

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

1. Sambathion, *archōn*, Byblos

IJO III Syr 30. Epitaph. Byblos, Syria (perhaps mid-to late-4<sup>th</sup> C. CE<sup>2</sup>). Reinterpreted by Daniel Stöckl Ben Ezra. "A Jewish 'Archontesse': Remarks on an Epitaph from Byblos." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 169 (2009) 287-93. Incised into a stone found on a house wall. No longer extant. Drawing by Ernst Renan. Stökl Ben Ezra transcribes and translates as follows:

יְרַחֵם יְהוָה [ 1  
 ] אֱלֹהֵי [ 2  
 עַל סַמְבַּתִּי וְנָ 3  
 אֶרְכֹּנִית שֶׁנִּתְּ 4  
 ] תִּיּוֹ חֶרֶט ל' 5

May the pity of YH[WH],  
 my God, be  
 [on] Sambathi[on],  
 [ar]chontesse. Yea[r]  
 416, Mars 30.

In contrast to Noy and Bloedhorn in IJO, who take Sambathion as the name of a male archon, Σαμβαθίων, Stökl Ben Ezra reads it as the feminine Σαμβαθίον. The waw can render both omega and omicron into Hebrew, but the feminine agrees with the feminine ending of [ar]chōnit, which I would simply translate as "archon," rather than "archontesse," which is archaic. If one were to translate it as "female archon," then all masculine examples of archon should be translated as "male archon." Noy and Bloedhorn argue that [ar]chōnit represents the Greek stem *archont-*, rather than a Hebrew or Aramaic feminine, which Stökl Ben Ezra rightly views as problematic, since *-it* is the normal female Hebrew ending. Stökl Ben Ezra notes that "archontesses" are occasionally attested among the many male ones in non-Jewish societies, especially on the Aegean islands.<sup>3</sup> While archons are generally assumed to be leaders of some sort within the state, precise functions that they may have had within a synagogue

<sup>2</sup> The dating depends on which system of dating the inscription utilizes. Noy and Bloedhorn in IJO III Syr 30 construe the date, "year 316, 30 March" to be possibly 385-86 CE. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "'Archontesse,'" 289, suggests 96 CE, 353 CE, 484 CE, or 616 CE.

<sup>3</sup> Stökl Ben Ezra, "Jewish 'Archontesse,'" 291.

are less clear.<sup>4</sup> Stökl Ben Ezra concludes that "Sambathion was most likely a woman and not a man and that she bore the title archon," arguing that while one cannot know for certain whether the title was honorific or indicated a function that she fulfilled, "we should seriously consider the latter probability."<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Eulogia, Elder, Malta

JIWE I 163 Epitaph. Rabat, Malta (4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> C.). Grafitti. 113 cm across, side of arcosolium. Letters colored with red ochre. Ross S. Kraemer, "A Jewish Inscription from Malta and the Question of Women Elders in the Diaspora Jewish Communities," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985) 431–38. First published by Antonio Ferua, "Antichità Cristiana; le catacomb di Malta," *La civiltà cattolica* (1949) 505–15. Inscription on p. 513.

[.....]  
 γερουσιάρχης φιλεντόλι[ος]  
 καὶ Εὐλογία πρεσβυτήρα ἡ αὐτοῦ σύμβιος.  
 [male name, plus perhaps one title and  
 "and"; or plus perhaps name of father]  
*gerusiarch*, lover of the commandments,  
 and his wife Eulogia, elder.

That the husband bears the title *gerusiarch*, while the wife is styled as elder demonstrates that Eulogia did not bear the title because her husband did. Perhaps as *gerusiarch*, he headed a council of elders, while she was an elder, but, in the absence of knowledge of the structures of the various synagogues in Rome, we cannot know for certain.

## 3. Sara, elder (or: the elder Sara), Sebastopolis

IJO II 161. Epitaph. Sebastopolis, Pontus and Bithynia, Asia Minor (4<sup>th</sup> C. or later). First edited by B. Le Guen-Pollet/B. Rémy (eds.), *Pontica* I, St. Etienne 1991, 119, No. 2 (SEG 41, 1138). Rectangular marble plaque; a menorah with a three-footed base appears below the inscription (.41 m. by .31 m. by .09 m; letters 2.5–4 cm.).

<sup>4</sup> See Stökl Ben Ezra, "Jewish 'Archontesse,'" 290–291, for references within the New Testament (likely much earlier than the inscription) and within early rabbinic literature (some may be contemporaneous with the inscription). A thorough analysis of the Jewish epigraphic evidence is needed.

<sup>5</sup> Stökl Ben Ezra, "Jewish 'Archontesse,'" 293.

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ἐνθα κατὰκτε  
Σάρα πρεσβῦτ-  
[ι]ς· εἰρένε.

