

Chapter Four

JEWISH WOMEN IN THE GRECO-ROMAN ERA

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Fiorenza's¹ comment a decade ago that "historical darkness" obscures our vision of the roles and status of Jewish women in the Greco-Roman world remains true today. Although intense recent interest in the subject has led to the recovery and analysis of much new data (both archaeological and literary), the application of insightful new methods (especially from the social sciences), and a proliferation of published studies, the available information has yet to be synthesized fully. "Writing the history of Jewish women in the Roman period," Brooten correctly insists, "is an urgent task for Christian theology."²

Obstacles to this "urgent task" are enormous. Reference to four such barriers at the outset will serve to clarify the methodological parameters of the present study. First, progress has been impeded by the persistent tendency to give primary, or even exclusive, attention to the rabbinic sources as representative of early Jewish thought and practice. Although popularized in such monolithic reconstructions of early Judaism as Moore's "normative Judaism,"³ and in

¹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1983): 108-110.

²Bernadette J. Brooten, "Jewish Women's History in the Roman Period: A Task for Christian Theology," *HTR* 79 (1986): 22.

³G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927-30): *passim*. See Jacob Neusner, "'Judaism' After Moore: A Programmatic Statement," *JJS* 31 (1980): 141-56.

countless studies of individual topics, including women's roles,⁴ this approach founders on the extreme pluralism now known to have characterized Judaism around the turn of the eras. Rabbinic efforts after AD 70 to standardize Jewish thought and practice were only partially successful, and even this limited standardization must not be read back into the pre-70 period. Neither the rabbinic literature nor any other single body of data should be considered "representative" or "normal." Not only must the rabbinic materials be sifted critically to distinguish late traditions from those early enough to elucidate Christian origins,⁵ but it is necessary to take fully into account such diverse literary sources as the OT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the works of Philo and Josephus, and the Qumran scrolls. The fact that subsequent Jewish tradition did not accord the same authoritative status to these non-rabbinic materials as to the Mishnah and Talmud does not alter the historian's obligation to incorporate them fully into the discussion. Most of these works, in fact, date much closer to the period of our interest than do the rabbinic sources, and some reflect images of women radically different from rabbinic stereotypes.

Second, literary works, by their very nature, present formidable barriers to historical reconstruction. The interpreter must perceive and decode subtle gender symbols as well as analyze explicit references to women. Extrapolating social reality from literary texts is complicated even in cases of detailed portrayals of women. One must ask whether a given portrayal of women is descriptive or prescriptive; that is, did the author mean to describe things as they actually

⁴Ben Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990): 3-9, is only one example.

⁵The earliest rabbinic materials date from around AD 200 in their written form. This fact alone demonstrates the need for caution in using rabbinic literature in the study of Christian origins. See Jacob Neusner, "The History of Earlier Rabbinic Judaism: Some New Approaches," *History of Religions* 16 (1977): 216-36; and "The Use of Rabbinic Sources for the Study of Ancient Judaism," *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* (ed. W. S. Green; BJS 11; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981): 1-17.

were, or things as he (she?) wanted them to be?⁶ The possibility that some Jewish portrayals of women were shaped more by Greco-Roman literary conventions and social patterns than by the social realities of Jewish life must also be considered. Even if social realities can be legitimately extrapolated from literary portrayals, one must not generalize across social classes, geographical boundaries, and cultural settings. Reconstruction of women's roles from scattered literary representations is therefore hazardous.

Third, insufficient attention has been given to extensive non-literary data, primarily inscriptions and papyrus documents.⁷ These diffuse records are often difficult to interpret. Even such basic matters as dating the materials, distinguishing Jewish from non-Jewish ones, and distinguishing male from female names are problematic. Nevertheless, non-literary records lack the tendentiousness which characterizes literature and which so complicates historical reconstruction. They provide unbiased testimony to the way things actually were. Moreover, the non-literary evidence for Jewish women's lives constitutes a surprisingly large body of evidence, the potential of which for supplementing or even correcting literary representations is considerable.

Fourth, political, religious, and social agendas too often have dictated the outcome of scholarly investigation of women's status and roles in antiquity. Some have been

⁶The feminine pronoun is supplied here to suggest the possibility of female authorship of at least some of the literature. See on this Ross S. Kraemer, "Women's Authorship of Jewish and Christian Literature in the Greco-Roman Period," *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (A.-J. Levine, ed.; Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Studies in Early Jewish Literature, 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991): 221-43; and in the same volume, Mary Lefkowitz, "Did Ancient Women Write Novels?" 199-220. Unknown authors of early Jewish literature are hereafter referred to with masculine pronouns, but only to avoid cumbersome forms such as "he/she" and "his/her." This accommodation to grammatical convention implies neither a decision about authorship nor a sexist bias.

⁷See Ross S. Kramer, "Non-Literary Evidence for Jewish Women in Rome and Egypt," *Helios* 13 (1986): 85.

predisposed to give one-sided emphasis to the misogyny of ancient cultures, while others have exaggerated the extent to which women occupied favorable or even dominant positions in antiquity. For our purposes, it is especially important to note that Christian scholars have contributed often to distorted portrayals of Jewish women in an effort to present early Christian attitudes toward women in a more favorable light. Thus, to exalt Jesus as the great liberator of women from a repressive patriarchal system, many have exaggerated the repression of women in the world of Jesus.⁸ Similarly, to mitigate Paul's apparent male chauvinism, or to set his apparent egalitarian ideal in sharper contrast, Christian theologians have delighted in pointing to the more pronounced chauvinism of Paul's Jewish contemporaries while ignoring Jewish evidence for more progressive roles for women.⁹ Until such agendas are set aside, progress toward reconstructing the place of women in early Judaism will be seriously impaired. Jewish sources need to be examined on their own terms rather than selectively cited to provide contrasting background against which to present appealing images of early Christianity.¹⁰

In view of the extensive and diverse data and the methodological complexity of reconstructing social reality

⁸E.g., Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (SNTSMS, 51; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984); *idem*, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (SNTSMS, 59; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988); and *idem*, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*.

⁹E.g., Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *JAAR* 40 (1972): 283-303; *idem*, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman: Revisited," *JAAR* 42 (1974): 532-37; and Robert Jewett, "The Sexual Liberation of the Apostle Paul," *JAAR* (Suppl. Vol.) 47 (1979): 55-87.

