

IUDEAE BENEMERENTI: TOWARDS A STUDY OF JEWISH WOMEN IN THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE

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THE WIDESPREAD SCATTERING of Jews around Europe, Egypt and Asia Minor known as the Diaspora began about 600 B.C.; long before Titus sacked Jerusalem, Jews had begun their migration westward.¹ From at least the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D., thousands of Jews were living in Rome and the western empire. Unfortunately, Jewish men and women have left us little evidence about their lives in the west under Roman rule. From Josephus we know something about Jewish warfare, politics, and history, particularly in Palestine, but little about daily life in the Diaspora. Women's lives especially have disappeared from the historical record. Almost the only extant evidence is in lapidary form—epitaphs.² Many of these epitaphs are formulaic in the extreme, while others offer us brief glimpses of emotion. Some are in Latin, many more in Greek. Only by collating and comparing as many of these epitaphs as possible will we squeeze any information about Jewish women's lives from these stones.

Recently, the lives of Jewish women in classical antiquity have begun to attract scholarly notice. Bernadette Brooten was the first modern scholar to study Jewish women's epitaphs as a separate entity. Her work primarily assesses whether the titles of leadership in the synagogue given to women on inscriptions were functional or honorific. She concluded that women's socio-political status in the synagogues was much higher and comprised more actual power than earlier scholars had believed. Judith Wegner has studied the legal status of women in the writings of the rabbis. Ross Kraemer, focusing mostly on the eastern empire, has recently studied Jewish women's religious lives from non-rabbinic literary sources.³ My paper, in its attempt to make the first systematic study of Jewish women's epitaphs in the western empire, builds on and complements the work of these three scholars in particular.

These funerary inscriptions are our single greatest body of evidence for both the image and the reality of Jewish women in the western Diaspora. Most of the epitaphs are brief and crudely made, and they are often impossible to date. By necessity, my evidence stretches over some five hundred years, from the beginning (probably) of the second century A.D. to the late fifth or early sixth century. The

I am grateful to Professors Jerzy Linderski, George Houston, and Ross S. Kraemer as well as the two anonymous referees for *Phoenix* for much helpful criticism and advice.

¹ Cf. Cicero *Pro Flacco* 66–69.

² Both Juvenal (6.588) and Horace mention Jewish women in their satires, but these, of course, are entirely fictional characters created for poetic effect. These Roman poets tell us far more about what the dominant culture thought of Jewish women than about Jewish women themselves.

³ See Brooten 1982; Wegner 1988; Kraemer 1992.

bulk of my sample of inscriptions comes from Rome. Of the 496 inscriptions in my sample, 351 come from Rome, 86 from the rest of Italy (principally Venosa), 54 from North Africa (*Africa Proconularis*), 4 from Spain, and 1 from Gaul.

I have depended for my sample on corpora collected by others. For Rome, I used primarily the inscriptions in Harry Leon's 1960 study and Umberto Fasola's 1976 publication of more inscriptions from the catacombs under the Villa Torlonia.⁴ My corpus of the North African inscriptions is based on Yann Le Bohec's 1981 work. The western European inscriptions are from David Noy's comprehensive new corpus, published in 1993.⁵ Since the quantitative element of this study examines gender and dedicators, I have selected for my sample only those inscriptions in which the gender of the deceased is evident.

A SAMPLE PROBLEM

A typical inscription, this one from Naples in southern Italy, reads:

*hic requis[icit] in
pace Criscentia fi
lia Pascasi ebrea
virgo qui vixit
annus p(lus) m(inus) XVIII
AMEN (menorah) SHALOM (Noy 1993: 35)*

At first, this inscription seems to tell us very little. We learn the name of the deceased, Criscentia (or, as Noy points out, more probably Crescentia). We note that she is identified as Pascasus' daughter (*filia Pascasi*). She is also separately identified both as a Hebrew (*ebrea*), and as a virgin (*virgo*). Finally, we see that she was more or less eighteen years old when she died (*plus minus XVIII*). From these scattered pieces of information we cannot learn very much about Crescentia. We do not know whether she was happy, whether she could read, how she spent her time, if she had a job, how she lived as a Jew.

Yet Crescentia's tombstone is not incidental to the study of women in the western empire. By comparing her epitaph to others, we can begin to track certain trends in Jewish women's epitaphs. For example, we can compare her stone to those for other women in her age group. How many of them are called "virgins"? How many are named in relation to a father, as opposed to another relative or a spouse? How many women are identified as "Jew" or "Hebrew"? Is Crescentia's marble slab comparable to other women's (and men's) monuments? Is it more or less extravagant? As will be seen, we cannot provide complete and definitive answers, for our sample of usable Jewish inscriptions from the west is too small

⁴ Leon 1960 and Fasola 1976. Leon follows the numbering system of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* 1 (Frey 1936), but he has frequently improved the readings. I follow Leon's readings, including his lack of accentuation on non-Greek names, but I too use the *CIJ* numbers.

⁵ See Le Bohec 1981 and Noy 1993.

to be statistically meaningful. We can, however, suggest patterns that may be validated by new evidence.

THE INSCRIPTIONS: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

It will be productive to begin our study with a look at the overall picture derived from our sample. Like the dominant Roman society, Jewish communities seem to have commemorated men and boys at a higher rate than women and girls.⁶ Male deceased make up about 57% of the dedications and females about 43% (291 and 221, respectively).⁷ As we saw from Crescentia's epitaph, the stones themselves seldom give us much information. Gender is the only quality of the deceased that is evident from almost every epitaph, and there are a few cases (as, for example, in the name Sabbatis)⁸ in which even this is impossible to ascertain. We can infer the economic class of the deceased and/or dedicator from the quality of the stone, but not with certainty. The surfaces bearing inscriptions range from elaborate sarcophagi⁹ and carefully carved marble slabs¹⁰ to reused marble and sarcophagus fragments¹¹ and a wall with letters simply painted or scratched on it.¹² Although the Jewish inscriptions do not, for the most part, give the clear indications of class that pagan stones do,¹³ the diversity of the material on which they are written gives us a few hints. Earlier scholars claimed that the social and economic status of Roman Jews was low, basing this conclusion on the "poor material, crude workmanship and eccentric spelling and syntax" of the epitaphs.¹⁴ Tessa Rajak has challenged that view, persuasively arguing, on the basis of a study of the materials and contexts in which they were found, that levels of economic class—as opposed to social status—among the Jews in Rome were no different from those of the dominant population.¹⁵

⁶ Hopkins 1987: 118, table 1.

⁷ There are more deceased people (512) than inscriptions (496) because 16 inscriptions are dedicated to more than one person.

⁸ Sabbatis, as Leon (1960: 84 and 105, n. 3) explains, can be either the feminine *Sabbatis*, or the masculine *Sabbatius*, since *-ius* and *-ιος* are often represented in the inscriptions as *-is* and *-ις*. In the absence of additional clues, we cannot with certainty assign a gender to these inscriptions. There are other inscriptions so fragmentary that the epitaph can be reconstructed as referring to either a male or a female.

⁹ E.g., *CIJ* 72.

¹⁰ E.g., Le Bohec 1981: 81.