Here lies  
Sara, the eld-  
[e]r. Peace.

The term elder, πρεσβῦτ[ι]ς, could refer to Sara's age or it could be a title equivalent to πρεσβυτέρα. This is one of just three Jewish inscriptions from Sebastopolis, all dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> C. or later. IJO II 160 commemorates Lampetis, ἀρχων.

### 4. Yael, *prostatēs*, Aphrodisias

IJO II 14. Donative Inscription naming "Yael *prostatēs*/with her son Iosua" (lines 9-10). Aphrodisias, Caria, Asia Minor (perhaps late 4<sup>th</sup>-early 6<sup>th</sup> C.) Marble block (2.8 m. by .46-4.25 m. [Side A] and .45-.43 m [Side B]; tapers in at the top). Face A is 27 lines long, and Face B is 61 lines long.

In 1990 and 1991 respectively, I argued that Iael is most likely a female name, like that of the Yael who killed Sisera in the Book of Judges (4:17, 18, 21, 22; 5:6, 24) and whom Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, the *Apostolic Constitutions* (in what may be Jewish prayers incorporated into a Christian work), and early rabbinic sources mention multiple times.<sup>6</sup> The inscription's first editors argued that, while it could be a female name, because the other donors on the inscription were all men, Iael was more likely a male name. Their evidence consists of textual variants in the Septuagint's translation of the names of יִאֶלָּא (in Ezra 10:26, 43=Septuagint 2 Esdras 10:26, 43), namely: Ἰαίηλ, Αἰεῖηλ, Ἰεεῖηλ, and Ἰαηλ. Walter Ameling follows Reynolds and Tannenbaum in reading Ἰαηλ as a male name, but does not take account of the multiplicity of Septuagintal translations for Hebrew names in 2 Esdras 10, most of which were probably never given to actual baby boys in Greek-speaking Jewish communities.<sup>7</sup> Using

<sup>6</sup> Bernadette J. Brooten, "Iael Προστάτης in the Jewish Donative Inscription from Aphrodisias," in: *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. Birger A. Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 149-62; Brooten, "The Gender of Ἰαηλ in the Jewish Inscription from Aphrodisias," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins: Presented to John Strugnell on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, John J. Collins, and Thomas H. Tobin (Lanham, MD: The College Theology Society University Press of America, 1990) 163-73; as well as the bibliography cited in IJO II 14.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Brooten, "Gender," 168-70.

rare Greek variants as evidence for the existence of Iael as a male name, rather than looking to the widely known female Iael of the Book of Judges is methodologically questionable.

Gerard Mussies argues that while the name Iael could be either feminine or masculine, προστάτης can only be masculine. He states that, as an actor word ending in -της, προστάτης must be προστάτις in the feminine.<sup>8</sup> Ἐραστής, the grammatically masculine form of active lover to which there is also a feminine equivalent, does, however, occur for women.<sup>9</sup> Throughout history, some important terms and images of leadership have been bestowed upon women in their masculine form, ranging from Hatshepsut (1507-1458 BCE), depicted in the form of a male statue, through to Mary Donaldson (1983-1984) and Fiona Woolf (2013-2014), called "Lord Mayor of London."<sup>10</sup>

Prostatēs could denote a high-level administrator, a patron, a presiding officer, or, more generally a leader.<sup>11</sup>

Yael donates here together with her son, Iosua (also a well-known biblical name: Joshua), illustrating the significance of family in service to the Jewish community, including the service involved in leadership.

## 5. Head of Synagogue, Name Missing, Göre, Nevşehir, Cappadocia

IJO II 255. Göre, Nevşehir, Cappadocia, Asia Minor. First published by G. Mavridis, in: *The Scientific, Literary, and Technical Illustrated Almanac of 1913, especially for Anatolian Greeks*, published by the Papa Georgios Association

<sup>8</sup> Gerard Mussies, "Jewish Personal Names in Some Non-Literary Sources," in *Studies in Jewish Epigraphy*, ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Pieter Willem van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 261-269, shows that ἀρχισυνάγωγος applied to Rufina (IJO II 143) is morphologically not comparable to προστάτης, which I had posited.

<sup>9</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 4.5; §189; and Hephaestion of Thebes, *Apotelesmatika* 2.21 §25; see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 127, 139, where, however, I argue that this term may serve to masculinize tribades.