¹⁰On the tendency of Christian feminists to project onto Judaism what they cannot bear to acknowledge in their own heritage, see further Judith Plaskow, "Christian Feminism and Anti-Judaism," *Cross Currents* 28 (1978): 306-09; *idem*, "Blaming the Jews for the Invention of Patriarchy," *Lilith* 7 (1980): 11-12; Bernadette Brooten, "Jüdinnen zur Zeit Jesu: Ein Plädoyer für Differenzierung," *TQ* 161 (1981): 281-85; Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 107-07; and Susannah Heschel, "Anti-Judaism in Christian Feminist Theology," *Tikkun* 5 (1990): 25-28.

from the data, this essay will simply illustrate the broad range of attitudes toward and roles of Jewish women in the Greco-Roman period. By no means does this approach yield a comprehensive picture of Jewish women's lives in antiquity, but perhaps it sheds some light on the broad contours of such a picture.

1. *Literary Images: The Patriarchal Model*

Modern caricatures typically present ancient Jewish women as repressed, denigrated, and relegated to inferior status and exclusively domestic roles in a male-dominated world. Although this caricature is exaggerated (as will be shown below), it is not without considerable support from early Jewish literature. Texts illustrating such denigration of women and their limited status and function abound.

Most notorious is *Ecclesiasticus*, also known as the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach*, an apocryphal book of wisdom from the early second century BC. Ben Sirach has such a negative estimate of women that he values a man's wickedness over a woman's goodness (42:14). Indeed, he considers woman to be the cause of all evil: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her all will die" (25:24).¹¹ Though well aware of the blessing of a good wife, this author seems rather obsessed with the curse of a bad one:

Any wickedness, but not the wickedness of a wife!

.....
I would rather dwell with a lion and a dragon
than dwell with an evil wife.
.....

¹¹The chauvinism of this distich is even more pronounced if, as John R. Levison, "Is Eve to Blame? A Contextual Analysis of Sirach 25: 24," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 617-23, argues, "woman" here refers not to Eve but to the evil wife. On this interpretation, the sinfulness of men is directly attributable to the evil influence of their wives. Unless otherwise noted, quotations of the Apocrypha are from the RSV.

Any iniquity is insignificant compared to a wife's
iniquity; may a sinner's lot befall her!
A sandy ascent for the feet of the aged--
such is a garrulous wife for a quiet husband.

.....
A dejected mind, a gloomy face, and a wounded heart
are caused by an evil wife.
Drooping hands and weak knees are caused by the wife
who does not make her husband happy.

.....
An evil wife is an ox yoke which chafes;
taking hold of her is like taking hold of a scorpion.
(25:13, 16, 19-20, 23, 26:7).

Not even the passages in which ben Sirach extolls the "good wife" (7:19; 25:8; 26:1-4, 13-18, 26; 36:22-26; 40:23) reflect a positive estimate of woman as woman. The "good wife" functions exclusively within the domestic sphere (see esp. 25:22), and she is not valued in her own right, but in terms of the benefits she brings to her husband (26:1-4). Moreover, she must be held in constant check because she has the potential at any moment to ruin her husband's financial security and honor.¹² A wife who cannot be controlled must be divorced (25:26). Not surprisingly, among the most desirable traits in a wife are submissiveness, silence, and modesty (26:13-16; 36:22-24).

If ben Sirach's misogyny is not mitigated by his praise of the good wife, neither is it vitiated by the female imagery he uses for personified Wisdom. His placement of Lady

¹²Claudia V. Camp, "Understanding a Patriarchy: Women in Second Century Jerusalem Through the Eyes of Ben Sira," *Women Like This*, 1-39, has shown that ben Sirach reflects the well-known Mediterranean "shame/honor" complex in which maintaining male honor and status was considered the highest good. Because women rank high on ben Sirach's list of forces which threaten that honor and status, various groups of women receive considerable attention in this book, and control over each of them is considered crucial. Note the language of "control" in the discussion of loose women, singing girls, virgins, prostitutes, attractive women, daughters, married women, and women generally (9:1-9; 25:21-26; 26:7-12; 33:19-23; 42:9-14; 47:19-21).

Wisdom on a pedestal stands in marked contrast to his attitude toward women in the flesh, and may even be a means of repressing women through negative comparison.¹³

Because ben Sirach considers all females lustful and sexually indiscriminate (26:10-12), daughters—even more so than wives—represent a threat to a man's ability to control his household and hence maintain his honor. While the undisciplined son is a disgrace to the father, the mere "birth of a daughter is a loss" (22:3). A man who educates his son brings honor to himself (30:3), but in the case of a daughter all a father can hope for is to avoid being publicly shamed by her promiscuity before marriage, her failure to marry in her youth, or her unfaithfulness or barrenness after she is married (42:9-11). Fathers should keep their unmarried daughters secluded, not even allowing them to converse with married women (42:12).¹⁴ The numerous warnings about prostitutes, the promiscuity of daughters, and the unfaithfulness of wives focus not on the evil deeds themselves or their effect on the woman involved, but on their impact on the honor and status of the male. In the patriarchal world view of ben Sirach, a woman had no autonomous status or function and was not valued in her own right; rather, at every stage of life her existence was determined by her relationship to a man.¹⁵

¹³Claudia V. Camp, "The Female Sage in Ancient Israel and in the Biblical Wisdom Literature," *The Sage in Ancient Israel* (ed. J. Gammie and L. Perdue; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990): 199.

¹⁴This advice appears in P. W. Skehan's translation in P. W. Skehan and A. A. DiLella, *The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira* (AB, 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987): 478-83. In the RSV it is the wise man who is advised to avoid the company of women. In either case, the reason given in v. 13 is that wickedness comes from women as moths come from garments.

¹⁵See also Kenneth E. Bailey, "Women in Ben Sirach and in the New Testament," *For Me To Live: Essays in Honor of James Leon Kelso* (ed. R. A. Coughenour; Cleveland: Dillon/Liederbach, 1972): 56-73; Henry McKeating, "Jesus ben Sira's Attitude to Women," *ExpTim* 85 (1973): 85-87; Maurice Gilbert, "Ben Sira et la femme," *RTL* 7 (1976): 426-42; and W. C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View of Women: A Literary Analysis* (BJS 38; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

Ben Sirach's attitude toward women is expressed with unusual frequency and poignancy, but it does not differ in kind from that expressed in numerous other early Jewish works. According to the *Letter of Aristeas*, a pseudepigraphon probably dating from the late second century BC, "the female sex is bold, positively active for something which it desires, easily liable to change its mind because of poor reasoning powers, and of naturally weak constitution" (248).¹⁶ Of kindred spirit is the sentiment expressed in the *Testament of Reuben*:¹⁷

For women are evil, my children, and by reason of their lacking authority or power over man, they scheme treacherously how they might entice him to themselves by means of their looks. . . . women are more easily overcome by the spirit of promiscuity than are men. . . . Accordingly, my children, flee from sexual promiscuity, and order your wives and your daughters not to adorn their heads and their appearances so as to deceive men's sound minds (5:1-5).

