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Local Jewish Leadership in Roman Palestine:

The Case of the *Parnas* in Early Rabbinic Sources in Light of Extra-Rabbinic Evidence

Introduction

The question of the leadership role of the early rabbinic sages in broader Jewish society in Palestine in the period following the two failed revolts against Roman rule (70 and 135 CE) has come under renewed scrutiny in recent years, with an overall negative result.¹ Whereas it was once presumed that with the collapse of priestly authority as a consequence of the failed revolts, rabbinic leadership quickly filled the resulting leadership vacuum—politically, religiously, legally, and socially; both locally and centrally—it is now presumed by most scholars that such a transformation took much longer to accomplish, centuries more, extending well into late antiquity if not beyond.² One reason for this shift in presumptions is a justified reluctance to take at face value later (amoraic) rabbinic projections of rabbinic authority onto early (tannaitic) times, borne of a proper cautiousness not to confuse rabbinic rhetoric (or wishful thinking) with historical representation.

The broad acceptance of this thesis has engendered other reconsiderations to explain the putative absence of rabbinic leadership beyond rabbinic circles. Perhaps Rome, as we can surmise from its broader patterns of imperial rule, was not ready to allow a centralized Jewish leadership group to

¹ I wish to thank Elitzur Bar-Asher, Moshe Bar-Asher, Hannah Cotton, David Goodblatt, Marc Hirshman, Ranon Katzoff, Uzi Liebner, Lee Levine, Stuart Miller, Shlomo Naeh, Tzvi Novick, Ishai Rosen-Zvi, and Ada Yardeni for their assistance in preparing this article.

² See most recently the influential works of C. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen 1997); and S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton 2001) 103–28, 226–30. For a good survey of the evidence, see S. J. D. Cohen, “The Rabbi in Second-Century Jewish Society,” in W. Horbury, W.D. Davies, and J. Sturdy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 3: *The Early Roman Period* (Cambridge 1999) 922–90. Specifically, Cohen (923–24) discounts the value of the evidence from the Bar Kokhba documents for the place of the rabbis in Jewish society of the time, something I hope to correct infra. For a less skeptical view of the rabbinic role in Jewish society, see S. S. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Eres Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in Talmud Yerushalmi* (Tübingen 2006). On the place of the *parnasim* in Jewish society, and the relation of rabbis to them, see Hezser 270–73; Schwartz 229–30; L. I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem and New York 1989) 162–67.

emerge in the Land of Israel in the immediate aftermath of the revolts, lest it rekindle Jewish nationalist passions.³ Perhaps we should no longer presume that the leadership role of the priests completely evaporated, especially at the local level, as an immediate consequence of the destruction of the Second Temple and the failed Bar Kokhba revolt. Perhaps the rabbinic movement was too small and inwardly turned and preoccupied, at least in the immediate aftermath of the failed revolts, to exert much influence beyond their own limited circles and “marginal” position in Jewish society.⁴ Perhaps the social and economic, not to mention theological, dislocations that resulted from the calamities were so great as to prevent the emergence of any centralized Jewish leadership group in the immediate aftermath. Perhaps other groups (Samaritans, early Christians, gnostics, mystics, apocalypticists) had other ideas of how to interpret and respond to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the tightening reins of Roman rule. Perhaps the lures of acculturation to the dominant imperial Greco-Roman culture were so seductive, especially with the loss of a Jewish political, religious, and culture center, as to leave the rabbis very little of a sympathetic audience to lead according to their particular socio-religious program. These hardly exhaust the possibilities. Nor is the extant evidence sufficient to allow us to choose or to combine among these possibilities with much confidence. My goal here is much more modest: to revisit one term for Jewish leadership that is first employed in our earliest (tannaitic) rabbinic texts, without any literary antecedent in Jewish sources, but with some interesting analogues in nearly contemporary, extra-rabbinic epigraphic and documentary remains, that being the Hebrew and Aramaic term *parnas*.

The Term פָּרְנָס/προνοητής

Scholars generally take פָּרְנָס to be a loanword from Greek, most likely related to the noun προνοητής (some suggest via πρόνοος) from the verb προνοέω,⁵ meaning to foresee, to plan beforehand, to provide, and which

³ See M. Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York 2007), 424–87.

⁴ See especially Schwartz, *Imperialism* 103–28; 229–30.

⁵ See E. Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, vol. 10 (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1958) 5193, n. 1; Nathan ben Yehiel of Rome, *Aruch Completum*, ed. A. Kohut, 8 vols. (Vienna 1878–92) 6.432; idem, *Additamenta ad Aruch Completum*, ed. S. Krauss (Vienna 1937) 341; M. Moreshet, *A Lexicon of the New Verbs in Tannaitic Hebrew* (Hebrew; Ramat Gan 1980) 293–94, esp. 294, nn. 38**, 39**, who refers to previous scholars and provides evidence of usage from a full range of North-West Semitic dialects. M. Jastrow’s derivation from the Hebrew פָּרָן (*A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York 1926] 1231) is not accepted. However, assuming a derivation from προνοητής, as

Greek noun refers to a supervisor, executor, or administrator, e.g., of an estate or of public buildings.⁶ The Greek noun is known from epigraphic usage to refer to rural administrative figures in Roman Syria, with specific responsibility for funding and overseeing building projects.⁷ The Hebrew/Aramaic noun פֶּרְנָס, having the dual sense of a provider and governor,⁸ in tannaitic rabbinic usage covers roughly three types of meaning, only the first two of which are evident in Greek equivalents or in extra-rabbinic Hebrew/Aramaic evidence of roughly the same time.

Greek loanwords usually enter Hebrew/Aramaic first as nouns, it is not clear how the five Greek consonants *prnts* transmuted into the four Hebrew consonants *prns*, presumably so as to form a conjugable quadriliteral stem. Perhaps the *t* of the *ts* cluster at the word's end elided, leaving the *s* alone. Alternatively, the *t* dropped out as a result of being sandwiched between the double Greek vowels η. For such elisions, especially *t* dropping out of the *ts* cluster, see S. Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim 1964) 1.128–30. Krauss, however, does not include פֶּרְנָס in his catalog of loanwords. In any case, it is surprising, given how massively and quickly this loan-word entered into the full range of North-West Semitic dialects, that no trace of the dropped *t* remains, nor any other awareness that פֶּרְנָס in its various forms is not a native Semitic lexeme. See *infra* n. 37. I wish to express appreciation for the assistance of Shai Heijmans (via Hannah Cotton) with this question.

⁶ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. H. S. Jones, with a Supplement (Oxford 1968) 1490, citing *CIG* 4591 from Palestine. As we shall see, the person so denoted is usually acting as an agent on behalf of someone else, whether an individual, a family, or a polity, distributing goods or services that are not his (or her) own. In this regard, the פֶּרְנָס/προνοστής is different from the *euergetes*, on which see S. Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton 2009).