<sup>10</sup> In the form "Lady Lord Mayor of London" and not "Lady Mayor of London," because "Lord Mayor" is the official title.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret H. Williams, "The Structure of Roman Jewry Reconsidered: Were the Synagogue of Ancient Rome Entirely Homogeneous?", *Jews in a Graeco-Roman Environment* (WUNT 312; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013), chap. 7, 132-35, 125-39; and "The Structure of Roman Jewry Re-Considered: Were the Synagogues of Ancient Rome Entirely Homogeneous?" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 104 (1994) 135-35, 129-41, suggests that the Roman Jewish examples of this term (JIWE II 170 [3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> C.?] and 373 [3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> C.]) could be variants to ἀρχισυνάγωγος. For further examples reaching back into the Hellenistic period, see Carsten Claußen, *Versammlung, Gemeinde, Synagoge: Das hellenistisch-jüdische Umfeld der frühchristlichen Gemeinden* (SUNT 27; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 282; and Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1985) 111-114.

of the Inhabitants of Nevşehir, 1913 (in Karamanli). Transcription; inscription now lost; not yet been published in the contemporary scholarly mode.

[.....]  
[... τ]ῆς Τουδε<α>ς Ν[ .. ] ἀρχι-  
συναγωγίσας. ἐν ἡ-  
ρίνῃ ἡ κύμεσις αὐτῆς.

[.....]  
[... olf the Jewish woman, head of  
the synagogue (*archisynagōgisa*). In p-  
ease her sleep.

I had originally construed the nu as the first letter of νήπια, translating as "i[nfant] head of the synagogue," but Walter Ameling, who disagrees, may be right.<sup>12</sup>

*In a separate class, because the title may have nothing to do with the synagogue or a temple:*

6. Megiste, Woman of Priestly Class/Priestess, Jerusalem

CII/P 297. Burial inscription on limestone ossuary, Qidron Valley, Cave 2. Chamber B, Ossuary 18 (1<sup>st</sup> C. BCE 1<sup>st</sup>-C. CE; height 41 cm, width 82 cm, depth 32 cm). Roughly inscribed above each of two medallions. First pulished by Tal Ilan.<sup>13</sup>

Μεγίστ-  
ης ἱερίσης.

Belonging to Megist-  
e, woman of priestly class/priestess.

As the reader will see in chapter five, I present three possible options for understanding inscriptions in which women bear the title *hiereia/hierisa*: (1) it could be simply the Greek equivalent of Hebrew *kōhenet*; Aramaic *kahantta'*; (2) it could mean "priest" in the cultic sense of the term; or (3) it could denote a synagogue function. (Any Jewish priestess was either born into a priestly family or had married into one.) I left the question fully open, but Ilan has written that I

<sup>12</sup> IJO II 255.

<sup>13</sup> Tal Ilan, "New Ossuary Inscriptions from Jerusalem," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 11 (1991-92) 157-59, 149-59 ; CII/P I,1 247, p. 321, similarly misrepresents me.

"equat[ed] the title priestess with a religious function,"<sup>14</sup> and that, "She claimed that these women [the three called hierieia or hierisa], as Diaspora Jews living in peripheral communities, functioned as priestesses." On the contrary, I proposed three interpretations and left the question open. Furthermore, I did not suggest that "the Temple of Onias [in Egypt] was sectarian," but rather that the Onias and other temples outside of Jerusalem suggest pluralism and that Marin might even have served in one of the temples "considered by Onias to be heterodox."<sup>15</sup> The Megiste inscription does not "undermine Brooten's theory equating the title priestess with a religious function," because (1) I suggested, rather than equated, and (2) because an inscription from Jerusalem does not undermine an inscription from Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

### *Theoretical and Methodological Questions*

In *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, I posed mainly epistemological questions. How do we know what we think we know? As analyzed in the pages below, the leading scholars of ancient synagogues and of ancient Jewish epigraphy who preceded me were certain that women did not have any functions within any of the Roman period synagogues of the ancient Mediterranean. I challenged that view. Having written before the systematic analysis of gender within Mediterranean Judaism or among its neighbors in this period, and on the basis of preconceived notions, my predecessors simply declared that women did not carry out leadership functions.

*Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* caused many to question what we know and how we know it. Why could not women, likely from influential, prosperous families, have participated in making decisions within their synagogues,

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<sup>14</sup> Ilan, "Ossuary Inscriptions," 159; see also Margaret Williams, "The Contribution of Jewish Inscriptions to the Study of Judaism," in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 3: *The Early Roman Period*, ed. William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 80, 75-93.

<sup>15</sup> Ilan, "Ossuary Inscriptions," 159; see below, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> See JIGRE 84, at which William Horbury and David Noy, who generally accurately present my views, suggest that only Marin or Marion could theoretically have served as a priestess, and that at the Leontopolis Temple (of Onias), ignoring my proposal that she might have served at a temple not approved by Onias. David Noy, however, writes of Marin or Marion "Brooten's alternative explanation that she could have had a function in the temple is just conceivable," although he prefers "of priestly descent." ("The Jewish Communities of Leontopolis and Venosa," in *Studies in Jewish Epigraphy*, ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Pieter Willem van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 167, 162-182).

likely together with other family members? If the titles in these inscriptions appear in the same or the feminine form of titles borne by men, why should scholars read the male titles as functional and the female as honorific?

