In a town where all are priests they raise up their hands [to give the blessing]. Whom do they bless? Their brothers in the north, in the south, in the east and in the west. And who answers, "Amen," after them? The women and the children.

Again, the women's presence in the service is simply presupposed. Note that this text presupposes that only male priests give the priestly blessing. A story told of a woman who used to go each week to hear R. Me'ir (ca. 150) preach would be one more example of the way in which also the rabbinic sources take women's attendance at worship services to be an ordinary phenomenon (y. Sota 16d.38-52; Lev. Rab. 9.9; cf. Deut. Rab. 5.15). Another story about a woman's regular attendance at synagogue services is also relevant here (b. Sota 22a):

A certain widow had a synagogue in her neighborhood; yet she used to come daily to the school of R. Johanan and pray there. He said to her, "My daughter, is there not a synagogue in your neighborhood?" She answered him, "Rabbi, but have I not the reward for the steps!"

The issue here is not that the woman goes to the synagogue regularly, but rather that she walks quite a distance to attend services in a synagogue far from her home and merits reward for her extra steps. That she attends is not cause for surprise. The background of these sources is that, according to Tannaitic halakhah, women are obliged to pray (m. Ber. 3:3); prayer in the synagogue is one of the ways of fulfilling that obligation.

In the light of such sources, one can say with certainty that Jewish women attended synagogue services in the period of the Second Temple and of the Mishnah and the Talmud. It is difficult to understand how Goodenough could write with reference to the Juliana who had donated the mosaic in the synagogue at Naro in North Africa:

She herself could presumably not have attended the services in this sancta synagogue; but as with all daughters in Israel, her hope was in the maintenance of Jewish worship and life.

B. Women as Donors to and of Synagogues

Anyone familiar with the workings of private institutions is acutely aware of the connection between the ability to give money and the capability of wielding influence. The boards of
trustees of the private institutions of this country provide ample attestation of this phenomenon. In the ancient world, philanthropy and power were also intimately connected with each other, perhaps even more so than today, whereby it is not always clear whether philanthropy was the prerequisite to holding office or vice versa. In an article entitled "Feminism in the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum," S. L. Mohler writes:

It follows as a natural corollary to the importance of games and epula in the life of the ancient communities that social leadership was determined to a considerable extent by the ability of individuals to supply the demand for these forms of entertainment.  

After outlining the concrete relationship between certain official titles held by women and philanthropy, Mohler notes:

Having once received this formal recognition as public functionaries—which meant as much or as little as election to a magistracy—, these women were in a position to enter upon the prescribed career of philanthropy.

Without simplistically transferring the situation of the non-Jewish world onto Judaism, it does seem reasonable to ask whether there might have been a relationship between donations to and of synagogues and influence in the Jewish community. This is not to ask whether synagogue functionaries attained their titles through engaging in donative activity or whether maintaining the synagogue building was one of their functions. Throughout the discussion of the various titles, we have seen that while persons who bear titles often appear in donative inscriptions, so too do those who bear none. The purpose of pointing out the women in Jewish donative inscriptions is not, therefore, to suggest that all of these held leadership positions or were synagogue functionaries. The point, rather, is to view the women title-bearers against the backdrop of women donors, that is, to consider the implications of the existence of women donors for the interpretation of the nineteen inscriptions in question.

For an overview of women donating alone and together with their husbands, as well as of others donating on behalf of women, see the forty-three inscriptions given in the appendix. The most important aspect of this corpus is not any one detail, but rather the very fact of the existence of such inscriptions. They belie the current, often unstated, view of Jewish women in antiquity as very much in the background, as not in any way involved in the public sphere, but rather as absolutely restricted to domestic...
activities. They show that at least some women controlled their own property and possessed sufficient sums of money to be able to donate from it. One might ask whether the system of guardianship would not have been a severe restriction on women's control of their property, as the approval of the guardian (tutor, kyrios) was necessary before disposing of one's property. Guardians are not mentioned in the donative inscriptions, probably because donative inscriptions are not legal documents. If the guardian's approval was necessary, which, especially with the smaller donations, may not have been the case, all of these women succeeded in obtaining it. Since the system of guardianship had broken down considerably by the late Roman period, the question may even be irrelevant for most of the inscriptions.