¹¹ E.g., *CIJ* 270.

¹² E.g., Noy 1993: 71 = *CIJ* 1.597 = *CIL* IX.6209.

¹³ E.g., by name, explicit recognition of legal status, such as mention of a patron or freedmen, or by occupation.

¹⁴ Smallwood 1981: 133. Leon (1960: 137) says the Jews were "a humble folk, occupying a low place on the economic ladder."

¹⁵ Rajak 1994: 226–241. She posits that the inelegance of the carvings on even the sarcophagi is a deliberate cultural choice instead of economic necessity. It would seem from the Jewish inscriptions from Carthage that there, at least, we also see a diversity of economic classes. The number of

Keeping in mind the diversity of class of those commemorated in these inscriptions, as well as the gender of the deceased, we may embark on more detailed analysis. In order to perform a study that will be at all illuminating, we need to examine stones that offer a little more information than the all-too-common inscriptions that read: "Cyrus lies in peace" (ἐν ἰρήνῃ κῆται Κῦρος, *CIJ* 133). One particularly helpful notation on epitaphs is age at death. Keith Hopkins, building on his groundbreaking 1966 work, finds that an analysis of the "age of death" rates on tombstones will not tell us the demographics of a given society.¹⁶ Since only some tombstones record age at death, and since the sample of stones itself is biased, we have to conclude that these inscriptions do not reflect the population but rather the values of the society. Following Hopkins' approach, Brent Shaw (1991: 68) concludes that "specifying age at death was a further public valuation indicating the greater social importance attributed to that person in death." It is productive, therefore, for us to see who the "favored members" of this society are, and what patterns their epitaphs suggest.

Slightly fewer than half of the deceased (240 or 47%) are commemorated with their age-at-death.¹⁷ The notations range from very specific to most general: sometimes a full formula of years, months, and days,¹⁸ sometimes only years,¹⁹ sometimes the years "more or less"²⁰ and sometimes those who died young are referred to simply as children.²¹ Of the 240 Jewish inscriptions that mark age, deceased women's and girls' account for 105, or 44% of the sample. Hopkins finds that 41% of the pagan inscriptions from Rome, Italy, North Africa, Spain, and Gaul that give the age-at-death commemorate women, a rate only slightly lower than that of Jewish inscriptions.²² He also calculates that in Christian epitaphs from the fourth through sixth centuries, women are commemorated in 45% of the inscriptions with age-at-death.²³ Again, the Jewish stones seem roughly in proportion to their non-Jewish neighbors.

Interesting results arise if we break these numbers down into age groups and gender groups. Out of the 232 inscriptions from which we know the age of the deceased, 88, or 38%, refer to children 10 years or younger. Another 33

inscriptions from more rural areas is too small for us to draw any conclusions about the status of people who lived outside urban areas.

¹⁶ Hopkins 1987; cf. Hopkins 1966.

¹⁷ Eight of these inscriptions (*CIJ* 13, 276, 409, 510; Fasola 1976: 18, 36; Noy 1993: 2, 63), are now missing the age, but the stone shows clearly that it was once inscribed.

¹⁸ E.g., *CIJ* 237: *Ch{ ... } coiugi su|e fecit Gargilie Eu|fraxiae que vixit an|nis XVIII mensibus III die|bus XII benemerenti set| sic non merenti* ("Gargilia Eufraxia, who lived 19 years, 3 months and 12 days").

¹⁹ E.g., *CIJ* 241: *Polla fecit|Iuliae filiae|que vixit ann(is) XXXIII* (Julia, who lived 34 years).

²⁰ E.g., Noy 1993: 28 (= *CIJ* 1.559): *hic re|quies|cit in pa|ce Here|ni filia||Thelesi|ni Romei, an(norum)|pl(us) m(inus) VIII* (Irene, who lived about eight years).

²¹ E.g., Noy 1993: 155 (= *CIJ* 1²653a): *Ἰάσων|τὸ νήπι|ον* (Jason the child).

²² Hopkins 1987: 118, table 1.

²³ Hopkins 1987: 119, table 2.

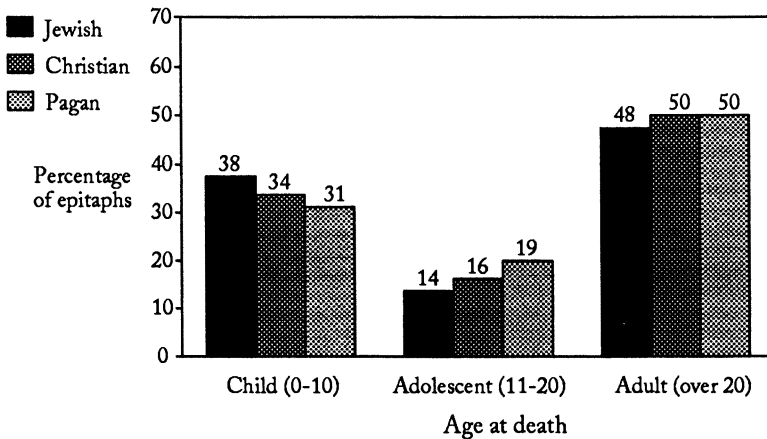


Fig. 1. Jewish, Christian, and Pagan epitaphs with age-at-death.

inscriptions (14%) refer to people between the ages of 11 and 20, and finally, the last 111 inscriptions, or nearly half (48%), refer to adults over the age of 20. These percentages are similar to those found by Shaw for the Roman “lower order” population in the fourth through seventh centuries and for the Christians in Rome. For the “lower orders,” Shaw calculates that 31% of pagan stones with age-at-death were dedicated to children under the age of 10, 19% to adolescents under the age of 20, and 50% to adults over age 20.²⁴ The percentages for Christian commemorations (of stones with known sets of personal relations) are even closer to the Jewish numbers: under age 10, 34%, ages 10–20, 16%, and over 20, 50%.²⁵

It would seem, then, that the patterns of commemoration by age were similar for all three communities, with the possible exception that children under the age of 10 were particularly highly valued by Jews. It is only when we break down these categories further that we notice the uniqueness of Jewish commemoration.

When we examine the Jewish inscriptions by gender in these three age categories, we see that females account for about a third of the children’s inscriptions (33 of 88), about two thirds (20 of 33) of the adolescent inscriptions, and about 44% (49 of 111) of the adult inscriptions.

The small size of the sample notwithstanding, the numbers for the “adolescent” group are worth further consideration. Why, in this group alone, do women so noticeably outnumber men? That there are more epitaphs to females than to males in the adolescent group is particularly significant in light of the fact that there are overall more commemorations of males than females in the Jewish

²⁴ Shaw 1984: 492, table “c.”

²⁵ Shaw 1984: 493, table “c.”