If a scholar is set on the notion that Jewish women played only a peripheral role in synagogues of the Roman period, and that they either sat in a separate women's section, likely a gallery, or did not attend synagogue services at all, then any number of inscriptions pointing to hitherto overlooked possibilities for women will not persuade. Today, however, far fewer today hold that view. Scholars ranging from Géza G. Xeravits; Karen Stern; Susannah Heschel; Ross Shepard Kraemer; Paul R. Trebilco; Pieter W. van der Horst; and Daniel Boyarin; to Ute E. Eisen, who has written on female office-holders within early Christianity; and Aisha Geissinger, who has written on female exegetes within Islam; as well as others who adopt my thesis that a small number of Jewish women carried out synagogue functions and have often incorporated it into their work.<sup>17</sup> Others have, sometimes tentatively or with construc-

<sup>17</sup> Z. Battinou, publication ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Graeciae: Corpus of Jewish and Hebrew Inscriptions from Mainland and Island Greece (later 4<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E.–15<sup>th</sup> century)* (Athens: The Jewish Museum of Greece, 2018) 92–95, No. 32 (entry by Anastasia Loudaru); Géza G. Xeravits, "Temple and Synagogue in Late Antiquity," in *Various Aspects of Worship in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Géza Xeravits, József Zsengellér, Ibolya Balla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) 348–349, 341–363; Karen B. Stern, "Harnessing the Sacred: Hidden Writing and 'Private' Spaces in Levantine Synagogues," in *Inscriptions in the Private Sphere in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Rebecca Benefiel and Peter Keegan (Leiden: Brill, 2016) 222, 213–247; Hannah Safrai, "Women and the Ancient Synagogue," in *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*, ed. Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 2010) 41–42; 39–49; Susannah Heschel, "The Impact of Feminist Theory on Jewish Studies," in *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness: Identities, Encounters, Perspectives*, ed. Andreas Gotzmann and Christian Wiese (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 530, 529–548; B. Nystrom, "Women, Priests and Jewish Inscriptions of Crete," *Ariadne* 8 (1996) 95–100; Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 106–7; 118–23, 192; Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 104–126; Pieter W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE–700 CE)* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991) 105–109; Daniel Boyarin, "Reading Androcentrism Against the Grain: Women, Sex, and Torah-Study," *Poetics Today* 12 (1991) 49, 29–53; Ross S. Kraemer, ed., *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 218–20, Nos. 84–92; Barbara Geller Nathanson, "Review: Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985) 369–371; F. García Martínez, "Review: Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 14 (1983) 55–56; and Paul Elbert, "Review: Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue," *The Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 35 (1984) 503–504. Ute E(va) Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, trans.



tive criticism, accepted my analysis of all of the titles, except for "priestess."<sup>18</sup> Peter Richardson and Valerie Heuchan, however, argue that Marin, *herisa*, in the Leontopolis inscription discussed below may well have carried out a cultic role in the Jewish Temple in Leontopolis.<sup>19</sup> Further scholars have adopted my research results in large part or suggested that women may possibly have served in these functions.<sup>20</sup>

While *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* has gained widespread acceptance, Sara Parks, in a 2019 article, "'The Brooten Phenomenon': Moving Women from the Margins in Second-Temple and New Testament Scholarship," points out that my book and other research on women and gender have yet to be adequately incorporated into scholarship as a whole, because research on women and gender is still viewed as specialized and not essential for a full picture. Parks particularly challenges male scholars: "women's scholarship and scholarship on women should not be construed as optional 'identity politics.' Rather they must be accepted as essential to so-called 'regular' scholarship. Without them, our scholarship is incomplete, or even incorrect."<sup>21</sup> She cites Lee Levine as an example of a scholar who discusses *Women*

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Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000 [German original, 1996] iii, and *passim*; Aisha Geissinger, "Portrayal of the *ḥajj* as a Context for Women's Exegesis: Textual Evidence in al-Bukhārī's (d. 870) '*al-Sāḥih*,'" in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 168, 153-177. For further references to early reviews and discussions of the book, see Brooten, "Female Leadership," 64.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Tal Ilan, "Inscriptions," 157-159; and Carol Meyers, "Review: *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 46 (1982) 542-543.

