varied as those found in contemporary Greek associations⁸³, 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 association⁸⁴ and, as the epigraphic record⁸⁵ and certain intertestamental texts⁸⁶ show, a leadership term in use among Diasporan Jews long before the Jewish community in Rome itself became established⁸⁷. 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 titles⁹⁰. 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 community⁹¹. 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* I² 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* I² 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* I² 425.

⁹⁰ Horsley, *New Docs.* IV 220.

⁹¹ See Th. Reinach in *REJ* 65, 1913, 135–137 and A. Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Tübingen 1985, 111–112.

Jewish usage, could well have been prostates. Once chosen, it could have been retained for centuries. Jews, like others, tended towards conservatism in such matters⁹².

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 *ἔξῆβος* and *ἔξἄθλος*⁹⁴. 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*, *expraefectus*⁹⁸, 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 inscriptional 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 each¹⁰²), is unlikely to have meant 'former archon'.

What, then, did it mean? Analysis of Greek sources, where ἐξάρχω and its derivatives ἐξάρχων and ἑξάρχος are throughout quite common (examples occur all the way from Homer to Michael Psellos¹⁰³), suggests that, whether used in a cultural, cultic (pagan or Christian), military or political context, exarchos/exarchon invariably denotes the current, supreme leader¹⁰⁴. (The prefix ἐκ- is thus performing its usual function in Greek verbal compounds — it has an intensitive force.) The exarchon of the Hebrews, then, surely must be seen, not as a committee member, either past or present¹⁰⁵, but as a leader of the congregation. But in what sense? 'Ordinary' archons are also attested in this congregation¹⁰⁶. 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, archigerousiarch¹⁰⁷. 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 archi- often functioned as a completely gratuitous supplement to common nouns¹⁰⁹. Archigerousiarches thus could be another example of this phenomenon¹¹⁰.

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 *alti ordinis*, the archon πάσης τιμῆς and the so-called life archon (διὰ βίου). 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 name¹¹¹, we know very little about them. However, it

¹⁰² *CIJ* I² 317 (Greek); 465 (Latin).

¹⁰³ The best discussion of the two words is still Bees' in N. Müller and N. Bees, *Die Inschriften der jüdischen Katakomben am Monteverde zu Rom*, Leipzig, 1919, 18–20.

¹⁰⁴ It was for that reason that Juster (cit. n. 1) and S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, Berlin 1922, 137–139 assumed (mistakenly — so, correctly, Leon 189) that the 'exarchon of the Hebrews' must have been the supreme leader of *all* Roman Jewry.

¹⁰⁵ For pertinent criticisms of Frey's view (*CIJ* I² cvii) that the terms archon and exarchon were simply synonymous, see Leon 189–190 and van der Horst 90.

¹⁰⁶ *CIJ* I² 291.

¹⁰⁷ *SEG* 26, 1178.

¹⁰⁸ On the date of the catacomb in which it was found, see Fasola in *RAC* 52, 1976, 61–62.

¹⁰⁹ For numerous examples, see G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity II*, 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 I*² 470, is unlikely to have belonged to any of the eleven congregations known to us by name. For the evidence relating to them is overwhelmingly Greek¹¹². Rather we should assume that he belonged to a highly Romanised congregation whose name has not survived¹¹³. 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 progressed¹¹⁴, 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 Rome¹¹⁵. 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 titlature¹¹⁶.

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 titlature 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.

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¹¹² The only exception is *CIJ I*² 523, 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 I*² 503); Augustesians (*CIJ I*² 416); Volumnesians (*CIJ I*² 417) and Vernaclesians (*CIJ I*² 398). 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 .