⁷ See G. M. Harper, Jr., “Village Administration in the Roman Province of Syria,” *YCS* 1 (1928) 102–68, esp. 127–29, where the local προνοηταί, in groups of two to four, are involved in overseeing building projects. Cf. mShek 5.2: ואין עושין שררה/סררה על הצבור בממון פחות משנים (“And no less than two persons are allowed to hold office over the public in matters concerning property”). For the two Jewish administrative *parnasim* of the Palestinian village of Bet Mashko/Mashiko, according to a documentary source, see *infra* at n. 51.

⁸ See, for example, G. H. Dalman, *Aramäisch-neuhebräisches Handwörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch* (Frankfurt a. M. 1922) 350, who provides as definitions of the noun פֶּרְנָס, “Versorger, Vorsteher.” See also *idem*, *Grammatic des Jüdisch-Palästinischen Aramäisch* (Leipzig 1905) 183, 252; C.-F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémetiques de l’ouest* (Leiden 1965) 236 (“chef d’une communauté”). For a similar range of meanings in Syriac, see R. P. Smith, *Thesaurus syriacus* 2 vols. (Oxford 1879–1902), 2.3269–71; C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon syriacum*² (Halis Saxonum 1928) 599. For other lexicons, see *supra* n. 5, *infra* nn. 24, 26, 28, 32. I do not deal in this article with the derivative noun פֶּרְנָסָה (“provision”), which, like the noun and verb פֶּרְנָס/פֶּרְנָס is well attested in tannaitic sources. See Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim* 1231–32; Ben Yehudah, *A Complete Dictionary* 5195–96; M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*² (Ramat Gan and Baltimore 2002) 448.

The Term פְּרָנָס as Denoting an “Appointed” Communal Functionary

The term פְּרָנָס is commonly used, already in tannaitic texts, to denote appointed local communal functionaries, whose responsibilities are not always specified, but which often are related to the collection and distribution of charities.⁹ For example, according to tMeg 2.15 (ed. Lieberman 352), the *parnasim* of each town collect pledged charity from the inhabitants of that town for distribution to the poor of that same town (unless they themselves pledge charity while in another town). Once the *parnasim* take possession of an individual’s pledged charity, the donor can no longer change its intended designation, except with the agreement of the *parnasim*:¹⁰

הפוסק צדקה, עד שלא זכו בה הפרנסין רשיי לשנותה לדבר אחר, משזכו בה הפרנסין אין רשיי לשנותה לדבר אחר, אלא מדעתן.

One who pledges charity, before the *parnasim* have taken possession of it, is allowed to change it for another purpose. Once the *parnasim* have taken possession of it, he is not allowed to change it for another purpose, except with their knowledge (and consent).

Similarly, according to tGit 3.13 (ed. Lieberman 259), *parnasim* (presumably Jewish) with charitable responsibilities in a town (עיר) of mixed Jewish and gentile inhabitants are to collect from Jews and gentiles alike, and to provide for Jewish and gentile poor alike, in both cases, “for the sake of peace”:

עיר שיש בה ישראל וגוים, הפרנסין גובין מישראל ומגוים, מפני דרכי שלום. מפרנסין עניי גוים עם עניי ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום.

[In] a city in which Israelites and gentiles dwell, the *parnasim* collect from the Israelites and the gentiles, for the sake of peace. They provide for the poor of the gentiles and the poor of Israel alike, for the sake of peace.

The implication is that although, strictly speaking, the *parnasim* are responsible for discharging their duties only to their Jewish constituents, to do so would give rise to resentment and enmity on the part of the gentile inhabitants of a mixed town toward their Jewish neighbors. Thus, the passage presumes a role for (and recognition of) the *parnasim* beyond their Jewish constituents. However, whether this role is backed by some authority or only by custom is much less clear.

⁹ For this emphasis, see Levine, *The Rabbinic Class* 162–67. See also supra n. 6.

¹⁰ See S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshuta*. Part 5: *Order Mo‘ed* (New York 1988) 1155–57. On the prerogatives of the *parnasim*, see tShek 1.2, 2.8 (ed. Lieberman, 204, 208), and infra n. 11.

Another passage (tMeg 2.12 [ed. Lieberman 351]) suggests that the local *parnasim* had financial oversight over other kinds of public spending, specifically relating to expenditures on buildings and public open space:¹¹

ר' מנחם בי ר' יוסה או' בית הכנסת לא יקחו את הרחבה. אמ' ר' יהודה במי דברים אמור' בזמן שלא התנו עמהן פרנסי אותה העיר, אבל אם התנו עמהן פרנסי אותה העיר, משנין אותה לכל דבר שירצו.

R. Menahem b. R. Yose says: [If they sold] a synagogue, they may not buy the open space. Said R. Judah: What is being referred to? When the *parnasim* of that town did not make a stipulation with them [that they can divert the funds for a different purpose]. But if they did make [such] a stipulation with them, they may change the purpose [of the spending] for anything they wish.

I would stress that the fact that the early rabbinic texts emphasize the role of the *parnasim* in locally collecting and distributing charity and other funds, should not be taken to mean that this was their only, or even primary role, but simply that for which the rabbinic texts took particular interest.¹² Likewise, the fact that rabbinic texts seek to regulate the practices of the *parnasim* does not necessarily establish that rabbis had any influence over the *parnasim* or the communities they served (at least not all of them).

Two tannaitic passages in particular associate the *parnasim*, presumably of local provenance, with the rabbinic sages, without shedding any further light on the specific functions of the former. In tRosh 1.18 (ed. Lieberman, 311–12)¹³ we find an addendum to the story in mRosh 2.9, in which Rabban Gamaliel asserts his authority over R. Joshua with respect to the calendar, and which concludes by arguing that any (rabbinic) court of three, descending, as it were, from the anonymous elders who stood with Moses at Mount Sinai, is equal in stature to the original court of Moses. The Tosefta offers its own scriptural arguments to the same effect, concluding:

להודיעך שכל מי שנתמנה פרנס על הצבור, אפ'י קל שבקלים, שקול כאביר שבאבירים, וכן הוא אומר "ובאת אל הכהנים הלויים ואל השופט" וגו'. אין לך אלא שופט שבדורך, ואומ' "אל תאמר מה היה" וגומ'.

To teach you that anyone who is appointed *parnas* over the community, even the lightest of the light, is equal to the mighty of the mighty. And thus it says, "And you shall appear before the levitical priests, or the magistrate [in charge at the time]"

¹¹ On this see M. Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132–212* (Totowa, N.Y. 1983) 122. It is unclear to me whether the *parnasim* here are determining the use of privately contributed (as per Lieberman's note ad loc. (*Tosefta Kifshuta* 5.151–53) or publicly assigned funds (see mMeg 3.1).

¹² See supra n. 9.

¹³ Alternative numbering, 2.3.