Here, as in *Ecclesiasticus* and numerous other ancient sources dealing with sexual misconduct, women are presented as the lustful ones, and men as the innocent ones seduced by them.¹⁸

In other texts, it is the naiveté of women rather than their sexual aggressiveness which brings men down. In the

¹⁶Quotations of the so-called Pseudepigrapha are from James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983-85): 2 vols.

¹⁷The larger work of which the *T. Reub.* is a part, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, is of uncertain date and has Christian as well as Jewish components. These testaments probably reached a form recognizably similar to their present form by 100 BC, though there were later reworkings and interpolations by both Jews and Christians.

¹⁸The pseudonymous author of *T. Reub.* reinforces this point in 5:6 by blaming women for the illicit and disastrous union of sons of God and daughters of men narrated in Gen. 6:1-4.

Testament of Job, an embellishment of the biblical story of Job which probably dates to the first century AD, women function as foils to highlight Job's superior insight into heavenly reality.¹⁹ Although men as well as women serve as foils for Job, this work suggests that women—precisely because they are women—are so spiritually imperceptive that they become easy prey for Satan and lead men astray as well.²⁰ Thus, in 26:6, Job's wife is described as "one of the senseless women who misguide their husband's sincerity."

If the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach* is less than explicit about Eve's role in bringing sin and death into the world, no such ambiguity exists in the *Life of Adam and Eve*. In this first century AD interpretive expansion of Gen. 1-4, responsibility for sin in the world is consistently placed on Eve rather than Adam. Thus, Adam claims that he and the angels prevented Eve from being deceived at first and that only in their absence was Satan able to take advantage of the unguarded female and persuade her to sin (32-33; and the parallel account in another recension of the same book, misnamed *Apocalypse of Moses* 7:1-2). Elsewhere in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, Adam says to Eve: "What have you done? You have brought upon us a great wound, transgression and sin in all our generations" (44:2; see also *Apoc. Mos.* 14:2; 26:1). In *Apoc. Mos.* 32:1-2, Eve herself is depicted as acknowledging full responsibility for the human situation. Nine times in her short prayer of confession she admits, "I have sinned," and her prayer always ends with "all sin has come about through me."²¹ Although it is impossible to

¹⁹See John J. Collins, "Structure and Meaning in the Testament of Job," *SBLSP 1974* (ed. G. MacRae; Cambridge, MA: SBL, 1974): 40.

²⁰This observation applies only to *T. Job* 1-45. In chapters 46-53, as will be shown below, a much more positive estimate of women's spiritual capacities appears.

²¹See also *Life of Adam and Eve* 3:1; 5:2; 18:1, 35, 37, and *Apoc. Mos.* 9:12 and 10:12, where Eve accepts full blame for the human predicament. In *Life of Adam and Eve* 38 and *Apoc. Mos.* 11:1-3, the beast who attacks Seth also reminds Eve that the blame for sin and its consequences rests squarely on her. The view that *Apoc. Mos.*

reconstruct the actual status of women from this theological use of traditions about the first woman, there is little doubt that the portrait of Eve as one constantly weeping, ignorant, perplexed, vulnerable to sin, and dependent upon the males around her for insight bears some relation to the way women were actually perceived and treated in the authors' and redactors' own times and places.²²

Philo of Alexandria has little to say about individual women in real life—so little, in fact, that it is unclear from his writings whether he was married. Nevertheless, his elaboration of the relationship between gender and the characteristics of the soul, together with his frequent insistence on female inferiority (often in quite gratuitous insults), clearly place his assessment of women among the most deprecatory that we have seen thus far. For Philo the soul's rational quality (*νοῦς*, mind or intellect) is masculine, while its irrational quality (*αἴσθησις*, sense-perception) is feminine. The rational part of the soul is the superior and immortal part, made in the image of God. Woman, who was fashioned from the inferior mortal aspect, has no part in the soul's rational quality, but only its irrational quality.²³ In explaining the Genesis account of the fall, Philo, like others we have seen, cites woman's intellectual inferiority and vulnerability to sin:

. . . woman is more accustomed to be deceived than man. For his judgment, like his body, is masculine and is capable of dissolving or destroying the

15-30 exculpates Eve and originated independently from the rest of the work is discussed below. Also blaming Eve for the origin of evil is II Enoch, the original of which probably dates prior to AD 70. See II Enoch 30:18; 31:6.

²²It is significant in this connection that Eve is not the only one who calls Adam "Lord." In *Life of Adam and Eve* 2:1, the narrator refers to Adam as "her [Eve's] Lord."

²³*On the Creation* 21-29, 46, 59; *The Worse Attacks the Better* 23; *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.11, 14; *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.37; and see further Richard A. Baer, Jr., *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

designs of deception; but the judgment of woman is more feminine, and because of softness she gives way and is taken in by plausible falsehoods which resemble the truth (*Questions and Answers on Gen.* 1.33; see also 1:37 and *On the Creation* 59).²⁴

Woman is thus responsible for the origin of sin, while man, who was the first to repent, initiated the atonement (*Questions and Answers on Gen.* 1.43).

Numerous contrived excuses to depreciate women appear in Philo's exegetical writings. Thus, he explains the biblical prescription of a male animal for the paschal sacrifice as follows:

... the male is more perfect than the female. ... the female is nothing else than an imperfect male. ... progress is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal, and sense perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought (*Questions and Answers on Exodus* 1.7-8).

Another example is Philo's ingenious explanation why Zelophehad (Num. 27:1-11) had produced only daughters and no sons:

Do you not notice, that the five daughters of Zelophehad, whom we take to be a figure of the senses ... are of the tribe of Manasseh, ... for his name means "from forgetfulness" ... "and he had no sons" (Numb. 27:3) but only daughters, for whereas the faculty of memory, being naturally wide awake, has male progeny, forgetfulness, wrapt in a slumber of reasoning power, has female offspring; for it is irrational, and the senses are daughters of the

²⁴Quotations of Philo are from F. H. Colson et al, *Philo* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1929-53): 12 vols.

irrational portion of the soul (*On the Migration of Abraham* 37).

Philo rarely comments on the legal and social status of women, but he does make clear that "wives must be in servitude to their husbands, a servitude not imposed by violent ill-treatment but promoting obedience in all things" (*Hypothetica* 7.3), and that women are best kept secluded:

The woman is best suited for the indoor life which never strays from the house. . . . A woman, then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion (*On the Special Laws* 3.31).