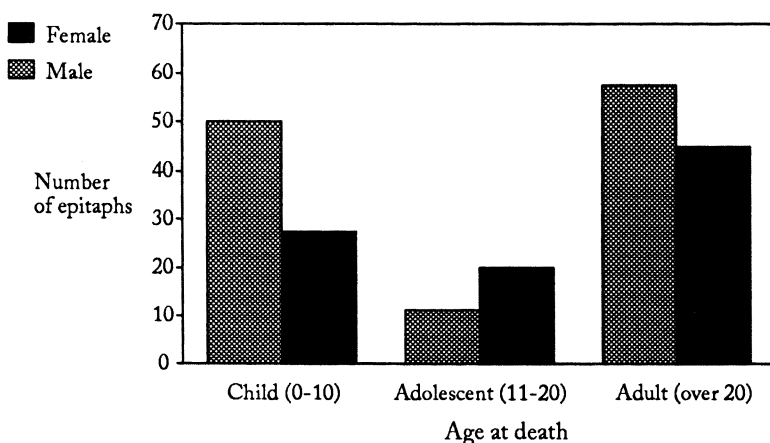


Fig. 2. Jewish epitaphs with age-at-death. Total of 212 inscriptions.

sample. Moreover, who are these women? According to Shaw's figures, the pattern of commemoration among pagans and Christians is different from that of the Jews.²⁶ For example, Shaw finds that 61% of Roman pagan inscriptions of freedpersons are dedicated to girls under the age of 11, and 39% to boys.²⁷ These numbers are nearly the inverse of the Jewish stones, which commemorate girls in 37.5% of the inscriptions. Patterns of Christian inscriptions are also different from Jewish; Christian inscriptions record boys' and girls' deaths nearly equally (52% and 48%, respectively).²⁸ Pagans and Christians commemorated adolescent women at a slightly higher rate than they did men. Shaw finds that, of all inscriptions dedicated to adolescents who died between the ages of 11 and 20, 55% were dedicated to women and 45% to men on Roman pagan inscriptions, while 52% of Roman Christian inscriptions were dedicated to women, and 48% to men.²⁹ Shaw offers no explanation for his numbers, except to note that Christian epitaphs were following the trend of the general population. He implies that the larger number of female epitaphs is a result of an increased valuation for women.³⁰

²⁶ Shaw presents his material in a slightly different format, which I have changed in order to make clearer comparisons between his study and mine. His numbers are in terms of gender preference by percentage.

²⁷ Shaw 1984: 81, table 4.5: 57% more to girls. In the rest of the Roman empire, however, 58% (40% more) of pagan inscriptions with the age at death are dedicated to boys.

²⁸ Shaw 1984: 81, table 4.5.

²⁹ Shaw 1984: 81, table 4.5; 24% and 10% more dedications to females, respectively. According to Shaw's calculations, Roman Christian boys under the age of 10 account for 52% (10% more) of the inscriptions.

³⁰ Shaw 1984: 84. Shaw quotes a study of American tombstones that claims that the increased commemoration of women in tombstones shows "a progression . . . expressing an evolution in practice

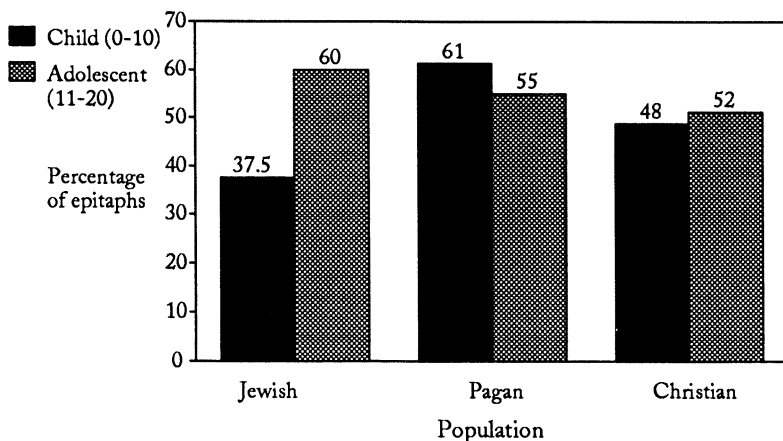


Fig. 3. Patterns of commemoration for female children and adolescents.

The Jewish epitaphs, however, do not reflect the “general trend” which commemorates both girls and young women more than their male counterparts; unlike pagan boys, Jewish boys 10 years and under are 50% more likely than girls to be commemorated with inscriptions that indicate age at death. In other words, only in the Jewish set of inscriptions is there such a radical shift from a low representation of female children to a high representation of female adolescents. In the other populations, the change is either very moderate or is the complete inverse. Moreover, the Jewish inscriptions have the greatest percentage of adolescent female commemorations of the three populations. Thus the variations in the male-to-female ratio between Jewish and non-Jewish epitaphs require a new explanation.

I propose that it is a particularly Jewish phenomenon to commemorate more adolescent women than men. Twelve of the twenty adolescent inscriptions commemorate wives or daughters (60%). This ratio of “family” women to “undefined” women is roughly parallel in the children’s inscriptions (in which 60% are explicitly called daughters), and it is slightly lower than the ratio in the adult inscriptions (in which 66% of the women are characterized by a familial relationship). The other forty percent of these adolescent inscriptions do not commemorate the deceased in terms of her family relationships. Instead, six of the eight of these inscriptions characterize the deceased as a virgin (*virgo* or παρθένος).³¹ It is striking that these are almost the only inscriptions which

which although far from arriving at equality between the sexes, does reflect a progressive reevaluation of the position of the woman as companion or loved one” (Vovelle 1980: 536).

³¹The six inscriptions are *CIJ* 45, 168, 381, 386; Noy 1993: 46 = *CIJ* I.588 = *CIL* IX.6197; Le Bohec 1981: 46 = *CIL* 8.24941a. One could also include 22-year-old Esther (ἐνθάδε | κίττε Ἀσθὴ|ρ

explicitly call attention to the deceased's sexual status as a virgin.³² While Roman pagan and Christian inscriptions do occasionally use the word *virgo*,³³ they are unlike Jewish epitaphs in that they often also include the commemorator's name and relationship.³⁴ Let us consider why only Jewish inscriptions, in epitaphs which additionally honor the deceased by giving the age at death, commemorate adolescent girls as virgins, but not as family members.³⁵

One possible explanation for this unusual group of epitaphs can be found in Mishnaic law. The Mishnah, a compilation of Jewish oral law, was edited around 200 A.D., but most likely reflects earlier Jewish laws and customs. Adducing the Mishnah as a picture of life in the Diaspora is problematic, for the Mishnah, like other legal texts, portrays an idealized society, not one ever reflected in historical reality. For example, some of the Mishnah's precepts, such as the levirate,³⁶ had almost disappeared by the end of the sixth century A.D.³⁷ Moreover, as Ross Kraemer (1991: 63, n. 7) notes concerning property rights, the extent to which the Mishnah was followed "probably varied considerably from one region to another, depending as much on local law and custom as on any possible 'standard' of Jewish jurisprudence." Nevertheless, it is likely that those legal precepts that had parallels in the dominant Roman legal system were still recognized to some extent in the Diaspora, and we will examine one of these precepts now.