(Deut 17:9). You only have the magistrate in your generation. And it says, “Do not say that [the former times were better than these]” (Eccles 7:10).¹⁴

Here the same argument for the status of the *parnasim* is made as was previously made for that of (presumably rabbinic) courts and judges, whatever the actual (as distinct from imagined) extent of their jurisdiction, if only local and internal: even if they do not match up in stature with those of earlier (biblical) times, they are the ones whose authority you must accept. While this passage does not explicitly attribute judicial functions to the *parnasim*, it certainly associates them, rhetorically at least, with judicial authority, enunciating their status as an extension of that of judicial appointees.¹⁵

One of the most remarkable tannaitic statements regarding the *parnas*, and the one most directly linking him with the rabbinic sage is found in the *Sifre*'s commentary to Deut 32:2, in which Moses employs the metaphor of rain to describe how he wishes his discourse to fall upon and penetrate the Israelites. In one of several exegetical unpackings of the rain metaphor, shifting from words of Torah themselves to their (rabbinic) teachers, the *Sifre* explains:

דבר אחר. מה מטר זה אי אתה רואהו עד שבא. כך הוא אומר "ויהי עד כה ועד כה ו(ה)שמים התקדרו עבים ורוח". כך תלמיד(י) חכמים אין אתה יודע מהו עד שישנה משנה הלכות והגדות או עד שיתמנה פרנס על הצבור.

Another interpretation: Just as with rain, you cannot see (anticipate) it until it arrives, as it says, “And after a while the sky grew black with clouds and there was wind [and a heavy downpour]” (1 Kgs 18:45),¹⁶ so too with respect to a disciple of the sages, you do not know what he is until he teaches *mishnah*: *halakhot*, and *haggadot*; or until he is appointed *parnas* over the community.¹⁷

¹⁴ For a similar exegesis of these verses, see *Sifre Deut 153* (ed. Finkelstein, 206), which explicitly links Deut 17:9 to the (rabbinic) court in Yavneh. For fuller discussion, see S. D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany 1991) 86–87.

¹⁵ Alternatively, the appointment of *parnasim* is viewed as a generic rubric of (rabbinic) leadership, within which judicial appointments are included. The question of the extent of local Jewish legal jurisdiction under Roman rule in this period is too complicated to enter into here. See *infra* n. 50.

¹⁶ The prophet Elijah sends his servant seven times to look for signs of rain until on the seventh try he spots a small cloud in the distance. The rain storm then comes suddenly.

¹⁷ *Sifre Deut 306* (ed. Finkelstein, 339). I cite the text and translate according to MS London, the text chosen by the database of the Academy of the Hebrew Language in the absence of MS Vatican. Some witnesses include *midrash* among the types of teaching. For a fuller treatment of this text within the larger midrashic passage, see Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary* 96–99. For a disciple of the sages being appointed *parnas* over the public, see the *baraita* in *yBer 2.9* (5c–d). Cf. *tTa'an 1.7*, where the *parnas* is not mentioned.

There are at least two ways to understand this passage, depending on how one understands the phrase (אין אתה יודע מהו (=מה הוא)), “you do not know what he is,”¹⁸ the first presuming that we do not previously know that someone *is* a disciple of the sages, the second presuming that we already do:

1. It is impossible to know that someone is a disciple of the sages from his outward appearance, until we hear him teach (rabbinic) oral Torah in all of its discursive branches.¹⁹ Alternatively, if a person is appointed as a *parnas* with public responsibilities, we may take that as a sign that he is a disciple of the sages. Since it is hard to imagine that, from a rabbinic perspective, appointment as a *parnas* alone, in the absence of rabbinic learning, would be sufficient to identify one as a disciple of the sages, we must presume that such an appointment is understood to signal recognition of the appointee’s rabbinic learning. In that case, learning and appointment are not truly alternatives to one another, just alternative modes of recognition, with all such appointees presumed to be learned.

2. It is impossible to know the “measure” (מהו) of a disciple of the sages, except through the quality of his teaching/learning of the branches of the rabbinic curriculum of oral Torah. Alternatively, what kind of disciple of the sages he is can be known by how well he performs the duties of public *parnas*, that is, whether he performs those duties according to rabbinic rules. Following this understanding, we need not presume that all appointees as *parnasim* are rabbinic disciples, but that those who are can be confirmed as such by how they discharge their duties.

In either case, our text presumes a positive relation between rabbinic learning and appointment as “*parnas* over the community (צבור),” and that, ideally at least, such learning is a prerequisite both for being so appointed and for the proper performing of the duties of that appointment. That at least is the “reality claim” of the text from its rabbinic perspective. However, we should not presume from this passage a historical representation of all public *parnasim* having been disciples of the sages, or of all disciples of the sages having been appointed as public *parnasim*. Allowing for the ambiguities of the text, as well as for rabbinic hyperbole and wishful thinking,

¹⁸ The identical phrase is not found elsewhere in early rabbinic literature, and the occurrence of similar phrases are in such different contexts as to be of little help in determining the precise meaning here.

¹⁹ But compare Sifre Deut 343 (ed. Finkelstein, 400), commenting on Deut 33:2 (“a fiery law unto them”): [מה אש] בני אדם העמילין בה ניכרין [הן] בין הבריות. כך תלמידי חכמים ניכרין בדיבורן: “Just as with fire, those who work with it are recognizable among other people, so too [with words of Torah], disciples of the sages are recognizable by their manner of speech, by their manner of walking, and by their manner of dress in the market”). Text and translation follow MS London (see supra n. 17).

the text does seem to make, at the very least, a “reality presumption” that in some locales some disciples of the sages held public appointments as *parnasim*, and that, ideally at least, such appointments signaled their having been recognized (or rewarded) for their oral Torah learning.²⁰ Conversely, such appointments might also provide an opportunity to publicly demonstrate the rabbinic learning of the appointees by how well they perform their functions as *parnasim*. Otherwise—that is, if no rabbinic sages held such positions at the time the midrashic comment was composed—it is difficult to see how the text could have made any sense in relation to the contemporary historical reality (functioning public *parnasim*) familiar to its audience.²¹ Even so, it is not clear from this text, or from similar ones in the tannaitic corpora, who is doing the “appointing” (and thereby conferring recognition) at this time: other rabbis, the Patriarchate, or local authorities, whether Jewish or non-Jewish.²² Nor is it clear to what extent such “appointments,” once made, are recognized as such beyond rabbinic circles, and if so, by whom, or whether they are not appointments in any official, legal sense, but rather in a more customary or figurative sense. Nor can we necessarily presume that the specific functions performed by these rabbinic *parnasim* are the same as those associated with (not necessarily rabbinic) *parnasim* elsewhere in tannaitic legal texts, the term being employed here, perhaps, in a more generic sense of communal leadership (on which see *infra*).²³

The Term פְּרָנָס as Denoting an Administrator of a Private Estate

Less evidence exists in the tannaitic corpora for another type of *parnas*, that being an administrator or executor of a private estate or a private guardian, which is well-evidenced in contemporary Greek sources (for the

²⁰ For a similarly cautious assessment, see Goodman, *State and Society* 119–28, esp. 121–22, 125–26, and 246, n. 53, where he is critical of those (e.g. S. Safrai) who have exaggerated the centralized rabbinic authority to make such local appointments. Compare M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule: A Political History of Palestine from the Bar-Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Jerusalem 1984) 61, 121. For the appointment of a scholar to the position of “*parnas* over the public” as an indication of his rabbinic learning, see bShab 114a.

²¹ See the contemporary, *non-rabbinic* epigraphic and documentary evidence adduced *infra*.