His assumption that a marriageable girl is virtually the property of her father (*On the Special Laws* 3.11) and the metaphors he uses for intercourse and childbearing (*On the Special Laws* 3.6) indicate that he perceived women more as chattel than as persons.²⁵

Although Josephus expresses the highest admiration for the matriarchs of Israel and for certain prominent women in his own time, his motives for this are transparent,²⁶ and when his true colors come out he clearly shares the condescending attitudes toward women that we have seen in other

²⁵See further Judith R. Wegner, "The Image of Woman in Philo," *SBLSP* 1982 (ed. K. Richards; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 551-63; and *idem*, "Philo's Portrayal of Woman—Hebraic or Hellenic?" *Women Like This*, 41-66.

²⁶The hellenized and idealized portraits of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah are clearly designed to win Roman admiration for these heroines of Israel and thus for the Jewish people. See James L. Bailey, "Josephus' Portrayal of the Matriarchs," *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (ed. L. Feldman and G. Hata; Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1987): 154-79. With regard to Josephus' favors from and favorable comments about royal women such as Poppaea, the consort and later the wife of Nero, and Domitia, the wife of Domitian, Bailey notes that "although he was part of a male dominated society, Josephus understood the advantage of knowing women who had access to powerful men" (156).

sources. Thus, in *Antiquities* 4.8.15 he writes: "From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex."²⁷ In *Against Apion* 24 he grounds the inferiority of women in Scripture: "The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for the authority has been given by God to the man." Such a view of women is implicit even amid Josephus' exalted portrayals of the matriarchs. He typically deletes or downplays assertiveness and initiative on the part of these biblical women, stresses their submissiveness, allows them no direct speech in the narrative, and eliminates suggestions of their receiving direct communication from God.²⁸ Similarly, he cannot bring himself to express unqualified admiration for a woman survivor at Masada, but only to say that she was "superior in sagacity and training to most of her sex" (*Jewish War* 7.9.1). Even Josephus' references to his family betray the assumption that males are more important than females. Although he includes the names of his sons in his rather detailed domestic history, he never names any of his wives, even the third wife whom he regarded highly (*Life* 76).

²⁷Quotations of Josephus are from H. St. John Thackeray, et al., *Josephus* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1926-65): 9 vols.

²⁸E.g., in Gen. 16 Sarah is impatient because of her barrenness and suggests that Abraham father a son by Hagar, whereas in *Antiquities* 1.10.4 Abraham is the one who is distressed over Sarah's sterility, and the plan for redressing the problem is launched by divine initiative; and in Gen. 25:23 the oracle concerning Jacob and Esau is given by God directly to Rebekah, but in *Antiquities* 1.18.1 it is Isaac who receives this divine communication. See also Bailey, "Josephus' Portrayal of the Matriarchs," *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* 154-79; Betsy Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' *Antiquities*," *JJS* 39 (1988): 143-70; L. H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Deborah," *Hellenica and Judaica: Hommage à V. Nikiprowetzky* (ed. A. Caquot, M. Hadas-Lebel, and J. Riaud; Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 1986): 115-28; and *idem*, "Hellenizations in Josephus' Version of Esther," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 101 (1970): 143-70.

The Essenes shunned marriage and sexual intercourse according to Philo (*Hypothetica* 11.14-17), Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.8.2; *Antiquities* 18.1.5), and Pliny (*Natural Hist.* 5.15), although Josephus says that a second branch of Essenes did marry (*Jewish War* 2.8.13) and that even the celibate Essenes did not condemn marriage in principle (*Jewish War* 2.8.2). Documents which most scholars consider to have been written by Essenes confirm this duality of practice: the rule for the Essene camps in the *Damascus Document* assumes marriage and family life, while the *Qumran Community Rule* makes no provisions for women in the community and leaves the impression of a wholly masculine society.²⁹ The Essene's motive for celibacy is explained by Philo as follows:

For no Essene takes a wife, because a wife is a selfish creature, excessively jealous and adept at beguiling the morals of her husband and seducing him by her continued impostures. . . . and casting off all shame she compels him to commit actions which are all hostile to the life of fellowship (*Hypothetica* 11.14-16).

The view of women expressed in this diatribe is quite consistent with what Philo says about women elsewhere, and there is little doubt that it reveals more about his own personal convictions than about Essene attitudes towards women.³⁰ A more likely explanation for celibacy at Qumran

²⁹The only time the *Community Rule* even uses the word נִשְׂאָה (woman) is in the cliché, "one born of woman" (11.21). The graves thus far opened in the large cemetery at Qumran have all contained male skeletons. Although the bones of a few women and children have been found on the periphery of the cemetery, and although the brief *Rule for the End of Days* (an appendix to *Community Rule*) provides for sexual relations when a man has reached the age of twenty, most scholars would agree that the Qumran sectarians were celibate. So Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (Cleveland: Collins and World, 1978): 96-97, 193.

³⁰The same can be said of Josephus' explanation that the Essenes "wish to protect themselves against women's wantonness, being per-

is that the priestly self-identity of these sectarians and their conception of the life of the community as a substitute for the Temple cult required a constant state of ritual purity which would be interrupted by sexual intercourse, involuntary emission, or any contact with a menstruating woman.³¹ On the other hand, the non-Qumran Essenes, who were not so obsessed with priestly purity, married and had children.

In rabbinic literature,³² the roles and status ascribed to women are very much in line with the patriarchal patterns of contemporaneous eastern Mediterranean cultures. Compiled by men and for men, the rabbinic corpus considers woman primarily in her relationship to man, as she comes under the authority of man and can contribute to his well-being.³³

sueded that none of the sex keeps her plighted troth to one man" (*Jewish War* 2.8.2).

³¹Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective*, 181-82, 217-18.

³²Under this heading are included the Mishnah (compiled around AD 200), the Tosefta (slightly later than the Mishnah), the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds (compiled around AD 400 and 500, respectively), and numerous midrashic or commentary materials of varying age. As noted above, one can never be sure that a tradition embodied in one or more of these late collections actually dates back to the time of Christian origins. Our study will draw primarily upon the earliest of these texts, the Mishnah, although even here there are tremendous methodological problems. In addition to the question of date, it is difficult to know whether rabbinic reflections on women represent things as they actually were, or idealized views of the way things should be, or even projections of fears about things that could come about.

