

## CONCLUSION

The view that the titles in question were honorific is based less on evidence from the inscriptions themselves or from other ancient sources than on current presuppositions concerning the nature of ancient Judaism. Seen in the larger context of women's participation in the life of the ancient synagogue, there is no reason not to take the titles as functional, nor to assume that women heads or elders of synagogues had radically different functions than men heads or elders of synagogues. Of the functions outlined for each title, there are none which women could not have carried out. If women donated money, and even large sums of it, surely they were capable of collecting and administering synagogue funds. Nor is it impossible to imagine Jewish women sitting on councils of elders or teaching or arranging for the religious service. Even women carrying out judicial functions is not impossible in a tradition which reveres one of its women prophets (Deborah) as a judge. This is not to say that the women of these inscriptions might not have been exceptions. Indeed, they probably were. It is an exception today for women to hold positions of religious leadership. The point is not whether these women were exceptions or not, nor even whether they faced opposition or not--today's women rabbis, ministers and priests certainly do--but whether their titles were merely titles or whether they implied actual functions, just as for the men. It is my view that they were functional, and that if the women bearing these titles had been members of another Graeco-Roman religion, scholars would not have doubted that the women were actual functionaries. This collection of inscriptions should challenge historians of religion to question the prevailing view of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period as a religion all forms of which a priori excluded women from leadership roles.

Further steps in research would be to consider these Jewish women leaders in the larger context of the history of religions, comparing their functions with those of women leaders in other communities and religions, such as the Isis, Demeter or Dionysus religions. It would also be especially useful to study possible connections between Judaism and Jewish Christianity. For example, it is striking that several early Christian women leaders were Jewish: the apostle Junia (Rom 16:7), the teacher and missionary Prisca (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom 16:3-4; 1 Cor

16:19; 2 Tim 4:19; note that in Acts 18:26 she teaches in a synagogue context), and possibly the Mariam of Rom 16:6, "who labored much for you" (on *kopiaō* as a term of leadership, see 1 Cor 16:16; 1 Thess 5:12). The inscriptional evidence for Jewish women leaders means that one cannot declare it to be a departure from Judaism that early Christian women held leadership positions. A further context in which to study this material would be the political titles borne by women in this period, in particular in Asia Minor, since some of the Jewish titles may have had civic and political overtones. Another area in great need of research is the social and economic aspects of Jewish women's lives in this period. If we had a clearer picture of women's daily lives, it would be much easier to visualize how Jewish women leaders fit into the larger context of Jewish women's history. A historian wishing to add to the picture of which the present study is a small portion might look at other periods of Jewish history, in particular, the Persian, Hellenistic and medieval periods, to see if similar evidence from those periods exists, raising the question of a continuum of Jewish women leaders.

Historians of Judaism, in particular rabbinics scholars, might consider taking this evidence into account when assessing statements concerning women in Jewish literary sources. Non-literary materials should be a challenge, and not a simple complement, to the view of reality emerging from literature. Literature composed by men is the product of men's minds and not a simple mirror image of reality. As we begin to evaluate all of the sources for Jewish women's history in the period in question, including inscriptions and papyri, a much more differentiated picture will emerge. It will then be impossible to mistake male Jewish attitudes towards women for Jewish women's history. Jacob Neusner has already made an important contribution to this endeavor with his five-volume work, A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women (Leiden: Brill, 1980), in which he attempts a systemic analysis of the mishnaic division on women. That is, Neusner sees clearly that what the male rabbis said about women does not necessarily reflect who women were, what they did or what they thought. Rather it reflects who the men making these statements were. Therefore, one must view their words in the context of their system of thought. Only subsequent to this can one evaluate how relevant for women's history a given passage might

be, that is, if it contains accurate historical data about women or not. Perhaps this greater sensitivity to the nature of the historical documents and a heightened awareness of the perspectives they represent can bring us one step closer to understanding the reality of women's past.\*

\*Just as this study was being prepared for publication, Prof. Dr. Martin Hengel kindly informed me of the existence of an unpublished Jewish inscription from Aphrodisias in Caria in which a woman by the name of Jael is called prostatēs ("presiding officer," "patron," "guardian"). Her son Josua, who is called an archōn, is also mentioned. The long inscription is reported to date from the third or fourth century and to be concerned with charitable activities. It is to be published soon by Miss Joyce Reynolds of Newnham College, University of Cambridge and others in Revue des études grecques and may well be an important piece of evidence for the further discussion of Jewish women's leadership. An analysis of the title prostatēs in the inscription could also shed light on the work of the early Christian prostatis, Phoebe, mentioned by Paul in Rom 16:1-2.



## ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations not listed here are according to the Journal of Biblical Literature abbreviation guidelines.

- ANRW = Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Vols. 1- . Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972- .
- Applebaum, "Organization" = Applebaum, Shimon. "The Organization of the Jewish Communities in the Diaspora." In: Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, pp. 464-503. Ed. M. de Jonge and Shmuel Safrai. Vols. 1- . Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974- .
- BAR = Biblical Archaeology Review
- Baron, Community = Baron, Salo Wittmayer. The Jewish Community. 3 vols. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942; reprint ed., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972.
- Berliner = Berliner, A(braham). Geschichte der Juden in Rom. 2 vols. Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1893.
- Chiat = Chiat, Marilyn J. Segal. A Corpus of Synagogue Art and Architecture in Roman and Byzantine Palestine. 4 vols. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1979. An abbreviated version of this appeared just after this manuscript was completed: Handbook of Synagogue Architecture. Brown Judaic Studies 29. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.
- CPJ = Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum
- EAE = Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land. English edition ed., Michael Avi-Yonah and Ephraim Stern. 4 vols. Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1975-1978. Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society and Masada Press, 1975-1978.
- Elbogen = Elbogen, Ismar. Der jüdische Gottesdienst. 2d ed. Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1924.
- Goodenough = Goodenough, Erwin. Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period. 13 vols. Bollingen Series 37. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953-1968.
- HA = Hadashot Arkheologiot
- Hennecke-Schneemelcher = Hennecke, Edgar. New Testament Apocrypha. Ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher. Tr. R. McL. Wilson. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963.