<sup>19</sup> See below, 73-74. Peter Richardson and Valerie Heuchan, "Jewish Voluntary Associations in Egypt and the Roles of Women," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (New York: Routledge, 1996) 226-39, 226-51. They base themselves on: Exod 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22; Targum to Judges 5:24 (all on women performing Israelite cultic functions); *t. Menahot* 11.II.1 (on the Onias Temple's [=Leontopolis Temple] high priest wearing women's clothing, which may be a spoof on priestesses in that temple wearing women's clothing), and on the more egalitarian gender relations in Egypt and the presence of cultic priestesses, which raises the possibility of assimilation.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Judith Romney Wegner, "Review: *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*," *The Journal of Religion* 68 (1988) 327-329; and A. T. Kraabel, "Review: *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984) 341-342.

<sup>21</sup> Sara Parks, "'The Brooten Phenomenon': Moving Women from the Margins in Second-Temple and New Testament Scholarship," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 15 (2019) 60, 46-64.

Leaders, but then does not incorporate my research in the rest of his work.<sup>22</sup>

Levine, who holds that synagogue titles held by men denoted leadership positions, concludes: (1) that women attended synagogue service, on the basis of ancient sources for their having done so; (2) that they most likely sat together with men because no ancient source states otherwise; (3) that they may or may not have had a liturgical function--a Toseftan passage on women reading from the Torah is difficult to interpret; (4) that they donated to synagogues, to which inscriptions attest; and (5) that they may have participated in synagogue leadership, although I "did not succeed in providing convincing proof that such official positions were indeed open to women."<sup>23</sup>

Levine is epistemologically quite self-aware, except for the last point. Proving anything for the ancient world is exceedingly rare and an unreasonable expectation. To his credit, Levine does not argue that female title bearers obtained their titles from their husbands, nor does he simply claim that the female titles were honorific, but rather looks especially to the surrounding cultures for evidence of female religious and civic roles, observing as I also did that these cultures and the Jewish titles used in them varied greatly from region to region. Levine observes the concentration of parallel evidence for women in the religions of Asia Minor, including Christianity, on which basis he argues that Jewish communities there may have, in part, adapted to their surroundings in that region.

Ultimately, however, Levine seems to believe that, in his separate chapters on "Leadership" and "Priests," he has demonstrated what specific male officeholders did and what role male priests likely had in the synagogue. He is judicious in those chapters, weighing evidence and arguing for his construal of it, but he does not and cannot prove his interpretations, for we cannot know with certainty what any synagogue officer of any gender did. If female title bearers were incorporated into the chapter on "Leadership" and female priests/women of priestly class into the "Priests" chapter, then the reader would recognize that, while scholars cannot prove anything, they can thoughtfully argue that

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<sup>22</sup> Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2000) 482-483, *inter alia*.

<sup>23</sup> Levine, *Synagogue*, 482.

female title bearers may well have participated in decision making and carried out other leadership functions.<sup>24</sup>

Ross Shepard Kraemer, who agrees that female title bearers had functions, although she questions the distinction between honorific and functional, argues that I and others have insufficiently theorized leadership.<sup>25</sup> Decision making is central to my understanding of leadership, which would include working with others, such as one's family in this highly family-based society, in arriving at decisions. A larger question, however, deserves robust discussion among researchers, namely whether administrative decisions about a synagogue complex, decisions about the liturgy, or decisions about Jewish legal matters, among other types of decisions that a synagogue official might make, are the most important indicator of leadership. Some commentators cited here seem at pains to establish that whatever functions female title bearers carried out, they did not carry out the most important ones.<sup>26</sup>

Kraemer further argues that I did not recognize the extent to which these inscriptions come largely from the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries and that I did not account sufficiently for regional differences.<sup>27</sup> I noted the geographic specificity of inscriptions with specific titles applied to women: the inscriptions for three female heads of the synagogue are from Asia Minor, and one is from Crete; and the inscriptions for female elders cluster in Venosa (Venusia), Southern Italy. I would love to know more about the Jewish communities in each region and how specific histories relate to the specific women, but no one has yet found the sources to answer that question. Subsequent to 1982, scholars have attempted to date these inscriptions more accurately, yielding later dates for some, although the dating of ancient inscriptions is rarely certain. Kraemer, who is currently completing a book on Diaspora Jews in late antiquity, points out the precarious situation

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<sup>24</sup> Levine, *Synagogue*, "Leadership," 387-428; "Women," 482, 471-490; "Priests," 491-500.

<sup>25</sup> Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 237.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., Walter Ameling, *IJO* II 1, pp. 39-40.

<sup>27</sup> Ross Shepard Kraemer, "Jewish Women Synagogue Officers in the Ancient Mediterranean: Some Further Considerations" (Unpublished Manuscript). I thank Kraemer for generously making this manuscript available to me. See also Kraemer's judicious analysis of then recent studies on synagogue officeholders in *Witnesses*, 232-246.

of Jewish communities under the Christian Roman Empire, especially as Christian Roman law increasingly removed previously held rights and placed legal disadvantages on Jews. Kraemer plausibly suggests that women sometimes take on roles usually filled by men in situations of great stress to a specific community and that we should, in any case, look at fourth and fifth century diasporic Jewish life circumstance of distress when interpreting inscriptions from that time period.