According to Mishnaic law, three types of women have full autonomy over themselves and their sexual and reproductive functions: widows (with male heirs), divorced women, and "adult daughters."³⁸ It is this last group that concerns us here. The Mishnah defines an "adult daughter" as one who has reached the age of twelve years, six months, and a day, and who has not been married. If she is not married by this age, she is emancipated from her father's control.³⁹ Her legal situation is analogous to that of a Roman woman who is *sui iuris*, except that the

παρθένο|ς δόξα ἐτῶ|ν εἴκοσι | δύο, *CIJ* 733), and Irene (ἐνθάδε κεῖ|τε Εἰρήνη | παρτένο|ς, *CIJ* 320). Strictly speaking, Esther is beyond the artificial limit I set for "adolescents" and Irene is not given an age at all, but both of them are explicitly termed "virgin" and neither of them is defined by a family member.

³² E.g., *CIJ* 45: Μαρκιανὰ π|(αρ)θένος ἐ | τῶν ιε' ἐνθ|άδε κεῖτε ("Marciana, a fifteen-year-old virgin, lies here"). The only two exceptions are Dulcitia (δουλ(κι)ταια παρθένω|μελλ(ο)νόμφη Πανχάρις | γερονσιάρχης τῇ Θυγατρὶ αὐ|τοῦ ἐποίησεν ἐν εἰρήνῃ | ἡ κοίμησίς σου, *CIJ* 106) and Criscentia (Noy 1993: 35; discussed above, 263).

³³ But only 20 times in at least partially legible fragments in all of *CIL* VI.

³⁴ E.g., *CIL* VI.22704, 28756, 35887.

³⁵ I reject the possibility that the reason is purely economic. Only two of the inscriptions (*CIJ* 45 and 386) are so sparse as to have no other epithets or formulae. All of the inscriptions except one (Noy 1993: 46 = *CIJ* I.588 = *CIL* IX.6197) are carved on marble. Moreover, the question remains why the dedicator did not write his or her name instead of the epithet "virgin."

³⁶ The levirate is the law by which a woman whose husband has died without leaving male heirs must marry her husband's brother unless he releases her from the obligation.

³⁷ See Archer 1983: 276.

³⁸ See Wegner 1991: 71.

³⁹ See Wegner 1991: 90, n. 10.

Jewish woman has control over her marriage, and has no *tutor*.⁴⁰ It is not likely that the Jews of the western empire were conducting their lives strictly by the law codes organized in the Mishnah. Nonetheless, it is certainly possible that Jews in the western Diaspora lived their lives according to some of the laws, especially those which seemed to be developing along similar lines to those of the dominant population.⁴¹ It is therefore likely that these inscriptions were erected by parents who simultaneously recognized two aspects of their emancipated daughters. On the one hand, parents did not assert their social control over their daughters by defining them in kinship terms, and thus the women came to be named on tombstones without mention of any family members.⁴² On the other hand, these parents also wanted to commemorate their daughters' sexual status. Both in the Mishnaic and in Roman societies, a virgin of marriageable age was "worth" more than a non-virgin.⁴³ The declaration of her status as a virgin was a mark that she would have been a desirable bride, and this redounded to the credit of both her and her family. There are, of course, inscriptions put up to unmarried women who are over the age of twelve and a half, and who are not termed virgins.⁴⁴ According to rabbinic law, these women must have been autonomous as well. But we should note that the parents who explicitly dedicated these inscriptions chose to commemorate neither their daughters' legal freedom nor their sexual status. These young women are, therefore, characterized as "daughter,"⁴⁵ unlike the inscriptions of the young women who are called virgins. This brief study of stones with age-at-death indicates that some Jews, even in the dominant culture of the West, retained some of their particular cultural values about women's sexuality and autonomy.

DEDICATORS

Of the 466 inscriptions of my sample, only 116 (25%) have explicit dedicators, that is, dedicators whose relationship to the deceased is stated on the epitaph. This low ratio of explicit dedicators is at least partly echoed in Christian inscriptions,⁴⁶ with one significant difference. Shaw finds that all mention of

⁴⁰ See Wegner 1991: 118.

⁴¹ Rutgers (1993: 323) also observes that "little or no substantial differences seem to have existed between the taxonomy of women as expressed in Tannaitic writings from Roman Palestine and the actual activities of women in Jewish Rome. From this we may perhaps infer that also in this respect the Jews in ancient Rome remained faithful to traditional Jewish practice."

⁴² Dulcitia of *CIJ* 106 (see above, n. 32) would not, according to rabbinic law, be emancipated, since she is engaged (μελλ(ο)νύμφη). Therefore, her father retains his right to assert his social domination by defining her according to him.

⁴³ Mishnah *Ketubot* 1:2 and 1:4, in which a virgin's marriage-contract is worth 200 *zuzim*, but a non-virgin's is worth 100.

⁴⁴ *CIJ* 389, 159, 156; Noy 1993: 36 = *CIJ* I.568 = *CIL* 10.3303; Noy 1993: 86 = *CIJ* I.611 = *CIL* IX.6620.

⁴⁵ E.g., *CIJ* 159: Πάρδος Σαβειν|αι θυγατρί τις | ἔζησεν ἔτη | δέκα ἔ(σ)ξ ἐν εἰ|ρήνῃ ἡ κοίμη|σις αὐτῆς.

⁴⁶ See Shaw 1984: 481.

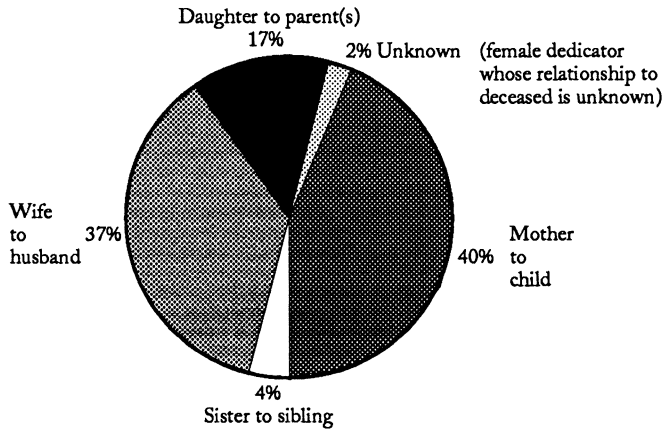


Fig. 4. Breakdown of all female dedicators by relationship. Total of 46 inscriptions, with 38 explicit and 8 implied dedicators.

personal relationships begins to disappear from the Christian epigraphic record, especially after the fourth century A.D. His explanation for this phenomenon is that the most important relationship at death for Christians is to God, not to the secular family.⁴⁷ But in Jewish epitaphs, family relations appear on nearly half the epitaphs (220 or 48%) as late as the sixth century. About half of these (116) are the explicit dedicators mentioned above; the other half are “implied dedicators,” or family members who are cited on the tombstone, but not specifically identified as the dedicator.

Jewish women are explicit dedicators or co-dedicators of 38 epitaphs (37% of the stones with explicit dedicators).⁴⁸ Another 8 epitaphs mention women as implied dedicators; this brings the total number of female dedicators to 46 (22% of all stones with any dedicator).⁴⁹

The most interesting group of stones are those dedicated, explicitly or implicitly, by mothers. Twelve women in the entire corpus dedicate stones to their children.⁵⁰ Another six women are characterized as mothers on children’s inscriptions that

⁴⁷ See Shaw 1984: 482.

