

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE

Brown Judaic Studies has been publishing scholarly books in all areas of Judaic studies for forty years. Our books, many of which contain groundbreaking scholarship, were typically printed in small runs and are not easily accessible outside of major research libraries. We are delighted that with the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities Open Book Program, we are now able to make available, in digital, open-access, format, fifty titles from our backlist.

Bernadette Brooten's study, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (1982), was a landmark in the study of gender in antiquity, bringing attention for the first time to the role that women played in ancient synagogues by focusing primarily on epigraphical evidence. Her book allowed us to see old evidence in a fresh way, revealing a long history of scholarly biases.

This edition incorporates a new preface. The original text is unchanged.

Michael L. Satlow
Managing Editor
January, 2020

INTRODUCTION TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

In *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, I argued against a then-prevailing view. On the basis of nineteen inscriptions, I challenged certain ideas about women whose relatives honored them with such titles as head of the synagogue, leader, elder, mother of the synagogue, and woman of priestly class/priestess or who claimed those titles for themselves, such as in donative inscriptions.¹ According to the consensus at that time, these titles did not imply that Coelia Paterna, Gaudentia, Rufina and the other women referenced in the inscriptions carried out any functions at all. Scholars claimed that they bore these titles because their husbands did; that these and comparable titles designated functions when men bore them, but were honorific when women bore them; or, in the case of mothers and fathers of the synagogue, that the titles were honorific for both women and men. In addition, I presented inscriptions honoring women who donated portions of synagogues, or in the case of one non-Jewish woman, an entire synagogue. I identified 43 donative inscriptions involving women, of which 23 commemorate women who donated, 15 commemorate a husband and wife donating together, and five commemorate a donation on behalf of a woman. Finally, I argued that, while there is medieval evidence for a strict separation between women and men in the synagogue during religious events, there is no such evidence for any required, permanent separation in the Roman period. Lest one imagine that Jewish women did not attend synagogue services at all, ancient sources present women in various communities doing just that.

In the intervening 38 years, five or six new inscriptions have come to light in which women bear titles, bringing the total number of inscriptions wherein women bear titles to 24 or 25. I present these new inscriptions here in roughly chronological order.

¹ In addition to the two articles on Yael προστάτης cited below, see: Bernadette J. Brooten, "Female Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine and Zeev Weiss. *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary series* 40 (2000) 215-223.