³³Jacob Neusner, "Thematic or Systematic Description: The Case of Mishnah's Division of Women," *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (BJS 10; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979): 93-100. Drawing on anthropologists' research on "anomalous women," Neusner shows that the division of the Mishnah dealing with women (*Nashim*) concerns itself largely with those points at which women become anomalous in rabbinic society, i.e., when their relationships to men are in transition: when they reach the age for marriage, are divorced or widowed, or engage in illicit sexual relationships. The rabbis sought to work out these anomalies by assuring orderly transition of women from one man's domain to another, "to bring under control and force into

Woman is placed in a domestic role in which her mind and energies are directed to fulfilling a man's needs so that the man's mind and energies can be devoted to worship, study, and work outside the home.³⁴ Women who fulfilled these domestic obligations were held in high esteem.³⁵ Moreover, elaborate measures were enacted to protect the dignity and basic rights of women.³⁶ These facts alone suffice to disprove the frequent claim that women were mere chattels of their patriarchal owners.³⁷ On the other hand, the positive

stasis all the wild and unruly potentialities of sexuality" (*ibid.*, 99). See also *idem*, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women* (Leiden: Brill, 1980): 5 vols.

³⁴Judith Hauptmann, "Images of Women in the Talmud," *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. R. Reuther; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974): 200.

³⁵See Babylonian Talmud *Yebamot* 62b and *Baba Mezia* 59a for praise of the supportive and resourceful wife.

³⁶E.g., Mishnah *Ketubot* 5:5-9 describes a reciprocal arrangement of matrimonial entitlements and obligations in which the wife performs specified household chores and produces a prescribed amount of cloth in return for maintenance at a standard that befits her social class. A wife retains title to any property she brings into her marriage, but she cannot sell it without her husband's consent and vice versa (Mishnah *Gittin* 5:6). She can appoint agents to transact her business (Mishnah *Gittin* 6:1) and can act as her husband's agent to sell his goods (Mishnah *Ketubot* 9:4). She even has the right of action against her husband and in certain situations can petition the court for a divorce (Mishnah *Ketubot* 7:10). A woman not under the authority of a man (an unmarried adult daughter, a divorcée, a widow whose deceased husband has a male heir) has even greater autonomy. She may keep anything she finds, makes, or earns, in contrast to the minor daughter or married woman, who must turn such things over to her father or husband (Mishnah *Baba Mezia* 1:5; *Ketubot* 4:4; 6:1). She can bring suit for damages (Mishnah *Baba Kamma* 1:3) or for the return of her marriage portion upon being widowed or divorced (Mishnah *Ketubot* 2:1; 11:2). In such cases she can even testify in court (Mishnah *Ketubot* 1:6-7; 2:5-6; cf. *Shevuot* 4:1). She can swear certain business-related oaths (Mishnah *Shevuot* 5:1; *Ketubot* 9:4), and she can arrange her own marriage (Mishnah *Kiddushin* 2:1). In rabbinic law, minor daughters do not normally inherit property, but are entitled to "maintenance" from the father's estate (Mishnah *Baba Batra* 9:1).

and affectionate rabbinic statements about women and the laws protecting their rights must not obscure the fact that a patriarchal ideal is everywhere promoted. Not only is reverence for women predicated upon their submissiveness and their fulfillment of domestic obligations, but women are repeatedly characterized as lazy, frivolous, excessively talkative, nosy, greedy, temperamental, involved in witchcraft, and more prone than males to immorality.³⁸

The subordinate legal status of women in the rabbinic system is most evident in the treatment of their sexual and reproductive function. The biological function of a minor daughter is considered the legal property of her father, who literally sells this function for a bride-price (Mishnah *Ketubot* 4:4).³⁹ If the bride is not a virgin, the bridegroom can claim damages because the goods did not meet specifications (Mishnah *Ketubot* 1:1). When a minor daughter is raped or seduced, her father is entitled to damages because her market value is thereby reduced (Mishnah *Ketubot* 4:1). When a girl is married, the legal right to benefit from her sexuality is transferred from father to husband (Mishnah *Ketubot* 4:5); thus the husband can revoke any vows the wife makes, because these may impair conjugal relations (Mishnah *Nedarim* 11:11-12; *Nazir* 4:5). Woman's social identity is linked to ownership of her sexuality.⁴⁰

³⁷See Judith R. Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988); and *idem*, "The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism," *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (ed. J. R. Baskin; Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1991): 68-93.

³⁸See Mishnah *Sotah* 3:4; *Abot* 2:7; Jerusalem Talmud *Kiddushin* 4, 66b; *Soferim* 41a; Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 49b; 80b; *Sanhedrin* 67a; *Pesahim* 111a; *Shabbat* 33b; 152a; *Ketubot* 65a; *Genesis Rabbah* 18:2; 45:5.

³⁹However, as Wegner, "The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism," *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, 71, notes, by the time of the Mishnah it had become customary to assign the bride-price to the bride herself as part of the marriage deed. See Mishnah *Ketubot* 4:7.

⁴⁰Wegner, "The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism," *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, 72,

The inferiority and limited roles of women in the rabbinic system are evidenced in other ways as well. Women are not normally eligible to testify in court (Mishnah *Shebuot* 4:1). In this instance, as in many others, women are consigned to the same category as slaves and children (Mishnah *Berakot* 3:3; *Sukkah* 2:7). Women are exempt from most religious observances, especially those for which there is a set time.⁴¹ This exemption, together with some rabbis' objections to women's studying the Torah at all (Mishnah *Sotah* 3:4; Jerusalem Talmud *Sotah* 3:4; Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 66b; *Baba Kamma* 29b-36a), the ban on mothers' carrying their infants outside the home on the Sabbath (Mishnah *Shabbat* 18:2), male fears of female sexuality as a source of both temptation and cultic pollution,⁴² and the principle that a person not bound by a particular precept cannot perform it on behalf of others who are so obligated (Mishnah *Rosh Hashanah* 3:8), effectively disqualified women from leadership roles in synagogues and houses of study.⁴³ The Mishnah affords only occasional

correctly argues that although women were treated as chattel in this one area, in all other aspects of Mishnaic law they are unequivocally persons, not chattel.

⁴¹E.g., Mishnah *Kiddushin* 1:7; *Berakot* 3:3; *Hagigah* 1:1. That in this system men have more opportunities to fulfill divine commandments than do women may explain the prayer (found in several rabbinic sources and still part of traditional Jewish liturgy today) in which one thanks God for not creating him a woman (Tosefta *Berakot* 6:18; Jerusalem Talmud *Berakot* 9, 13a; Babylonian Talmud *Menahot* 43b).

⁴²See Judith Baskin, "The Separation of Women in Rabbinic Judaism," *Women, Religion, and Social Change* (ed. Y. Haddad and E. B. Findly; Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1985): 11-12.