⁴⁸ I have not included in my calculations the 13 sets of parents who are explicit dedicators, nor the 10 who are implicit dedicators, since I am interested in only those inscriptions wherein either the woman or the man can specifically be identified as the dedicator. When a parental couple dedicates, it is impossible to determine the role of either parent in choosing the inscription. Therefore the percentages are out of 103 stones with explicit dedicators, and 210 stones with any dedicator.

⁴⁹ Clearly, there are many more male implied dedicators than female. This is due at least in part to the use of patronymics, which skews the numbers. See below (272–273) for a fuller discussion of patronymics and matronymics.

⁵⁰ *CIJ* 68, 102, 144, 213, 232, 241, 389, 461, 474, 470; Le Bohec 1981: 76 = *CIL* VIII.20759; Le Bohec 1981: 77 = *CIL* VIII.9114.

have no explicit dedicator, or, in fact, any other name.⁵¹ These eighteen stones dedicated to children warrant a closer look.⁵² Ten of the inscriptions mark the graves of sons, and eight commemorate daughters. A comparison with stones dedicated explicitly only by fathers to children shows that of the eighteen stones put up exclusively by fathers, twelve are to sons, and six to daughters.⁵³ Although these numbers are much too small for us to draw any definite conclusions, it does seem that mothers who dedicated stones alone were more likely to value their daughters equally with their sons than fathers. Moreover, and more interesting, the inscriptions put up by mothers imply that some women were paying for burials on their own. Since every major community in the corpus has at least one dedication by a set of parents together,⁵⁴ it is clear that on occasion parents dedicate stones together. We must assume, then, that the father was gone, either temporarily or permanently, when the child died. This implies that some women acted as head of the household, a role which women never play in rabbinical legal texts. In this context, an inscription from a mother to her adult (34-year-old) daughter is particularly interesting (*Polla fecit Iuliae filiae que vixit ann(is) XXXIII*, *CIJ* 241). One must wonder where the men are in the lives of both these women. The likelihood is very great that, at these ages, both of these women would have married at least once. It is possible that both women have been widowed or divorced. Another possibility is that one or both of these women were slaves.⁵⁵ Even if they were, Polla is taking a financial initiative in erecting the stone. The existence of this inscription hints at a picture that is never drawn by ancient Jewish writers: the lives of women whose households and lives did not center on men.⁵⁶

Matronymics are another hint at women-headed households. The six inscriptions that show mothers as implied dedicators suggest the use of matronymics. It is obvious that patronymics were used by Jews in the western Diaspora. In this sample, about 60 people have their father's names on their tombstones, even when there is another, explicit dedicator. Often, especially when there is no explicit dedicator, it is difficult to determine if the father was the actual dedicator or not. For example, *CIJ* 376 is the simple epitaph of Marina, daughter of Benjamin (ἐνθάδε κεῖτε | Μαρίνα θυγάτηρ | Βενιαμειν). The question arises, however,

⁵¹ E.g., *CIJ* 156: Σαββατίς (θυ)|γάτηρ Βιβί|ας ἐτών γ' | ἐν εἰρήνῃ κοί|μησίς σου ("Sabbatis, daughter of Vibia, aged 13 years. In peace your sleep"). Cf. also *CIJ* 27, 171, 413, 497, 361.

⁵² It is possible that *CIJ* 339 (Φηλικισ|σιμα 'Η|μαράν|τω ἐ|ποίησεν) could also refer to a mother-son relationship, since the stone does not indicate at all the relationship between the commemorator and the deceased.

⁵³ To sons: *CIJ* 3, 71, 85, 112, 125, 254, 263, 269, 358, 412, 24*; Le Bohec 1981: 81. To daughters: *CIJ* 102, 106, 155, 159, 169; Le Bohec 1981: 74.

⁵⁴ E.g., Rome (*CIJ* 1), North Africa (Le Bohec 1981: 10), Venusia (Noy 1993: 67).

⁵⁵ We might also entertain the possibility that one or the other woman had a non-Jewish husband and thus his name is not mentioned on a stone in a Jewish burial space. We have very little evidence, however, about intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews.

⁵⁶ "The framers of the Mishnah do not imagine a household headed by a woman; a divorced woman is assumed to return to her father's household" (Neusner 1989: 122).

if Benjamin was the actual dedicator, or if her father's name is more strictly a patronymic. There is nothing in this inscription to point us one way or the other. Some inscriptions are easier to interpret. For example, some of the older people (such as the 80-year-old son of Faustinus, (ἐνθάδε κῆκε . . . υἱὸς Φοστίνου . . . π' κέ, *CIJ* 56) certainly are not buried by their fathers. In these cases, the person was obviously known (or the commemorator wished the deceased to be known) as the child of Mr So-and-so. Another example is *CIJ* 314,⁵⁷ in which the deceased is identified as daughter of Oclatius, but the inscription explicitly cites the husband as dedicator. In most cases, we will never know whether the father was the dedicator or not. We can infer no more from these patronymics than that the father's name was the means by which those reading the inscription would put the deceased into a social context.

Similarly, then, those people who are named only in relation to their mother⁵⁸ must have been associated primarily with their mothers. The dedicator must have assumed that the deceased would be recognizable by a matronymic. These stones imply that the primary kin-relationship, in life as in death, was between the deceased and the mother. Some of these stones explicitly dedicated by mothers are not to young children but to adult children whose ages are between 27 and 45.⁵⁹ The father's name does not appear on these stones. Moreover, the nature of these funerary inscriptions suggests that the community too thought of these adults in relation not to their fathers but to their mothers.⁶⁰ This epigraphic evidence, slender as it is, is the only indication we have that the Jewish household in the western empire was not the completely male-dominated environment that the literary and legal texts imply.⁶¹

THE CONTENT OF THE INSCRIPTIONS

Except under extraordinary circumstances, the ancients, like moderns, followed the precept *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. The result of this philosophy appears in highly idealized epitaphs, which reflect more what a society expects of a person

⁵⁷ (ἐ)νθάδε κείτι Γαυδεν| (τ)ια θυγάτηρ 'Οκλατίου | (ἐ)τῶν δέκα ἑννέα (ἐ)ποίησεν αὐτῇ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς | ἐν ἡρῇν κύμισις αὐ|τῆς θάρα(ει) οὐδὶς (ἀ)θάνατος.

⁵⁸ E.g., Euphranticus, son of Veriana: (ἐν)θάδε| κείτε Εὐφραντικὸς υἱὸς Βηριάνης (*CIJ* 27).

⁵⁹ *CIJ* 68, 144, 241; Le Bohec 1981: 76.

⁶⁰ It has been suggested that men's names do not appear on these inscriptions because one or both parents were slaves and therefore not entitled to a legal marriage (*coniugium iustum*). While it is completely possible that these women were slaves, that fact alone would not explain the format of these inscriptions, for two reasons. First, there is no evidence that inhabitants of the Roman empire were overly concerned with their legal marital status. As Dixon (1992: 54) notes, "In practice, people knew that slaves did form marital and family relationships." Second, we have pagan inscriptions dedicated by both parents, clearly both slaves, to their child (e.g., *CIL* VI.10440). Thus we see that parents, regardless of their legal status, felt free to commemorate their children together. Conversely, we can assume that mothers who chose to remember their (technically illegal) children without using the father's name did so for personal and social, not legal, reasons.