*Women Leaders* and my three follow-up articles have also elicited other critiques. Everyone agrees that women donated to synagogues, and a few see donation as their main synagogue function and as the main cause of their titles. Tessa Rajak writes of my books and articles, "Brootten vastly overestimates the amount of administrative activity that would have surrounded an ancient institution, and her picture of dedicated female rabbis of progressive persuasion concerned with everything from liturgy to repairs, introduces an anachronistic note."<sup>28</sup> I, however, have not presented Jewish female officeholders as progressive, nor as rabbis, and Rajak does not cite any page to back up her claim. As for the activities of synagogue officials, I propose only what ancient sources mention.

Tessa Rajak and David Noy argue that both male and female heads of the synagogue participated in the patronage system in which communities honored donors with honorific titles.<sup>29</sup> Prior to publication of *Women Leaders*, most scholars held that both "father of the synagogue" and "mother of the synagogue" were honorific titles. Samuel Krauss wrote: "A genuine office could not have been associated with the distinction [of father/mother of the synagogue] for the simple reason that it was also bestowed upon women."<sup>30</sup>

The presence of female heads of the synagogue has long influenced whether or not scholars view such persons as having authority, contributing to the liturgy and/or teaching, or as bearers of an honorific title. Most scholars who

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<sup>28</sup> Tessa Rajak, "The Jewish Community and Its Boundaries," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (Routledge: London, 1992) 23, 9-28.

<sup>29</sup> Tessa Rajak and David Noy, "Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993) 87-88, 75-93

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer* (Berlin: Benjamin Harz, 1922) 166. See below 64.

do not see the female heads of synagogue as carrying out any functions argue that:

1. The titles of men signify a function, but the women's do not; or
2. The titles of both female and male heads of synagogue are honorific and signify neither administrative, nor liturgical or teaching functions.

The inscriptions in which women bear a different title than their husband and the absence of husbands in most of the inscriptions have apparently persuaded nearly all interpreters; today almost no one argues that women bore their titles because their husbands did. The honorific interpretation has nevertheless become a default position among some scholars, understood to be proven and evidence-based, in contrast to viewing the titles as including functions. "That these women used their wealth to adorn the synagogue is clear, but that their titles (and these include *hierisa*), were anything other than honorific has yet to be proved," writes Margaret Williamson.<sup>31</sup> James Burtchaell writes that seeing Jewish women as functioning officers goes against mishnaic culture, not recognizing that that these largely Diasporan female title bearers were not under rabbinic control.<sup>32</sup> William Horbury argues that all titles were honors given to men and women for their benefactions and that they designated "governmental, rather than liturgical" functions, but that women were unlikely to have participated in the decision making of a synagogue council.<sup>33</sup> His assessment that synagogues in this period probably separated women from men correlates with his views on women's lack of decision-making capacity. Walter Ameling holds that female heads of the synagogue are "less upsetting than often thought," because

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<sup>31</sup> Margaret Williams, "The Contribution of Jewish Inscriptions to the Study of Judaism," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 3 *The Early Roman Period*, ed. William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 79–80, 75–93.

<sup>32</sup> James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 245, 244–246, argues that the feminine titles of office refer to women whose husband's title bestows dignity upon them. Burtchaell notes the occurrence of *episcop[i]a* as the wife of an *episcopus* in Canon 14 of the Council of Tours (567). Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 200, however, observes that Burtchaell, 316–318, erroneously refers to the wife of a bishop being called an *episcopa* in Gregory of Tours, noting that the Council of Tours provides the single known Latin example of this usage.

<sup>33</sup> William Horbury, "Women in the Synagogue," 399, 358–401.

male and female heads of the synagogue had no liturgical functions and did not need to be learned, but were rather often wealthy people who donated to and worked to improve the organization.<sup>34</sup> Tessa Rajak and David Noy argue that "head of the synagogue" was mainly an honorific title for all holders.<sup>35</sup> They view the non-Jewish literary sources indicating functions of heads of synagogues as not useful owing to their biases or lack of knowledge of the internal workings of the synagogue.<sup>36</sup> Taking as the only admissible evidence inscriptions concerning Roman civic office and heads of the synagogue, which rarely mention functions, contributes to the thesis that "head of the synagogue" was an honorific title.<sup>37</sup>

Those above who see all the titles as honorific and mainly deriving from beneficence need to explain who led in the absence of functioning synagogue officers. Should we imagine that an entire congregation jointly organized each liturgy; read from the scriptures with no one to call them forth; as a group decided how to renovate their synagogue; and as a leaderless group raised funding, taught the members, gave advice or judgment on Jewish legal matters, decided on which biblical translation to use and acquired it, etc.? We have no evidence that Jewish communities throughout the ancient Mediterranean were leaderless communities. To be sure, however, many congregations may well have been small and less in need of official roles and designated leaders.