²² In amoraic texts we have clear evidence of rabbis making these appointments, e.g., yPeah 8.7 (21a). See *supra* n. 20.

²³ With these caveats, compare the generic application of פְּרָנָס with the passive of the verbal stem מָנָה (“appoint”) to biblical and rabbinic national leaders, to be discussed *infra*. The distinction between “leader” and intermediary “provider” is blurred in a theocratic conception of governance.

προνοητής), as well as in Palmyran (Aramaic) inscriptions of the same time (מפרנסיתא).²⁴ In mKet 7.1 we find:

המדיר את אשתו מלהנות לו - עד שלשים יום, יעמיד פרנס; יתר מכן - יוציא ויתן כתבה.

If a man vowed that his wife should not derive benefit from him, up to thirty days, he must set up a *parnas* [to provide for her needs]; if for longer, he must put her away and grant her her *ketubbah* (marriage writ).²⁵

The *parnas* functions as an interim provider to the wife, on behalf of the husband, during a period of separation in anticipation of divorce. Once again, it is not clear who does the appointing, but there is no indication here that this private *parnas* has any rabbinic affiliation or association.²⁶

The Term פְּרָנָס as Denoting a National Leader

The noun פרנס is used in tannaitic *non-legal* (aggadic) passages to refer to Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, and David as national leaders/providers of Israel. For example, we find in an early aggadic midrash, שני פרנסים טובים, עמדו להם לישראל משה ודוד מלך ישראל (“Israel had two good *parnasim*, Moses and David, king of Israel”).²⁷ According to the Palestinian *targumim* to Gen 40:12, we find: תלתא פרנסין מהימנין משה ואהרן ומרים (“three faithful *parnasim*, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam”).²⁸ A similar tradition is found in tSot 11.8 (ed. Lieberman 220):

²⁴ See H. Ingholt, “Inscriptions and Sculptures from Palmyra II,” *Berytus* 5 (1938) 124–33, esp. 130 (on מפרנסיתא, a female personal guardian or foster mother); J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 2 vols. (Leiden 1995) 2.940; D. R. Hillers and E. Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts* (Baltimore 1996), 37 (PAT 0095.5), 385.

²⁵ Cf. tKet 7.1.

²⁶ For a similar usage of פרנס, but in Aramaic (בר פרנסא), as a private household steward, see Targ Onq Gen 15:2, for Hebrew בן־משק (“in charge of my household”). Cf. Targ Onq Gen 24:2. See E. M. Cook, *A Glossary of Targum Onkelos According to Alexander Sperber’s Edition* (Leiden 2008) 229, with reference to previous lexical treatments. For a similar targumic rendering using פרנס as a household steward, see Targ Nev Isa 22:15. The functions of this kind of פרנס are similar to those of the אפיטרופוס (=ἐπίτροπος) as a guardian, curator, or procurator, legally representing someone else, whether for a short or long term. See, for example, mGit 5.4; mBK 4.4; Sifre Num 103, 153, 154 (ed. Horovitz, 102, 203, 205); Sifre Zuṭa Num 30:14 (ed. Horovitz, 327).

²⁷ Sifre Deut 26 (ed. Finkelstein, 36, 38). Cf. Sifre Num 137. For fuller treatment of the larger passage see Fraade, “Sifre Deuteronomy 26 (ad Deut. 3:23): How Conscious the Composition?” *HUCA* 54 (1983) 245–301.

²⁸ See Targ Neof, Geniza Targ E, Frag Targ P, Frag Targ V ad loc. Targ Neof Margin substitutes צדיקין for פרנסין. See Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 448, who translates the Aramaic noun פרנס as “community leader.” The use of Aramaic פרנס (פרנסא) for national leaders is especially frequent in Targ Nev, where it is used to translate the Hebrew רוֹעֵה (“shepherd”), when used metaphorically of Israel’s kings, who poorly shepherd Israel as God’s flock. See especially the concentration of this translation (as well as verbal forms of פרנס for רעה) in Targ

ר' יוסה בר' יהודה אומ' כיון שיצאו ישראל ממצרים נתמנו להן שלשה פרנסין טובין, אילו הן משה, אהרן, ומרים. בזכותן נתנו להן שלש מתנות, עמוד הענן, ומן, ובאר.²⁹

R. Yose b. R. Judah says: When the Israelites left Egypt, three good *parnasim* were appointed for them. These are they: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. For their merit three gifts were given to them: the pillar of cloud, the manna, and the well.²⁹

Similarly, in designating Moses's intermediary revelatory role, with respect to both written and oral words of Torah, we find in the Tosefta, פרנס אחד, נתנם ("one *parnas* gave them [all]").³⁰ Of particular significance is Moses's transfer of authority to Joshua, of whom it is midrashically said, נתמנה ברשות, ("he was appointed to lead"), after which it is said, נתמנה פרנס על, ("he was appointed *parnas* over Israel"), thereby equating רשות and פרנס, after which Joseph and David are mentioned as leaders, each of whom was נתמנה מלך ("appointed king").³¹ Here, clearly, *parnas* is used not simply for the role of provider in a limited, local sense, but in the broader sense of national, authoritative leadership (רשות).

Shifting from nominal to verbal forms of פרנס, we find in the *Sifre to Deuteronomy* that just as Moses is said to have led/provided for Israel (פירנס את ישראל) for forty years, the same is said of Hillel the Elder, Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, and Rabbi Akiva (note the chronological progression):

"ומשה בן מאה ועשרים שנה." זה אחד מארבעה שמתו בן מאה ועשרים שנה. ואלו הן. משה והילל הזקן ורבן יוחנן בן זכי ור' עקיבא. משה היה במצרים ארבעים שנה. ובמדן ארבעים שנה. ופירנס את ישראל ארבעים שנה. הילל הזקן עלה מבבל בן ארבעים שנה. ושמם חכמים ארבעים שנה. ופירנס את ישראל ארבעים שנה. רבן יוחנן בן זכאי עסק בפרקמטיא ארבעים שנה. ושימש חכמים ארבעים שנה. ופירנס את ישראל ארבעים שנה. ר' עקיבא למד תורה ארבעים שנה. ושימש חכמים ארבעים שנה. ופירנס את ישראל ארבעים שנה.

"Moses was one hundred and twenty years old" (Deut 34:7): This is one of four who died at the age of one hundred and twenty years old. And these are they: Moses, Hillel the Elder, Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, and R. Akiva. Moses was in Egypt for

Nev Ezek 34 (vv. 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10). Note as well Targ Nev Ezek 34:23 and 37:24, where Aramaic פרנס is used to translate Hebrew רוֹעֵה with reference to David as messianic king. For Aramaic פרנס as a translation of Hebrew שר as national ruler, see Targ Nev Isa 3:4.

²⁹ I am unaware of other examples of the noun *parnas* being applied in early rabbinic literature to a woman. See infra n. 33. For Miriam, often linked with Moses and Aaron, as a prophetess in her own right, see Exod 15:20.

³⁰ See tSot 7.12 (ed. Lieberman, 195). For treatment of the passage as a whole, see Fraade, "Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization," *AJS Review* 31 (2007) 1–40, esp. 32–37. While the verb *pirnes* can be used of God (see infra nn. 37, 38), the noun *parnas* here is best presumed to refer to Moses.