⁶¹ Kraemer (1986: 89) finds evidence for families without a male head in the inscriptions from children to mothers that do not mention fathers.

than the life of the deceased. Yet even these images are helpful in the study of Jewish women, for the nature of what constitutes “good” is different for every culture, even for those that live side by side. Without question, Jews in the west borrowed funerary motifs from their neighbors,⁶² but they also commemorated virtues specific to their values and their community. An examination of the epitaphs of Jewish women will indicate the expectations for women of the Jewish societies in the western empire. A comparison with a few pagan inscriptions will highlight the ideals that Jews shared with their neighbors as well as those that are specifically Jewish.

Epithets of Jewish women, like those of Jewish men, reflect the attitudes both of the prevailing culture and their community. In the patriarchal societies of Greece, Rome, and Israel, expressions of praise for women are often in terms of private life and especially of women’s relationships to men. Thus, Lattimore (1942: 294–300) has found that pagan funerary inscriptions generally celebrate a woman’s private, domestic virtues. The author of the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*, in a *praeteritio*, gives a fine list of the elements of domestic virtue: modesty, obedience, camaraderie, eagerness for wool-working, religion without superstition, dressing without ostentation, modesty of appearance, and dedication to family.⁶³ The husband of Amynone adds that she was best and most beautiful, pious, chaste, thrifty, and faithful, and liked to stay at home.⁶⁴

Jewish inscriptions also indicate approval for some “family values.” This is expressed sometimes in terms of a woman’s affection for her husband while she was alive, as in the inscription of Simplicia, who may have been a mother of the synagogue,⁶⁵ and sometimes in terms of her loyalty to her husband.⁶⁶ One woman is devoted both to her children and to her brothers.⁶⁷ But despite the adjective φιλότεκνος, most Jewish women are not praised for the production of children. As we noted above, very few of the inscriptions put up to women as wives have children as co-dedicators; in fact, the only one is *CIJ* 212. Only two other inscriptions to women explicitly mention children. One of them simply notes that the woman had three children (*CIJ* 47), possibly a reference to the *ius trium liberorum*, as Lifshitz (1975: 27 *ad loc.*) suggests; while another states that the dedicatee saw her own children bear children (*CIJ* 537). In fact, with only a

⁶² See Rutgers 1993: 137 f.

⁶³ *CIL* VI.1527: *domestica bona pudici[t]iae, opsequi, comitatis, facilitatis, lanificii stud[i] religionis* | *sine superstitione, o[r]natu non conspiciendi, cultus modici cur [memorem cur dicam de tuorum cari]tate, familiae pietate . . .*

⁶⁴ *ILS* 8402 = *CIL* VI.11602: *hic sita est Amynone Marci optima et pulcherrima* | *lanifica pia pudica frugi casta domiseda*.

⁶⁵ *CIJ* 166: ἐνθάδε κεῖτε Σιμπ[λικία μήτηρ συ] | ναγωγῆς φύλανδρος (..) | συναγωγῆς τῇ ἰδίᾳ σ(υμβίῳ ἐποίειν). Cf. also *CIJ* 158.

⁶⁶ *CIJ* 392: ἐνθάδε κῆται | Ρεβεκκα μόναν | δρος ζήσας ἔτη | μδ’ ἐν εἰρήνῃ | ἡ κοίμησις αὐτῇ | σ. Cf. also *CIJ* 81.

⁶⁷ *CIJ* 363: ἐνθάδε κεῖτε Καίλια | Εὐδοῦς ὅσια δεικέα | φιλόταικνος φιλαδελ[φῶν αἰν εἰρήνη(ς) | ἡ κοίμησις αὐτῆς.

few exceptions, we see that most of the standard female values of the pagan world are ignored on Jewish inscriptions.

Many epithets on Jewish women's inscriptions have a different emphasis. These Jewish stones do not commemorate fidelity to the household, as pagan inscriptions do.⁶⁸ Instead, they stress faithfulness to the community. Thus women are lovers and keepers of the commandments (φιλέντολος, *CIJ* 132; *iuste legem colenti*, *CIJ* 72), righteous (δεικέα, *CIJ* 363), good pupils (presumably of Jewish law; δισκεπουλαιναι, *CIJ* 215), and good Jews (*bona Iudea*, *CIJ* 250). One woman, whose inscription we will discuss in more detail below, is characterized by her "love for her people" (*amor generis*, *CIJ* 476). Women also, like men, live "good lives" (καλῶς βιώσας). Finally, both women and men are frequently called pious (ῥσῖα⁶⁹ or *pia*⁷⁰). Although many pagan women (and many more women than men) are also praised for being "pious," the social implications of this description are quite different. In Rome's political structure, access to power was not only or even primarily through religion. Men advanced through the *cursus honorum* or imperial posts, regardless of whether or not they held important priesthoods; and so, in the dominant Roman society, piety itself was generally not a measure of political power.⁷¹ Cicero emphasizes the difference between women's and men's roles and expectations in a letter he writes to Terentia, saying that he is looking forward to dying in her arms, since neither the gods whom she has worshipped nor the men whom he has served have been grateful for their services (*cupio videre et in tuo complexu emori, quando neque di, quos tu castissime coluisti, neque homines, quibus ego semper servivi, nobis gratiam rettulerunt*, *Fam.* 14.4.1). For pagan women, then, *pietas* implies the fulfillment of women's "private" lives, as opposed to a man's "public" and political role. For Jewish women, however, *pietas* suggests that the same public/private dichotomy did not exist in the Jewish community. Instead, all Jews, men and women alike, participated in religious life and their participation had real social consequences commemorated on epitaphs. Religious observance is not a defining characteristic of women as it is in pagan inscriptions, but an indication of communal cohesiveness.

One anomalous Roman inscription to a woman named Regina seems to be a bridge between pagan and Jewish ideals of women. The epitaph is interesting enough to be quoted in full:

*Hic Regina sita est tali contexta sepulcro
quod coniunx statuit respondens eius amori
haec post bis denos secum transsegerat annum*

⁶⁸ The *locus classicus*, of course, for this idea in pagan inscriptions is *CIL* VI.15346: *lanam fecit, domum servavit*.

⁶⁹ *CIJ* 72, 132, 151, 158, 298, 363, 733, and (transliterated into Latin) 482.

⁷⁰ Noy 1993: 9 (superlative form) and Le Bohec 1981: 17.

⁷¹ Naturally, participation in certain cults, particularly the imperial cult, was a political gesture. But *pietas* refers not to the *action* of participation as much as to the *attitude* of the participant towards the gods. Cf. *OLD* ad loc.