One synagogue where women were particularly active as donors was that in Apamea in Syria, which contained a mosaic floor with nineteen dedicatory inscriptions (Lifshitz, Donateurs nos. 38-56; Inscr. Syrie 1319-1337; CII 803-818). One of the inscriptions is dated to 391 (Lifshitz, Donateurs no. 38; CII 803). Of the nineteen inscriptions, nine were ordered by women (Appendix nos. 7-15), and another five were ordered by a man (or men) and a woman (or women) together, in two cases with their children (Appendix nos. 30-34). Two further inscriptions contain donations on behalf of women (Appendix nos. 39-40). There are only three inscriptions (Lifshitz, Donateurs nos. 38, 47, 49; Inscr. Syrie 1319, 1328, 1330; CII 803, 812, 814) which mention only male donors (in contrast to nine which mention only women), although one of these (Lifshitz, Donateurs no. 38) refers not to one, but rather to several male donors. A caveat concerning the relationship between being a donor and holding an official position is in order here. In spite of the preponderance of women donors, the only office-holders mentioned by name are men. Thus, the case of Apamea does not demonstrate that where women donate money, they receive official titles. It simply shows that they were active members of the synagogue and in control of a certain amount of money.

An inscription which shows a closer connection between donative activity and official honor is the Tation inscription from Phocaea, Ionia (Appendix no. 3; perhaps 3rd C.). Tation donated an entire synagogue and was honored with a golden crown and prohedria, that is, the right to sit in front in the seat of honor. Perhaps this refers to the type of special chair or throne found in the synagogues at Delos, 'En-Gedi and Korazim. One is reminded also of Jesus' indictment of the scribes and...
Pharisees who "sit on the seat of Moses" and who "love the best seats (prōtokathedriai) in the synagogues" (Matt 23:2, 6). The prohedria granted to Tation does not fit in with the hypothesis of a women's gallery. One could imagine that this inscription is unambiguous with respect to the honor bestowed upon a woman. Not so to Salomon Reinach, who writes:

The inscription of Phocaea shows us that this distinction [i.e., prohedria] was accorded not only to the wealthy and the learned, but that the community conferred it, by special decision, even upon women.13

It would seem that a woman who donates an entire building is, by definition, wealthy, and how Mr. Reinach can know that Tation was not a learned person is unclear to this author.

Another woman who donated an entire synagogue was Julia Severa (Appendix no. 6; probably 1st C.), probably a non-Jewish woman14 who was a high priestess, agnōnothetis and eponymous magistrate (MAMA VI 153, 263, 265).15 Her name continued to be associated with the synagogue for some time, for the extant inscription does not commemorate the erection of the building, but rather its repair at a later date.

The one woman title-bearer who was also a donor is Theopempte (Appendix no. 4), head of the synagogue. The contribution of her and her son Eusebios was a chancel screen post, possibly also the chancel screen attached to it.

In summary, the references to women in Jewish donative inscriptions do not prove that women were synagogue functionaries in antiquity, but they do show that some women controlled considerable sums of money and were active in supporting the synagogue. This is an important piece of information when considering the question of whether women could have been members of boards of elders or whether mothers of the synagogue might have served on governing boards. One of the functions of such boards might have been to make budgetary decisions. Those in society who are appointed or elected to make budgetary decisions are often those who possess property or money themselves. These inscriptions show that some women in antiquity controlled money and would, therefore, have been good candidates for board membership.

C. Women as Proselytes to Judaism

Scholars have recognized for some time that women proselytes are mentioned relatively frequently in ancient sources.