³¹ Sifre Deut 334 (ed. Finkelstein, 384). פרנס על ישראל is the reading in MS Berlin, but MS London and Yalqut Shim'oni have פרנס על הציבור, but the meaning would be the same. For Joshua as פרנס in the sense of national leader, see also Sifre Num 138, 141 (ed. Horovitz, 185, 187); Sifre Zuṭa Num 27:21 (ed. Horovitz, 321).

forty years, and in Midian for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. Hillel the Elder went up from Babylonia at the age of forty years, served sages for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai engaged in practical pursuits for forty years, served sages for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. R. Akiva learned Torah for forty years, served sages for forty years, and led Israel for forty years.³²

The one thing they all share is having led (פירנס) Israel for their final forty years. Although the noun פירנס is not directly applied to these rabbinic sages as national leaders, the employment of the verb פירנס rhetorically establishes a horizontal continuum from Moses, through his biblical successors, through the early sages, to the present-day (rabbinic) *parnasim*, accruing thereby national leadership status to the latter.

Several times in tannaitic literature, the noun פירנס is associated by analogy with the biblical king (מלך). Commenting on Deut 17:15 (according to which an איש נכרי, “a foreign man,” cannot be appointed king), the *Sifre* states:

מכאן אמרו האיש ממנים פרנס על הציבור (ואין ממנים האשה פרנסת על הציבור).

From here [the sages] said, a man may be appointed *parnas* over the public [but not a woman].³³

Similarly, commenting on Deut 17:20 (הוא ובניו, “he and his sons”), we are told that just as the king is succeeded by his son if he dies, so too לכל פרנסי ישראל (“for all *parnasim* of Israel, that their sons succeed them”).³⁴ This may be compared to early rabbinic exegetical asso-

³² *Sifre* Deut 357 (ed. Finkelstein, 429). Text and translation follow MS London (see supra n. 17). Cf. Gen Rab 30.8; bRosh 31b; bSan 41a; Avot R. Nat A 6. For the verb פירנס applied to God, see infra. The earliest use of the verb פירנס applied to a ruler, in the sense of administering/providing for his subjects’ affairs/needs, that I have been able to locate is in a Palmyran Aramaic inscription dated to 21 CE. See *CIS* 2.3.75–77 (#3915.3–4), esp. 77, note to line 4; G. A. Cooke, *A Text-Book of North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford 1903), 293–94 (#132.3), esp. 294, note to line 3 (for the rendering, “he administered their government”); Jean and Hoftijzer, *Dictionary des inscriptions*, 43 (בר III b); Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 63 (*PAT* 0263.3–4), 350, 401. As all of these note, it is unclear what precisely the verb פירנס means in that inscription because of the uncertainty of meaning of the following word, ברמנהון.

³³ *Sifre* Deut 157 (ed. Finkelstein, 209). The words within brackets at the end appear in MS Berlin, but not in the other early witnesses. However, their absence could be the result of a scribal error of homoioteleuton. For a female *parnas*, in the role of a private executor, see the Palmyran מפרנסיתהא, on which see supra n. 24. For Miriam as a *parnas*, see supra nn. 28, 29, perhaps reflecting the difference between halakhic and aggadic interpretation.

³⁴ *Sifre* Deut 162 (ed. Finkelstein, 212–13). See also *Sifre* Zuṭa Num 27:21 (ed. Horovitz, 321). For the association of *parnasim* with biblical kings, see the citing of Prov 8:15–16 in *yPeah* 8.7 (21a). For a broader discussion, see Fraade, “‘The Torah of the King’ (Deut 17:14–20) in the Temple Scroll and Early Rabbinic Law,” in J. R. Davila, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001* (Leiden 2003) 25–60, esp. 51–53. On hereditary rabbinic positions and authority,

ciations of the biblical king with the rabbinic Patriarch (נשיא).³⁵ I am unaware of any extra-rabbinic applications of the title פרנס (in Hebrew or Aramaic) or its Greek equivalent (προνομητής) to human national leaders (e.g., emperors).³⁶

It would be appropriate to add here that although the noun *parnas* is not applied to God in tannaitic texts, we find the verb *pirnes* used of God as king in the following comment of the *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael* on Exod 15:3:

מלך בשר ודם עומד במלחמה ואינו יכול לזון את חיילותיו ולא לספק להם אופניניות אבל מי שאמר [והיה העולם אינו כן] "ישי איש מלחמה" שהוא נלחם במצור [ים] "ישי שמו" שהוא זן ומפרנס כל בריותיו שנאמר [לגזור ים סוף לגזרים] וגומר [וכתיב] "נותן לחם לכל בשר" וגומר.

A king of flesh and blood wages war and is unable to feed his soldiers nor to supply them with provisions. But He who spoke and the world came into being is not like this. "The Lord is a man of war," in that he fights against Egypt; "the Lord is His name," in that He feeds and provides for all of His creatures, as it is said, "Who split apart the Reed Sea," etc. (Ps 136:13), [after which] it is written, "Who gives food to all flesh" (*ibid.*, v. 25).³⁷

see G. Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem 1977) 436–57 (citing our Sifre passage on 449); M. Beer, "The Sons of Moses in Rabbinic Lore," (Hebrew), *Bar-Ilan University Yearbook of Judaic Studies and the Humanities* 13 (1976) 149–57, summarized in *idem*, "The Hereditary Principle in Jewish Leadership," *Immanuel* 10 (1980) 57–61. On the tension between such inheriting of rabbinic positions of authority and the ideal of the sage as one who merits his position solely on the basis of his learning and deeds, and for an explanation of why this phenomenon developed in Palestine but not Babylonia, see as well I. Gafni, "Scepter and Staff: Concerning New Forms of Leadership in the Period of the Talmud in the Land of Israel and Babylonia" in I. Gafni and G. Motzkin, eds., *Priesthood and Monarchy: Relations between Religion and State in Israel and the Nations* (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1986–87) 84–91.

³⁵ See Fraade, "The Torah of the King" 47–49; *idem*, "Priests, Kings, and Patriarchs: Yerushalmi Sanhedrin in its Exegetical and Cultural Settings," in Peter Schäfer, ed., *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 3 (Tübingen 2002) 315–33.

³⁶ But see my discussion of the *Mekhilta* passage to be cited next.