*et quartum mensem restantibus octo diebus
 rursum victura reditura ad lumina rursum
 nam sperare potest ideo quod surgat in aevom
 promissum quae vera fides dignisque piisque
 quae meruit sedem venerandi ruris habere
 hoc tibi praestiterit pietas hoc vita pudica
 hoc et amor generis hoc observantia legis
 coniugii meritum cuius tibi gloria curae
 horum factorum tibi sunt speranda futura
 de quibus et coniunx maestus solacia quaerit.⁷²*

Despite the clearly Jewish content of the epitaph, shown in phrases like *observantia legis* (observance of the Law), the form of Regina's inscription is not typical of Jewish epitaphs. It is closer to pagan epitaphs than to Jewish, and shows certain signs of pagan influence. First of all, at thirteen lines, this is more than twice as long as any other Jewish inscription in Rome,⁷³ and considerably longer than most. Second, whereas pagan and Christian metrical inscriptions are relatively common, this is the only Jewish metrical epitaph from the western empire.⁷⁴ Third, the Latin name "Regina," while possibly a translation of "Sara," indicates that the deceased woman comes from a family who wanted their daughter to sound like a Roman. Finally, the inscription expresses several of the more stereotypical formulae of pagan inscriptions to women, including devotion to marriage and living a chaste life. Since there are no other Jewish inscriptions that describe

⁷² *CIJ* 476. I also reproduce here Leon's rendering of this epitaph into blank verse:

Here lies Regina, covered by this tomb,
 Which to reveal his love, her husband raised.
 A score of years plus one, four months, and eight
 Days more she spent in wedlock by his side.
 Again she'll live, again will see the light;
 For she may hope that she will rise aloft
 To that eternal life which is ordained,
 As our true faith doth teach, for all the worthy
 And all the pious. She has merited
 To find a home in that most hallowed land.
 This is assured thee by thy piety,
 Thy life so chaste, thy love of all thy people,
 Observance of our Law, and faithfulness
 Unto our marriage bond, which thou didst strive
 Ever to glorify. For all these deeds
 Thy future bliss is certain. In this faith
 Thy sorrowing husband finds his only comfort.

⁷³ Only *CIJ* 358 from Rome, which is about five lines long, is even close to being the length of Regina's. In Spain, there is one other long epitaph, but it is written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and is probably 400–500 years later than the Regina inscription. The catacomb where the Roman inscription was found is the earliest of the Roman catacombs, possibly dating from the first century B.C., whereas the Spanish inscription is dated from the fifth to sixth century A.D.

⁷⁴ See van der Horst 1991: 49 for a list of the other Jewish metrical inscriptions.

women's lives as *pudica*, I suggest that Regina's epitaph indicates a more Roman perspective than do most of the other Jewish inscriptions. This is not to say that the inscription does not show Jewish values. Regina is pious, observant, faithful, and loves her race; all of these are ideals for Jewish women and Jewish men alike. Kraemer notes (1986: 90) that "it is only devotion to marriage that separates the virtues which guarantee Regina a place in the world to come from those which we find attributed to men." The overall force of the epitaph, however, shares nearly as much with typical pagan women's inscriptions as it does with Jewish women's.

There are several other ways that Jewish women's inscriptions differ markedly from those of their pagan neighbors. It is instructive to consider, for example, what the Jews did not put on the women's stones. The most surprising silence is the lack of employment data.⁷⁵ We cannot assume that the absence of this information means that Jewish women did not work. Juvenal (6.542–547) and Josephus (*AJ* 17.141) both suggest that they did. Yet this aspect of their lives was not deemed worthy of record on epitaphs. In contrast, pagan women of all classes except the aristocracy are frequently commemorated in terms of their jobs.⁷⁶ Employment information does exist on some Jewish men's stones; in Rome, for example, we find a painter (ἐνθάδε κίτε Εὐδόξιος ζωγράφος ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἡ κύ, *CIJ* 109), and a butcher (*bubularus de macello*, *CIJ* 21), and there is a porter from Aquileia (*L(ucius) Ai(i)cus P(ublii) l(ibertus) Dama Iudaeus portor v(ivus) s(ibi) f(ecit)*, Noy 1993: 7). We have some scanty extra-inscriptional evidence for Jewish women's employment, such as a mention of their presence in imperial weaving establishments in the fourth century,⁷⁷ but there is no mention on the tombstones of their work. Van der Horst (1991: 85) suggests that the reason so few occupations are mentioned on Jewish tombstones is because secular life was not very important to Jews compared to their lives with and in the synagogue. This explanation is plausible but not fully satisfactory. First of all, van der Horst himself does not make any distinctions of gender when he makes this statement. Secondly, the evidence adduced above as well as a very lengthy dedicatory inscription from Aphrodisias suggests that men did identify themselves by job.⁷⁸ Van der Horst's claim of the importance of religious over secular identification is not persuasive when viewed from the perspective of women's lives within the synagogue, either. Although there is some evidence for women leaders in synagogues, which we will discuss later, only fourteen of the eighty (17.5%) epitaphs referring to synagogue leaders in the sample refer to women. The only feasible explanation for these

⁷⁵ Other elements of pagan women's inscriptions missing mostly or entirely from Jewish epitaphs in the west include: the formula *sine ulla querela* (only *CIJ* 457), epitaphs put up by a woman while she is still alive (*viva*), either for herself or for her family, and finally, inscriptions in which the deceased speaks in the first person.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Treggiari 1979: 65–86. More skilled workers such as physicians were also commemorated on tombstones; e.g., *CIL* VI.9614, 9615, 9617.

⁷⁷ See *Cod. Theod.* 16.8.6.

⁷⁸ See Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987.

numbers is that, despite the clear evidence that some women were synagogue leaders, and, by implication, still more women were synagogue members, the synagogues were very much male-dominated. It would seem, therefore, that the synagogue may have been an important means of identification for men, but not necessarily for women. We must look elsewhere for additional explanations for the lack of employment information on Jewish women's inscriptions.

It is more likely that the reason Jewish women's inscriptions do not include employment data is because outside employment is not a part of the ideal of the Jewish woman as expressed in the literary and legal texts. Wegner notes (1988: 127) that "the Mishnah's framers normally limit a woman's economic enterprises to such work as baking and weaving, which is carried out in the privacy of the home." In other words, women's economic contributions are an extension of their usual domestic work. According to the Mishnah, which was, as Wegner notes, "a blueprint for a utopian society" (1988: 4), women generally did not go out of the home to work. Just as pagan inscriptions portray idealized women as early Republican matrons who spent all their time working in wool and keeping house,⁷⁹ so do Jewish inscriptions, by their omission of any mention of outside employment for women, perpetuate an ideal that women's economic activity is conducted exclusively in the house.

PROSELYTES AND WOMEN LEADERS IN THE SYNAGOGUES

It would be impossible to conclude a study of Jewish women in the Roman Diaspora without taking a look at the phenomenon of women synagogue leaders. Of the eighty individuals who are commemorated as leaders of synagogues in epitaphs in the western part of the empire, fourteen are women.⁸⁰ These women seem to come from all walks of life and they are commemorated by a variety of people. A few of the inscriptions must come from the wealthier part of the Jewish population, since they are well carved on marble sarcophagi.⁸¹ Conversely, others are no more than red paint on plaster.⁸² Three of the women are commemorated, either explicitly or implicitly, by their husbands.⁸³ Another two are named in relation to their fathers.⁸⁴ One woman is buried with her husband by an anonymous person.⁸⁵ And, most interesting, eight of the fourteen women have no

⁷⁹ For a possibly tongue-in-cheek picture of the idealized Roman matron, see the epitaph to Allia Potestas, *CIL* VI.37965.