Beyond this, the relationship between benefaction and synagogue titles is far from clear. Among the inscrip-

<sup>34</sup> IJO II 1, pp. 39-40: "weniger aufregend als oft gedacht" (40).

<sup>35</sup> Tessa Rajak and David Noy, "Archisynagogoi," 75-93.

<sup>36</sup> Rajak and Noy, "Archisynagogoi," 78-81. Today, in line with Levine, I would account more for Christian biases in these sources than I do below, 27-33.

<sup>37</sup> See also Carrie Elaine Duncan, "The Rhetoric of Participation: Gender and Representation in Ancient Synagogues" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2012); see also Carrie Duncan, "Inscribing Authority: Female Title Bearers in Jewish Inscriptions," *Religions* 3 (2012) 37-49. Duncan argues that one cannot know anything about what female title bearers did, if they had any functions at all, but rather only that they were benefactors to the Jewish community whose titles related to their benefactions. Duncan claims that my and others' understanding of female officeholders includes their exertion of power through control, which is based on a "modern, andro-normative understanding of power as control" ("Rhetoric," 214) but she has not identified a specific example of this in this book or in my articles. Duncan helpfully stresses that women worked within their family structures, which is surely true, although we actually know very little about the female office holders' families.

tions discussed above and below, just two are donative.<sup>38</sup> Why would one assume that all of the remaining twenty-two or -three women are donors? I state below that some of the female office holders may also have been donors and that wealth can accompany access to offices.<sup>39</sup> The appendix below of female donors who bear no titles and who far outnumber female office holders demonstrates, however, the problem in assuming an inextricable link between donations and female titles.<sup>40</sup> The synagogue of Apamea, with its nineteen donative inscriptions, of which nine are by women and others by women together with one or more family members can illustrate this. None of these female donors bear titles.

Deciding which are the best comparable materials for synagogue titles is complicated. The decision determines one's interpretation. Rajak and Noy give priority to Greek honorific titles and not to, for example, contemporaneous titles of church leadership.<sup>41</sup> Riet van Bremen's research on the limits of female participation in Roman civic and religious life has provided needed caution, even as some scholars use her work to argue that Jewish women had no functions at all.<sup>42</sup> Whether to compare synagogue titles with civic titles, those of volunteer associations, those of church leadership, or something else depends on one's assessment as to whether synagogues mainly represent the Jewish community vis-à-vis Roman society, are mainly volunteer associations, or are mainly for religious worship. I see elements of all of these and therefore choose to compare on more than one axis. Riet van Bremen and Rajak and Noy have shown limits and demonstrated the functions of beneficence, and I do not posit an egalitarian form of Judaism in the Roman period. One example can, however, suffice to show the value of Christian inscriptions of female presbyters, bishops, etc., and debates over the leadership of women. In 494, Pope Gelasius complains of a Christian practice in southern Italy and Sicily of women taking on ritual roles, serving as presby-

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<sup>38</sup> IJO II 14, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Pp. 141-44.

<sup>40</sup> Pp. 157-65.

<sup>41</sup> Rajak and Noy, "Archisynagogoi," 84-86.

<sup>42</sup> Riet van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1996). Carrie Duncan presents the civic titles as interpreted by van Bremen as a comparison more plausible than the titles "bishop," "elder," etc. as analyzed by Eisen. (Duncan, "Representations," 259-263).

ters at the "sacred altars."<sup>43</sup> Eisen presents two inscriptions commemorating female Christian presbyters in southern Italy and Sicily in the fourth-fifth centuries.<sup>44</sup> In Venosa in southern Italy from just this time, three female elders, a Jewish "fatheress" and a "mother" are commemorated in inscriptions.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps Christian and Jewish communities in this region in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> C. encouraged and recognized women through titles associated with service to the church and the synagogue respectively, maybe even influencing each other.