³⁷ The text and translation follow MS Oxford, which is similar except for minor details to MS Munich. For published versions, see *Mekh. of R. Ishmael Shirta* 4 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, 131; ed. Lauterbach 2:34). For our purposes, the parallel in *Mekh. of R. Shim'on bar Yoḥai Exod 15:3* (ed. Epstein-Melamed, 82) does not display significant differences. Where MS Oxford has אופניניות, MS Munich has אופניעות, and the first printing (Constantinople 1515) has אכסניות. I take the manuscript readings to be more reliable here, deriving from the Greek ὀψώνιον, meaning "provisions, esp. supply and pay for an army" (Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim* 106, s.v. אכסניא); cf. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* 1283. Compare Targ Neof Deut 32:4 (as well as Targ Ps-J, Frag Targ P, Frag Targ V ad loc.): ותלת שעין מפרנס כל עלמא, "For three hours [each day] He provides for the whole world". Cf. S Eli Rab 14 [2x], 17 [2x], 18, 24, 29 (ed. Friedmann, 62, 84, 90, 130, 162). This idea of God as provider (מפרנס), is especially prominent in the *Birkhat Hammazon* (Grace after Meals) prayer, e.g., in the opening *birkhat hazzan*: כי הוא אל זן ומפרנס לכל, "for he is God who supplies and provides (food) for all." This usage is surprising in that Greek loanwords do not typically appear in rabbinic Hebrew prayers, suggesting how fully the loanword was assimilated into rabbinic Hebrew, without seeming awareness that it is not a native

Whereas the human (pagan) king is unable simultaneously to wage war and provide for his army at the same time, (Israel's) God is able to do both, that is, his ability to provide for all creatures is undiminished by his other activities. This is exegetically based on the otherwise redundant repetition of God's name (the Tetragrammaton) in Exod 15:3, taken the second time to signify God's beneficence (attribute of mercy). Note that the verb פִּירַנְס (מִפְּרַנְס) is employed of God, but not of the human (pagan) king, for whom is used לִסְפַּק, despite expectations of parallelism (זָן/לִזָּן is used of both).³⁸ We find, thus, an expansion of the usage of פִּירַנְס from denoting specific functions of providers (in halakhic texts) to a broader usage to denote national leaders/providers (in aggadic texts), in both cases serving intermediary functions (between humans and humans in the former; between God and humans in the latter), to the use of the verb פִּירַנְס to denote direct divine beneficence.

The Jewish Epigraphic Evidence for פִּירַנְס

What light does the non-rabbinic epigraphic and documentary evidence from the Bar Kokhba period shed on the rabbinic evidence that we have assembled from tannaitic sources? For a possible analogy to our last usage (פִּירַנְס as singular national leader), let us consider a lead weight found at Ḥorvat Alim, near Beit Guvrin, with the Hebrew inscription, on Side A (obverse), running counter-clockwise around the outer four sides of the face of the weight, beginning at the top: שְׁמֵעוֹן בֶּן / כּוֹסְבָא נָשִׁי / יִשְׂרָאֵל / וּפְרַנְסוֹ (‘‘Shim‘on son of Kos[i]ba’ Prince [Nasi] of Israel and his/its *parnas*’’).³⁹ On a second line, concentrically interior to the first, on the bottom side of

Hebrew/Aramaic lexeme. On this, see M. Bar-Asher, ‘‘עיון ראשון’’, in Joseph Tabory, ed., *Kenishta: Studies of the Synagogue World*, vol. 4 (Ramat Gan 2010), 27-49, esp. 47-49, who argues that the combination of the verb פִּירַנְס with the native verb זָן (as well as with סִפַּק and כִּלְכַּל) both facilitates and signals this absorption.

³⁸ For פִּירַנְס as a verb, in Palmyran, applied to a non-Jewish ruler, see supra n. 32. For other tannaitic midrashic sources that employ the verb (but not the noun) פִּירַנְס with God as its subject, see Mekh. *Vayyassa* 2 (3) (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, 162; ed. Lauterbach, 2:105); Sifre Num 82 (ed. Horovitz, 79); Sifre Deut 38 (ed. Finkelstein, 74). In the last two, פִּירַנְס is used in combination with זָן. For this pairing of verbs in tannaitic sources, see also tKet 4.7 (ed. Lieberman, 67), as well as the examples given in the previous note. Note also the use of the verb פִּירַנְס, for providing for an orphan, in mKet 6.5 (and more narrowly in mBB 8.7-8), with which compare the Palmyran usage, cited supra n. 24.

³⁹ For the textual decipherment, here and in what follows, I am depending on A. Yardeni, *A Textbook of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Nabataean Documentary Texts from the Judaean Desert and Related Material*, 2 vols. (Hebrew; Jerusalem 2000) 1.185. I have adapted slightly her translation (ibid. 2.[69]). A. Kloner (see infra n. 43), reverses the designations of Sides A and B (but inconsistently) and provides his own comments on the transcription and its meaning.

the weight, are written the words נשי and פרס, possibly having been added, as well as a stray letter ש on the top side. The word פרס (“half”) is understood to designate a unit of weight.⁴⁰ The word נשי may have been added since it is not clearly written on the first line, where it is squeezed into the bottom left corner. On Side B (reverse), a similar Hebrew inscription wraps counter-clockwise around the weight, but beginning on the right side: בנ / ופרנשו / ישראל / נשי / כסבא (“Ben Kos[i]ba’ Prince [Nasi’] of Israel and his/its *parnas*”). In the second line, in the space between the word נשי of the first line and the double circle that frames the central rosette, appear the words שמעון דסוי (“Shim‘on Dasoi”),⁴¹ which seem to have been added, as does the word פרס (“half”), which is inserted between the word ופרנשו in the first line and the double circle.

The inscriptions on both sides of the weight are ambiguous as to the referent of the pronominal suffix of ופרנשו, whether “his (=Ben Kosiba’s) *parnas*” or “its (=Israel’s) *parnas*.” If the former, the weight refers to some official in Ben/Bar Kosiba/Kokhba’s administration, or possibly to an administrative assistant to Bar Kokhba himself, who, in either case, is unnamed on Side A (and possibly on Side B). If the latter, then *parnas*, like *nasi*, is a title applied to Bar Kokhba himself, presumably denoting his claim to national leadership as Israel’s *parnas*. These two possibilities are roughly comparable respectively to the halakhic and aggadic usages that we observed in the tannaitic texts surveyed above. The choice between these two options is complicated by the question of the meaning of the added words שמעון דסוי on the second line of Side B, with דסוי understood by some to be a component of a proper name together with שמעון, even though it is otherwise unattested in any context.⁴² However understood, do these two, seemingly added, words refer to Ben Kosiba himself, his name שמעון not appearing in the first line of Side B, or to his *parnas*, otherwise unidentified? A. Kloner, in publishing this lead weight, provides three ways of reading the inscription on Side B (his Side A):⁴³

1. Of particular interest is the possibility, *not* favored by Kloner, of reading the inscription as: “Shim‘on Dasoi ben Kosba, Prince of Israel and its administrator,” thereby giving Ben Kos(i)ba the *dual* title of “Prince (נשיא)

⁴⁰ See Yardeni, *Textbook* 2.[69], 123.

⁴¹ Yardeni, *Textbook* 185, transcribes the second word as דסנו (with dots above the last three letters, indicating that they are not clear), but does not render that word in her translation (ibid. 2.[69]), or include it in her concordance (ibid. 2.3–183). Whether דסנו or דסוי, the word is otherwise unattested, and its vocalization is conjectural, it not being clear what its relation, if any, is to the proper name שמעון.

⁴² See supra n. 41.