⁴³Babylonian Talmud *Moed Katan* 18a, in discussing the superstition that stepping on discarded nail parings could cause a woman to miscarry, notes that this is not a problem in a house of study because women so rarely come there. Tosefta *Megilla* 3:11 says that women were not invited to read Scripture publicly. Babylonian Talmud *Megilla* 23a lists women among those eligible to read the Torah in the synagogue but indicates that they were expected to decline. Babylonian Talmud *Hagigah* 3a assumes that women merely listen. At least one rabbi sought to vitiate this exclusion of women from the central intellectual and spiritual experiences of rabbinic Judaism by suggesting

glimpses of limited social contacts for women outside the home (*Sotah* 6:1; *Ketubot* 7:4-5; *Gittin* 5:9). The Talmud seeks to minimize and carefully regulate women's appearances in public (Babylonian Talmud *Yebamot* 76b-77a; *Berakot* 3a-b; *Gittin* 12a; 90a-b; see also *Genesis Rabbah* 8:12; 18:1). A woman who ventured into the public domain was presumed to be up to no good, and conversation with her was strongly discouraged (Mishnah *Abot* 1:5; *Ketubot* 7:6; Babylonian Talmud *Berakot* 43b). When a woman did go out in public, she was expected to have her head covered. Failure to do so was considered so shameful that it was grounds not just for divorce, but divorce without payment of the marriage settlement (Mishnah *Ketubot* 7:6; Babylonian Talmud *Gittin* 90a-b; *Erubin* 100b).

2. Literary Images: Cracks in a Patriarchal Structure

The images thus far drawn from literary sources all point to an ideological norm and social pattern in which Jewish women were confined to domestic roles and considered intellectually and spiritually inferior to men. As widely documented as such a patriarchal model is, and though many modern studies have left the impression that all the evidence fits such a rigid model, considerable evidence points in other directions. Some literature evaluates women more positively and portrays them in more public and autonomous roles.

That women occasionally played prominent roles in public life in the Hasmonean and Herodian periods is clear from Josephus. Most notable is Queen Salome Alexandra, monarch over the Hasmonean Jewish state from 76 to 67 BC. Even before becoming queen, she showed considerable boldness and initiative in governmental affairs. During the reign of her first husband, Aristobulus I (104-103 BC), she conspired to kill his brother and rival, Antigonus

that while men acquire merit by diligent study, women earn merit "by making their children go to the synagogue to learn Scripture and their husbands to the Beth Hamidrash [rabbinical school] to learn Mishnah, and waiting for their husbands till they return from the Beth Hamidrash" (Babylonian Talmud *Berakot* 17).

(*Jewish War* 1.3.3; *Antiquities* 13.11.2). Upon the death of Aristobulus I, she took charge and appointed another of his brothers, Alexander Jannaeus, to the throne, and became his wife (*Jewish War* 1.4.1; *Antiquities* 13.12.1). That she wielded considerable political power during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC) is suggested by Josephus' statement that "Alexander *and his wife* appointed [Herod's grandfather] governor of the whole of Idumaea" (*Antiquities* 14.1.3; *emph. mine*).⁴⁴ Upon the death of Alexander Jannaeus, Alexandra herself assumed the throne and named her son, Hyrcanus II, high priest (*Jewish War* 1.5.1; *Antiquities* 13.16.1-2). Although Josephus preserves contrasting evaluations of her nine-year reign as queen, he makes clear that she exercised considerable administrative, diplomatic, and military initiative and skill.⁴⁵ Several other Hasmonean women were also active in political matters.⁴⁶

Jewish sources from the Greco-Roman period assign autonomous and public roles not only to historical women, but to women in quasi-historical and fictional tales. Thus in the second-century BC fictional work bearing her name,

⁴⁴Rabbinic sources also attribute considerable political activity to Salome Alexandra, but Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees before 70* (Leiden: Brill, 1971): I, 86-141, has shown that these stories are not reliable indicators of her actual role.

⁴⁵ Compare the positive evaluation in *Jewish War* 1.5.1-3 with the criticisms in *Antiquities* 13.16.1-3. Even amid criticism, Josephus praises her administrative ability. Rabbinic literature preserves both positive evaluations of her reign as a golden age (Babylonian Talmud *Taanith* 23a) and strong objections to a woman's having royal power (*Sifre to Deut.* 157.12).

⁴⁶The daughter-in-law of Salome Alexandra and wife of Aristobulus II bargained with a Roman proconsul on behalf of her family after Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem (*Jewish War* 1.8.5; *Antiquities* 14.5.4). With courage and skill, the daughter of Aristobulus II delayed Herod's capture of the fortress of Hyrcania for years (*Jewish War* 1.19.1). Alexandra, daughter of Hyrcanus II, was a trusted advisor of Herod, later ingeniously saving her family from Herod (*Antiquities* 14.13.6; 15.2-7). See J. Sievers, "The Role of Women in the Hasmonean Dynasty," *Josephus, the Bible, and History* (ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata; Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1989): 132-46.

Judith single-handedly averts a major catastrophe for the Jewish people, overshadowing all the males in the story in intelligence, piety, resourceful leadership, and bravery.⁴⁷ She even assembles the chief magistrate and elders of her home city of Bethulia and censures them for lack of faith and initiative (*Judith* 8-9). In contrast to these helpless male leaders, she cleverly devises and courageously executes a plan which calls to mind some of the boldest and most ingenious exploits of Israel's heroes and heroines (10:6-13:10).⁴⁸ Judith is also exemplary in her piety.⁴⁹ To celebrate the deliverance of her people from oppression, Judith and a choir of dancing women lead the men in a triumphant procession to Jerusalem, the High Priest and the supreme council in Jerusalem join the people in lavishing praise and gifts upon her, and Judith leads the assembly in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving which is a reprise of the major theological affirmations of the book (chaps. 15-16). Judith then retires to Bethulia, where she grows even more famous and declines many proposals to marriage (she needs no male to protect her!). If this fictional story mirrors social reality to any significant degree, then the world of *Judith* was one in which a competent and aggressive woman, independently of her relationship to a man, could assume an active role of

⁴⁷A.-J. Levine, "Character Construction and Community Formation in the Book of Judith," *SBLSP 1989* (ed. D. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989): 564, states, "Only the text's females act in a fully efficacious manner; only Judith displays well-directed initiative; only her maid competently follows instructions. The men are weak, stupid, or impaired." Though there are notes of male chauvinism in the account of Judith's manipulative use of her sexuality, for the author Judith was no weakling, but skillful in the use of weapons in her arsenal that best exploited her enemy's weakness.

⁴⁸G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981): 106-108, 152 n. 10, suggests that Judith is a personification of several biblical heroes and heroines. In view of a likely date of composition in the Hasmonean period, the very name "Judith" suggests a parallel with Judas Maccabeus.