The genres of sources declared relevant also heavily determines one's interpretation. As Levine correctly notes, restricting oneself to epigraphic materials, as do Rajak and Noy, can result in viewing the title "head of the synagogue" as based on benefaction and honorific.<sup>46</sup> In this book, I draw upon the full range of sources.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the historiographical question: Why has the contention that all titles were mainly honorific arisen following publication of this book. Is it, in part, a response to my interpretation? Previously, scholars decided that fathers of the synagogue, in the presence of mothers of the synagogue, bore their title as an honorific. Given that it has become largely untenable to hold that women acquired

<sup>43</sup> Gelasius I, *Epistle* 14.26: *Nihilomus impatienter audivimus, tantum divinarum rerum subisse despectum, ut feminae sacris altaribus ministrare fermenter, cunctaque non nisi virorum famulatu deputata sexum, cui non competun, exhibere.* "Nevertheless, we have heard to our annoyance that divine affairs have come to such a low state that women are encouraged to officiate at the sacred altars, and to take part in all matters imputed to the offices of the male sex, to which they do not belong." (Latin: *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum genuinae*, ed. Andrea Thiel, vol. 1 [Braunsberg/ Braniewo, Poland: Hildesheim, 1867-1868; reprint: New York: Olms, 1974] 376-377; English: Mary Ann Rossi, "Priesthood, Precedent, and Prejudice: On Recovering the Women Priests of Early Christianity: Containing a Translation from the Italian of 'Notes on the Female Priesthood in Antiquity,' by Giorgio Otranto," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 [1991] 81).

<sup>44</sup> Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, transl. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000; German original: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 128-131: Sicilian grave inscription for presbyter Kale (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> C.; *L'Année Epigraphique* 1975, no. 454); and Calabrian grave inscription for presbyter Leta (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> C.; CIL X 8079).

<sup>45</sup> JIWE I 59; CIL IX 6226 (perhaps 5<sup>th</sup> C.; see below, pp. 42-43); JIWE 62; CIL IX 6230 (perhaps 5<sup>th</sup> C.; see below, p. 43);

<sup>46</sup> Levine, *Synagogue*, 390-402; Rajak and Noy, "Archisynagogoi," 75-93.

<sup>47</sup> Today, however, I would add discussion of "head of the synagogue" as a non-Jewish title and would also take account of Roman civic and religious titles in the same regions as the Jewish titles. On the former, see the review in G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 4 (Macquarie University: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1987) 219-220, 214-220.



their titles from their husbands, might the presence of female title bearers have motivated, at least in part, some scholars to declare all titles honorific?

In closing, if I were to write this book today, I would more thoroughly historicize by interweaving discussion of an institution widespread within the Roman Empire and often necessary for obtaining the resources for benefaction, namely slavery. Women in the Roman Empire could hold property, including human property, in their own names. The very first inscription that I discuss below was commissioned by Rufina, a slave-holder, but I did no more than mention that fact.<sup>48</sup> An analysis of female donors as potential slave-holders would have further located these women within the contexts of their economies and their surrounding cultures. Slaveholding reminds us yet again how different were ancient synagogues from contemporary ones and demonstrates the value of thoroughly understanding the world in which they existed.

Concordance of *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* (used for principal inscriptions discussed in this volume) with Newer Editions

## Abbreviations:

- CII     *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*. Ed. Jean-Baptiste Frey, 2 vols. Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1936-1952; reprint of vol. 1 with a Prolegomenon by Baruch Lifshitz, New York: Ktav, 1975.
- CIJG     *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Graeciae*. Ed. Zanet Battinou. Athens: The Jewish Museum of Greece, 2018.
- CII/P   *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palestinae*. Ed. Hannah M. Cotton, et al., Vol. I, Part 1. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010.
- IJO     *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*. Ed. David Noy, Alexander Panayotov, and Hanswell Bloedhorn, vol. 1; Walter Ameling, vol. 2; David Noy and Hanswulf Bloedhorn, vol. 3. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 99, 101, 102; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

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<sup>48</sup> IJO II 43; CII 741. See below, 5-12. Ross S. Kraemer argues that the tomb was not for Rufina's enslaved laborers raised in her household and for her freedpeople, but instead those of others, perhaps other members of her synagogue. (Ross S. Kraemer, "Rufina Refined: A Woman *archisynagōgos* from Smyrna Yet Again," in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch* [Brown Judaic Studies 357; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015] 287-299. Kraemer observes that the "her" usually assumed in l. 4 is in fact missing. Kraemer does not, however, argue that Rufina was not a slave-holder.

Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue

JIGRE *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*. Ed. William Horbury and David Noy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

JIWE *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*. Ed. David Noy, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993-1995.

CII 315	JIWE II 11
CII 400	JIWE II 24
CII 496	JIWE II 542
CII 523	JIWE II 577
CII 606	JIWE I 63
CII 619d	JIWE I 116
CII 639	JIWE I 5
CII 731c	IJO I Cre 3
CII 741	IJO II 43
CII 756	IJO II 25
CII 696b	IJO I Ach 18
CII 581	JIWE I 59
CII 590	JIWE I 62
CII 597	JIWE I 71
CII 606	JIWE I 63
CII 692	IJO I Thr 3
CII 1514	JIGRE 84

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