⁴³ A. Kloner, “Lead Weights of Bar Kokhba’s Administration,” *IEJ* 40 (1990) 58–67, esp. 62, originally published in Hebrew in *ErIsr* 20 (1989) 345–51. Kloner refers to several other lead weights, less well preserved, with similar inscriptions, including on one the title *parnas* (ופרנסו).

of Israel and its *parnas* (פרנס).⁴⁴ In this case, the inscription on Side B, as modified, would be the same as that on Side A, as might be expected, except that a fuller form of Ben Kos(i)ba's name has been provided on Side B, if we assume that the otherwise unattested דסוי is part of his proper name. If so, this would be the only known case of someone bearing the dual titles of פרנס and נשיא, and of Ben/Bar Kos(i)ba bearing the title of פרנס.⁴⁵

2. Alternatively, and preferred by Kloner, is to understand פרנשו to refer to Ben Kosiba's administrator, named Shim'on Dasoi (Shim'on having been a popular name at the time): "Ben Kosba, Prince of Israel, and his administrator Shim'on Dasoi." Perhaps this Shim'on Dasoi was someone in Ben Kosiba's administration who bore particular responsibility for maintaining the standards of weights and measures, or overseeing market matters more generally.⁴⁶

3. A third possibility, suggested but not favored by Kloner, but close in meaning to his favored reading, is to take פרנשו on both sides of the weight to refer to an *unnamed* official in Bar Kosiba's administration, in which case Side B would be understood as: "'Shim'on Dasoi ben Kosba, Prince of Israel[,] and his administrator,' the latter being an additional but unnamed, entity in the Bar Kokhba administration." It strikes me as unusual to refer to such a figure in such a way without naming him, unless this was precluded for lack of space on the weight.

While I slightly favor the first understanding—with Ben Kosiba bearing the dual titles of נשיא and פרנס of Israel and being the only person referenced by the weight—the inscriptions on both sides remain ambiguous (regardless of how we understand דסוי), and any conclusions must allow for this ambiguity.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See Y. Yadin, J. C. Greenfield, A. Yardeni, and B. Levine, eds., *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri* (Jerusalem 2002) 48, where it is stated that this understanding "better fits the syntax." Hannah Cotton, in consultation with Ada Yardeni, informs me that they similarly favor this understanding. Ranon Katzoff informs me that he favors פרנסו as meaning "his *parnas*."

⁴⁵ We have no way of knowing how widespread, if at all, the use of such a dual title for Ben/Bar Kos(i)ba might have been, or why it might have been appropriate to a lead weight but not to documents. What does פרנס add to the authority already conveyed by נשיא? See supra nn. 34, 35, for the rabbinic exegetical association of the latter-day rabbinic נשיא and פרנס with the biblical מלך.

⁴⁶ Such an office brings to mind that of Agoranomos (ἀγορανόμος), the supervisor of weights and measures used in the market, known both from early rabbinic literature and Greek inscribed weights. See D. Sperber, "On the Office of the Agoranomos in Roman Palestine," *ZDMG* 127 (1977) 227–43; idem, *The City in Roman Palestine* (Oxford 1998) 32–47. For this functionary in a tannaitic text, see Sifre Deut 294 (ed. Finkelstein, 313). According to bBB 89a, this office was appointed by the Patriarch (נשיא), and wielded considerable power, but this may reflect later conditions.

⁴⁷ Although we have no other extra-rabbinic evidence for the noun פרנס applied to a ruler, note the inscriptional evidence for the Palmyran Aramaic use of the verb פרנס applied to a ruler in 21 CE. See supra n. 32. However, nominal and verbal usages cannot necessarily be equated.

That Shim'on ben Kosiba had *parnasim* as part of his administration, attending to local civil matters, is evidenced in three legal papyri from Naḥal Hever dealing with land-lease transactions. Papyrus Yadin 44 (lines 6–7) and P. Yadin 45 (lines 10–13), refer in Hebrew to one as “Yehonathan, son of Maḥanaim, the *parnas* (פרנסו) of Shim'on son of Kosiba, Premier of Israel, [in] Ein Gedi.”⁴⁸ In P. Yadin 42 (lines 1–2), two *parnasim* (פרנסוהי) of Shim'on ben Kosiba are referred to in Aramaic, “Yeho[h]anan, son of Yeshu'a' (and) Miryam, and Ḥoron, son of Yishma'el.”⁴⁹ In both cases, *unlike the weight*, פרנס with a pronominal suffix is immediately followed (after של in Hebrew and ד- in Aramaic) by the name(s) of the person(s) to which the pronominal suffixes refer. Hannah Cotton has commented that this administrative structure follows the Roman imperial model, evidenced also in Egypt, whereby Bar Kokhba occupied (usurped) the place of the imperial *fiscus*, and the *parnasim*, paralleling the imperial procurators, acted as his agents (sub-lessors) vis-à-vis the subject sub-lessees.⁵⁰ It should be noted that in all of rabbinic literature, I have not found a single case of someone being referred as a named person's *parnas* (פרנסו), as we find here of Ben Kosiba. While *parnasim* are associated with particular places, and in amoraic sources are themselves named, they are not usually identified as serving another named person of authority.

Unlike the previous examples, in which the *parnas* would appear to be an official in the administration of Ben/Bar Kosiba/Kokhba, even if locally based, the two *parnasim* (פרנסין) mentioned by name in P. Mur. 42,⁵¹ would appear to have no stated connection to a higher-level administration. These *parnasim* write as the *local* officials of Bet Mashko/Mashiko (probably near Herodium) to confirm that an animal purchased from a resident of that town had legally belonged to him and was his to sell.

Finally, to round out the epigraphic picture, we should note the appearance of three late synagogue dedicatory inscriptions, one in Aramaic from Na'aran and two in Greek from Ḥammat Tiberias, that contain the word

⁴⁸ See Y. Yadin et al., *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period* 42–64.

⁴⁹ Y. Yadin et al., *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period* 142–49. Ḥoron, son of Yishmael is also found performing administrative functions, but without the title *parnas*, in P. Yadin 43.4, 8, where he acts as the collection agent for a partial payment of a lease, for which he issues a receipt. See *ibid.*, 150–55.

⁵⁰ H. M. Cotton, “Ein Gedi Between the Two Revolts,” *SCI* 20 (2001) 138–54, esp. 151–52; and more broadly, *idem*, “Die Papyrusdokumente aus der jüdischen Wüste und ihr Beitrag zur Erforschung der jüdischen Geschichte des 1. und 2. Jh.s n. Chr.,” *ZDPV* 115 (1999) 228–47; *idem*, “Jewish Jurisdiction under Roman Rule: Prolegomena,” in Michael Labahn and Jürgen Zanganberg, eds., *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und römische Herrschaft: Vorträge aus der Ersten Konferenz der European Association for Biblical Studies*, Tübingen 2002) 5–20.