⁴⁹She prays and fasts regularly (8:6; 9:1-14; 12:6; 13:10), immerses herself daily (12:7-9), and keeps Jewish dietary laws even when she is in the enemy camp (10:6; 12:1-4).

leadership in political, military, and religious matters, and could be respected for so doing.⁵⁰

Extra-biblical works which develop the portraits of women known from the Bible provide especially illuminating case studies of the perceptions of and roles occupied by Jewish women in the Greco-Roman period. Josephus' treatment of Rebekah has already been cited as an example of a woman whose role in Genesis has been reduced and made to conform to contemporary ideals. However, in other works biblical women receive greatly expanded roles and exalted portrayals. An example is the portrayal of Rebekah in *Jubilees*, a second-century BC rewriting of Gen. 1 through Exod. 12. Rebekah, not Isaac, assumes the mantle of leadership in this marriage and provides the bridge between Abraham and Jacob in the drama of salvation history. The exhortation to Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman (25:1-3) and the lengthy parental blessing for Jacob (25:11-23) are given not by Isaac, but by Rebekah.⁵¹ Not only is the matriarchal blessing without precedent in the biblical text, but Rebekah is said to have been inspired to utter it by the descent of a "spirit of truth" upon her mouth (25:14). Moreover, in her words to Jacob, she addresses some of the very problems which were of greatest concern to the author: assimilation (esp. intermarriage) with gentiles, and the contamination of the Jerusalem temple. Later, her admonitions to familial harmony become the author's means of addressing the internecine strife of the contemporary Jewish community (chap. 35). Further divine revelations to Rebekah not mentioned in the biblical text legitimate her function as the bridge from Abraham to Jacob, as a link in the all-important chain of levitical tradition, and as a spokesperson for the author's ideals (27:1; 35:6). Other alterations

⁵⁰The most recent research on *Judith* is James VanderKam, ed., *"No One Spoke Ill of Her": Essays on Judith* (Early Judaism and Its Literature 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), which I have not yet seen.

⁵¹Because Abraham had offered the blessing and warned against exogamy earlier (22:10-30), Rebekah's functions here parallel those of Abraham and suggest that she, not Isaac, is the crucial link in salvation history.

of the Gen. narrative confirm Rebekah's role as the more imperious partner in her marriage,⁵² exonerate her from any charge of ethical impropriety, and establish her as an example for the Jewish community to emulate.⁵³ In every way, Rebekah is for the author of *Jubilees* "the matriarch *par excellence* of the Jewish people."⁵⁴

In the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, Aseneth is mentioned only in passing as the wife of Joseph (Gen. 41:45, 50; 46:20), but in *Joseph and Aseneth*, an apocryphal romance from the first century BC or AD, Aseneth—not Joseph—is the leading character. In the first part of the story (chaps. 1-21), Joseph appears at the beginning and end but is absent throughout the heart of the story, where Aseneth occupies center stage. In the second part (chaps. 22-29), Aseneth again eclipses Joseph, not only by the frequency of her appearances, but also by her role alongside Levi as a prime example of and advocate for the ethical ideals which the text promotes.⁵⁵ Carefully-designed parallels between her portrayal and that of Joseph,⁵⁶ and others between her portrayal and that of Levi,⁵⁷ demonstrate that she is in no way inferior to these revered patriarchs. She

⁵²Even Isaac's "fatherly" actions of pronouncing a blessing upon Jacob, giving a deathbed speech, and sharing a final meal with his sons, all replicate actions already taken by Rebekah (chaps. 25, 35).

⁵³E.g., her preference for Jacob over Esau is no longer arbitrary favoritism, as in Gen., but a choice shared by Abraham, grounded in Jacob's moral superiority, and ordained from heaven (19:13-31; 25:14-23; 26:18).

⁵⁴John Endres, *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* (CBQMS 18; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1987): 217, who also provides a much fuller discussion of Rebekah's portrait in *Jubilees*. See also Randall D. Chesnutt, "Revelatory Experiences Attributed to Biblical Women in Early Jewish Literature," *Women Like This*, 108-111, 119-25.

⁵⁵See Randall D. Chesnutt, "The Social Setting and Purpose of Joseph and Aseneth," *JSP* 2 (1988): 21-48; and *idem*, "Revelatory Experiences," *Women Like This*, 114-15.

⁵⁶See Chesnutt, *JSP* (1988): 31-32.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 32.

rebukes the sons of Jacob for their vengefulness and becomes the leading spokesperson for the author's own ideal of clemency and non-retaliation (28:7, 10, 14). Dramatic heavenly revelations to Aseneth strengthen her ethical admonitions, her role as purveyor of revealed knowledge, and the exemplary character of her conduct (chaps. 14-17; 22:13).

As has been acknowledged above, it is impossible to determine the actual social roles and status of women from literary embellishments of biblical characters. Nevertheless, if exalted and influential positions for women such as those assumed by Rebekah in *Jubilees* and Aseneth in *Joseph and Aseneth* had been out of the question in the social environments from which these two works came, the stories could not have been expected to serve the authors' purposes. Moreover, these two authors do not throw social convention to the wind, but demonstrate great concern for proper familial and social patterns.⁵⁸ Since it is within a context of respect for proper familial and social patterns that these women are assigned significant—even dominant—roles of leadership in both home and community, and since both works present the lives of the forebears as examples for their respective Jewish communities to emulate, it appears that in the social world of these works it was possible and even desirable for a capable woman to speak out for the principles central to the life of the community and to assume an aggressive role of leadership as the situation demanded.⁵⁹

⁵⁸E.g., *Jubilees* 29:14-20, and in *Joseph and Aseneth* the recurring formula, "it is not proper for the man (woman) who worships God to" (8:5, 7; 21:1; 23:9, 12; 29:3). See further Chesnutt, "Revelatory Experiences," *Women Like This*, 123-24.

⁵⁹Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, an interpretive expansion of Genesis through 2 Samuel which probably dates to the first century AD, is another work which expands the portraits of certain biblical women in interesting ways. This text's expansion of Deborah's role, for example, stands in marked contrast to Josephus' downplaying of Deborah's judicial, political, and military leadership. See Cheryl A. Brown, *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Portraits of Biblical Women* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

The possibility of such prominent religious and social roles for women is assumed rather than argued in the two works just considered; it is a premise from which the authors proceed to deal with other concerns. However, other authors and redactors may have been more self-consciously attempting to counter the denigration of women. Thus, while *Testament of Job* 1-45 depicts and even promotes such denigration, *Testament of Job* 46-53 presents women much more positively, whether by the same author or a later redactor. As in chaps. 1-45, there is a premium on insight into heavenly reality, but here it is Job's three daughters--not the sons--who are heirs to this insight. When Job dies, his seven sons and his brother are distraught and can only weep and lament. On the other hand, Job's daughters see his soul gloriously conveyed into heaven and are therefore able to look beyond earthly afflictions to take comfort in heavenly reality and worship ecstatically in the language of angels (48:2-3; 52:6-53:4). In a reversal of the stereotypes prominent in the earlier chapters, these women become the leading characters in chaps. 46-53 who embody the author's most cherished values, while the helpless male characters are presented in most unflattering terms.⁶⁰ *Testament of Job* 46-53 projects an image of women which contrasts sharply not only with that in chaps. 1-45, but also with prevalent stereotypes of Jewish women in the Greco-Roman world.