⁸⁰ *CIJ* 166, 315, 400, 496, 523; Noy 1993: 5, 59, 62, 63, 71, 116, 163; Le Bohec 1981: 4. One inscription, not yet published, although mentioned by Kraemer (1992), is of a woman elder from southern Italy.

⁸¹ E.g., *CIJ* 496 and 523.

⁸² Noy 1993: 163, 63, 71.

⁸³ Noy 1993: 116, 166, and the unpublished inscription.

⁸⁴ Noy 1993: 59, 62.

⁸⁵ Noy 1993: 163.

male names on their stones at all.⁸⁶ Bernadette Brooten has argued persuasively that these women held actual offices in the synagogue, and that the titles were not merely honorary. One of her arguments is that some of the men mentioned on these stones did not have titles themselves, and so clearly the women were not receiving titles merely on their husbands' account. Another one of her arguments, and one that would benefit from further consideration, is that some of these women (half of my sample) were buried with no mention of their male relatives at all.⁸⁷

I am interested particularly in these eight women, and I wonder if the fact that they are buried without the mention of any family members, particularly male ones, implies a certain degree of autonomy. While this is in no way provable, it is not implausible. One assumes, at least, that these women were not paupers and peripheral members of the community. Rather, they played a central role, even if we do not know the specifics of their offices.⁸⁸ Rajak and Noy have found that synagogue leaders share certain features with other leaders of associations in the ancient world. One of these features is an appreciable link between social status and appointment to a high position.⁸⁹ Of course, it is not impossible that these women simply had no family.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, compared with the numbers of women in the general population who are buried without mention of a family member (77 out of 209, or 36%), the ratio for this socially (if not economically) elite population is high, at a full 50%. An even greater number of male leaders of the synagogue are commemorated on inscriptions that do not mention their families (52 out of 66, or 78%). These numbers lead us to infer that the assumption of the Jewish community was that their synagogue leaders did not need to be identified in terms of their families. As Regina's inscription implies, love of one's race (*amor generis*) is equally as important, if not more so, than love for one's family.⁹¹ One could also infer that the entire community, and not just the family, was dedicating these inscriptions to their leaders.

We can only speculate on the implications of these findings. One wonders, however, if the opportunity to hold leadership roles in the synagogue was not one of the reasons more women converted to Judaism than men.⁹² In the western part of the Diaspora, where Jewish communities were probably somewhat limited in size except in the largest cities, possibly there were appreciably greater

⁸⁶ Noy 1993: 5, 63, 71; *CIJ* 315, 400, 496, 523; Le Bohec 1981: 4.

⁸⁷ Brooten 1982: 9 and *passim*.

⁸⁸ Rajak and Noy 1993: 89.

⁸⁹ Rajak and Noy 1993: 84.

⁹⁰ It does not seem possible to infer that family is not mentioned in these women's epitaphs on account of expense, since some of the more expensive epitaphs have no mention of family, while some of the poorer ones do.

⁹¹ Note that the only mention of family that occurs on Regina's epitaph is of marriage (not husband), *coniugii meritum*.

⁹² The large proportion of women among converts has been noted by many scholars. See, for example, Brooten 1982: 145 and Van der Horst 1991: 109–111.

opportunities for women's actions in the public sphere. If so, because of the small size of the community, public actions would have been even more notable than in the pagan world. A pagan woman who was accustomed to holding public offices and fulfilling liturgies would still have had the opportunity to perform similar roles, but now in a community where her role as leader was more significant, since the synagogue played a correspondingly larger role.⁹³

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we find that these epitaphs considered together suggest to us far more about Jewish women and their lives than they do individually. There are several possible methods of sorting the inscriptions. I have chosen to compare the stones first by examining those that give the age at death. Following the work of Hopkins and Shaw, I have treated the age at death as an indicator not of demographics but rather of value. Age at death is given for approximately 44% of Jewish girls and women, which is roughly the same as the percentage for pagan females. One particularly interesting phenomenon is the large percentage of adolescent girls whose age at death is given and who are called virgins. While pagan stones record the age at death for a large proportion of adolescent girls, they also record the age at death for a large percentage of female children. Jewish epitaphs, on the other hand, more frequently record the age of death for male children. The disparity between the pagan and the Jewish inscriptions may indicate a difference in the reasons commemorators had for giving the age at death on the stones. If the reasons for commemorating males and females were the same for pagans and Jews, one would expect an identical pattern in the breakdown of male and female commemorations. It is possible, then, that the explanation for the large percentage of adolescent girls' commemorations is connected to Mishnaic beliefs. The Mishnah defines a woman over the age of twelve and a half who is not married or engaged as equivalent to a Roman woman who is *sui iuris*. This set of stones, then, by giving both the age and the sexual status of the deceased, suggests that these adolescents belonged to no man.

A second approach to collating the evidence is to examine the relationship between the living and the dead, that is, between the dedicators and the deceased. We find that mothers dedicated inscriptions to sons and daughters in the same proportions, whereas fathers dedicated a greater percentage of inscriptions to sons. There is also other evidence that women were highly valued and autonomous. There are some inscriptions from mothers to adult daughters that have no mention of either husbands or fathers. These epitaphs hint at women-headed households, or possibly ones which were exclusively female. This is counter to the image given by the rabbinical texts, which suggests rather that all households were headed by men. Moreover, some deceased Jews, males and females of all

⁹³ Kraemer (1992: 123) also suggests that "women's leadership was particularly likely in Jewish synagogues with relatively high numbers of proselytes (both male and female) for whom the participation of women in public life, including religious *collegia*, was familiar and acceptable."

ages, are defined primarily by their mothers' names. The matronymics imply a community where some people, including even adult males, are known through their mothers. There are several possible reasons for the use of the matronymic instead of the patronymic. One is that the father was absent for much of the child's life. Another, more intriguing, possibility is that the mother was a more prominent member of the community. Although we will never know for sure why a child is identified by the mother, it can safely be assumed that a matronymic indicates that the child was known to the community solely or primarily through his or her relationship to the mother.

Finally, the content of the inscriptions suggests the ideals that the Jewish communities in the western empire held about women. There are many expressions of marital affection, but little emphasis on motherhood. Instead of being identified primarily by their families, Jewish women are seen as part of the entire Jewish community. Several pieces of information common on pagan inscriptions are missing from Jewish inscriptions, most notably employment data. A possible explanation for this is that the ancient Jewish ideal, as preserved in the Mishnah, was that women did not work outside the home. Whether or not they actually did work outside the home, the ideal of women not working was then reified on epitaphs. The last point for consideration is women's leadership in the synagogues. More than half of the women leaders are buried without any mention of family relationships. It seems that identification with a leadership role and the community is more important and more valued than identification with family. This trend of emphasizing community over family is true for male synagogue leaders as well. This commemoration of female synagogue leaders primarily through their offices and not through their families may have made conversion to Judaism an attractive prospect for women.

New inscriptions could alter or strengthen the specifics of these hypotheses, and few of them can be proven beyond doubt. Nonetheless, this study does indicate that the experience of women in the Roman West differed according to their ethnicity, and, as in other gender studies, we must be careful not to assume the same history for all women.

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