⁵¹ P. Benoît, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, eds., *Les Grottes de Murabba'at: Text* (DJD 2.1; Oxford 1961) 155–59.

parnas (Aramaic, [ה]פרנס) or its Greek equivalent (προνοούμενος, προνοητής).⁵² From these inscriptions it is difficult to identify the functions of the *parnasim*. Were they village notables being recognized for their contributions to the building or renovation of these synagogues, or were their titles indicative of a function specific to synagogue status or leadership, or to the oversight of local building activity, as possibly suggested by one of the Ḥammāt Tiberias inscriptions?⁵³ In the case of Ioullōs of Ḥammāt Tiberias, he appears to have been involved in overseeing or contributing to the completion of the renovations (πάντα ἔλεσε). Needless to say, there is no reason to presume that these *parnasim* have any direct connection to the rabbinic sages.⁵⁴

Conclusions

We have witnessed a variety of administrative functions ascribed to the *parnas*, which are fairly consistent between the tannaitic sources, especially the *halakhic* ones, and the extra-rabbinic epigraphic and documentary evidence. However, in one important way, the early rabbinic evidence finds no certain analogue in the extra-rabbinic evidence: the *aggadic* application of the term *parnas*, as denoting *national* leadership, to singular figures of the biblical past (Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, and David), and (by implication) to the rabbinic “founding fathers” (Hillel, Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakai, and Rabbi Akiva).⁵⁵ The only extra-rabbinic analogue to such an expanded usage might be inscriptions on lead weights that may refer to Bar

⁵² For the Na‘aran Aramaic inscription (=CIJ 1202, where Frey renders פרנסה as “administrateur”), see J. Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1978), 97 (#63, line 2); J. A. Fitzmyer and D. J. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts (Second Century B.C.–Second Century A.D.)* (Rome 1978) 254–55, 282. For the Ḥammāt Tiberias Greek inscriptions, see L. Roth-Gerson, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Synagogues in Eretz-Israel* (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1987), 65 (#16, line 4), 72 (#18, line 2), as well as discussion at 158, 168–69; B. Lifshitz, “The Ancient Synagogue at Hamat-Tiberias: Its Floor and Inscriptions,” in B. Oded et al., eds., *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, vol. 3 (Hebrew; Haifa 1974), 99–109, esp. 106, both of whom render the Greek as *parnas*.

⁵³ For the view that they were synagogue officials, see B. Lifshitz, cited by Roth-Gerson, *The Greek Inscriptions*. For the view that they were local building overseers, see Roth-Gerson, *The Greek Inscriptions* as well as supra nn. 7, 11.

⁵⁴ For later documentary evidence from the Cairo Geniza for the *parnas* as a title and a communal functionary in the 10th–12th centuries, see M. A. Friedman, *The Jewish Marriage in Palestine: A Cairo Geniza Study*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv and New York 1981) 226–36 (#22=TS 24.35, line 42); S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 2 (Berkeley 1971) 77–82.

⁵⁵ For the somewhat similar application of the verb (but not the noun) פרנס to God, see supra nn. 37, 38.

Kokhba (Ben Kosiba) himself as Israel's *parnas*, an understanding that cannot be established unambiguously.⁵⁶

Although the term *parnas* does not appear in any pre-rabbinic *literary* source (that is, neither in the Hebrew Bible nor in any of Second Temple literature), its ample attestation in inscriptions and legal documents of the Bar Kokhba period, and in Palmyran inscriptions of roughly the same period,⁵⁷ suggests that the rabbis did not invent this administrative term or its usage, but adapted it from their larger cultural environment, whether Northwest Semitic or Greco-Roman. Like other terms for local administration under Roman rule, it was part of the regional *lingua franca*, borrowed and domesticated by each sub-culture. While the rabbinic *halakhic* usages of *parnas* are virtually identical to those found in the broader cultural context, in the more generic rabbinic *aggadic* usages of *parnas* as a *national* leader/provider, we see a unique (with the *possible* exception of Bar Kokhba) broadening of its usage, as I have argued, for inner-rabbinic rhetorical purposes.

Contrary to scholars of a previous generation who tended to overstate the degree and reach of centralized rabbinic authority in the period following the two failed revolts against Rome, it is clear that not all rabbis were *parnasim*, nor were all *parnasim* rabbis, nor did all *parnasim* take their instructions from rabbinic rules. However, we need not, nor should not, deny any overlap between rabbis and *parnasim*. Some of our earliest rabbinic sources do positively connect the two in ways that cannot simply be dismissed as fantasy. Otherwise, they would not have made communicative sense in their own historical context. Simply put, we must presume that some rabbis in some locales functioned in town or village civil administration as *parnasim*, and that the application of this legal/administrative term to them would have represented familiar usage within both the local and broader cultural contexts. To the extent that some rabbis so served and were so designated, this would have been rabbinically viewed as a way to extend rabbinic influence beyond rabbinic circles, while at the same time, presumably, providing means for their material support.

Whatever the extent of such overlap, which cannot be determined, it is important to look to early rabbinic texts not simply as historical representations of local civil administration, but as rhetorical constructions, especially in *aggadic* usage, of how the early rabbis sought to take their places as **פרנסי ישראל** in the horizontal chain of leaders/providers that originated with Mos-

⁵⁶ See supra n. 44. For an earlier, extra-rabbinic (Palmyran Aramaic) epigraphic use of the *verb* **פרנס** to denote the activities of a ruler, see supra n. 32.

⁵⁷ See supra n. 24.

es and was vertically overseen, as it were, by God.⁵⁸ From a rabbinic perspective, the local administration of Jewish communities in the Land of Israel — including the distribution of charity, the regulation of markets, the oversight of public buildings, the leasing of land, and the implementation of civil justice—were best entrusted to those who were learned in the specifics of Torah law, both written and oral. By retrojecting the legal/administrative loan-word *parnas*—now narratively transformed into a more generic term for national Jewish leadership—onto biblical leaders (Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, and David), and to identify that term with Israelite kingship, was not simply an exercise in anachronism, but a way of bestowing authority on those rabbis who were available and willing (as not all were) to serve locally as פרנסים על הצבור in the historical present. By limiting our investigation to tannaitic texts and their near-contemporary epigraphic and documentary analogues, we have seen that this rhetorical impulse already was at work in the mid-second to early third centuries, and did not await the late third century as others have claimed, depending on amoraic sources.⁵⁹

Many questions remain as to the scope and specific functions of rabbinic sages who served as *parnasim* at the local level, and to the extent to which this was an important vehicle both for their material support from and legal influence upon the larger Jewish society. At the very least, our earliest rabbinic sources suggest that the rabbis eyed the position of *parnas* as a way of enhancing their authority and extending their socio-religious program, in the hope of assuming their own rightful places in the succession of leaders of and providers to Israel, with an implicit theological claim to be intermediaries in God's providing for Israel. If the rabbis were not, in the century or two following the failed revolts, "central" to Jewish society, neither were they necessarily "marginal" to it, but in slow transit between the latter and the former. The position and terminology of *parnas*, legally adopted and narratively adapted from broader cross-cultural usage, was but one vehicle by which they sought not just to *imagine*, but gradually to *achieve*—both practically and rhetorically—that social transition.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See supra nn. 37, 38.

⁵⁹ See Levine, *The Rabbinic Class* 162–67.

⁶⁰ Soon after completing this article, I became aware of Daniel Meir, "The *Parnas* in Israel: Identity, Status, and Authority" (Hebrew; M.A. thesis, The Hebrew University Jerusalem 2007).