If Levison⁶¹ is correct that *Apocalypse of Moses* 15-30 originated independently from the remainder of the *Apocalypse of Moses*, we have yet another work which preserves divergent views of womankind. As we have seen, the *Life of Adam and Eve* and the closely-related *Apocalypse of Moses* blame Eve for the primeval sin and the human predicament. However, as Levison shows, in *Apocalypse of Moses* 15-30, which gives Eve's own testamentary account of the primeval deception, Eve's actions are explained in

⁶⁰See further Chesnutt, "Revelatory Experiences," 'Women Like This', 115-19, 124-25; and P. W. van der Horst, "The Role of Women in the Testament of Job," *NedTTs* 40 (1986): 273-89.

⁶¹John R. Levison, "The Exoneration of Eve in the Apocalypse of Moses 15-30," *JSJ* 20 (1989): 135-50.

ways that are sympathetic to her. Blame is placed on Adam, and Eve is exonerated. She is no longer the ignorant, weeping, perplexed, uncontrollably enervated character of chaps. 1-14 and 31-43 who is entirely dependent upon the males in the story for insight. Levison concludes that Eve's testament in 15-30 originated independently and that a later editor obscured the exoneration of Eve by incorporating it into the larger indictment of the first woman. It is, of course, possible that the same author who wrote 1-14 and 31-43 also composed Eve's testament as a literary device by which to give the woman's perspective on the primeval fall, if only to discredit that perspective by including it in the larger work. In either case, the extant form of the *Apocalypse of Moses* reflects an awareness of the denigration of the first woman (and, through her, of womankind) and some concern to voice a more sympathetic view.

Even rabbinic literature provides one glaring example of a woman who did not conform to rabbinic stereotypes of women but whose memory was nevertheless preserved and cherished. Beruriah, wife of the second century sage, Rabbi Meir, is depicted as a scholar and teacher of Jewish law whose knowledge and skills in disputation exceeded those of the most learned and renowned rabbis of her time.⁶² Recent studies have shown that the Beruriah traditions are not all of

⁶²E.g., Babylonian Talmud *Pesahim* 62b. Specific stores about Beruriah indicate that her views were convincing to contemporary male sages and were passed along in the tradition (Tosefta *Kelim Baba Mezia* 1:6), that she sternly rebuked a rabbi whose knowledge was defective and a student who was not studying properly (Babylonian Talmud *Erubin* 53b-54a), and that she easily refuted challenges from heretics (Babylonian Talmud *Berakot* 10a). Her reputation for studiousness spawned fantastic legends, e.g., that she studied three hundred laws from three hundred teachers in one day (Babylonian Talmud *Pesahim* 62b). In the medieval period, it also spawned attempts to defame her, as in the eleventh-century Talmudic scholar Rashi's comment on the Babylonian Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 18a, that Beruriah was caught in adultery and committed suicide. However, this late attempt to undermine her reputation is itself evidence of the high esteem in which she had been held in rabbinic circles.

equal age and historical reliability,⁶³ but the mere fact that the compilers of the Talmud allowed the traditions about her to stand and presented them in a complimentary light shows that the rabbinic strictures on women discussed above did not always obtain, even in the strictest rabbinic circles.

Although it is commonly assumed that women played no public role in ancient Jewish worship, Neusner⁶⁴ notes correctly that only three known Jewish groups denied women such roles: the Essenes, the Temple priesthood, and the rabbis. In other Jewish circles, there is evidence of women's presence and even prominence in public worship. Thus, the NT assumes the presence of women in synagogues (Matt. 13:56; Acts 16:13-15; 18:26), and epigraphic materials considered below evidence prominent positions for women in synagogal life. Moreover, in at least one community of Egyptian Jewish worshippers described approvingly by Philo, women participated fully.⁶⁵ Members of the Therapeutic community, both men (Therapeutae) and women (Therapeutrides), lived rigorously ascetic lives but broke their solitude for a weekly Sabbath assembly. Although Philo assumes that the senior member who offered the Sabbath discourse was a male, and although men and women sat apart, separated by a wall that extended partway to the ceiling so that they could hear but not see each other, women participated "with the same ardour and with the same

⁶³Thus David Goodblatt, "The Beruriah Traditions," *JJS* 26 (1975): 68-85, argues that the traditions about Beruriah's formal education and those suggesting that she was the wife of Rabbi Meir and/or the daughter of Rabbi Hananiah ben Teradyon all belong to the latest strata of Talmudic tradition. These elaborations by the Amoraic sages have the effect of sanitizing Beruriah's surprising independence by giving her a venerable rabbinic genealogy and a formal education appropriate to her authoritative station.

⁶⁴Jacob Neusner, "From Scripture to Mishnah: The Origins of Mishnah's Division of Women," *JJS* 30 (1979): 138-53.

⁶⁵The following description summarizes the pertinent points of Philo's lengthy description in *On the Contemplative Life*, our only source of information on this intriguing monastic community near Lake Mareotis in lower Egypt.

sense of their calling" (*On the Contemplative Life* 3). In the gathering for the Feast of Weeks, individuals in turn sang favorite hymns, many of which they had composed themselves, while the whole community of men and women joined in the closing lines and refrains. Finally, the men's and women's choirs sang, sometimes together, sometimes antiphonally, to commemorate the exodus from Egypt. Filled with ecstasy, they sang until dawn, when they returned to their individual houses to resume the life of solitude, Scripture study, prayer, contemplation, and composition of hymns (*On the Contemplative Life* 8-11). Like their male counterparts, the female members of this monastic community seem to have been well-educated and to have had considerable financial resources (*On the Contemplative Life* 3, 8-9). In fact, the principal difference between the male and female Therapeutics seems to have been that while the men had left their wives to join the community, most of the women were virgins who had chosen Wisdom as a spouse (*On the Contemplative Life* 8).⁶⁶

In addition to developed literary portraits of Jewish women who break the patriarchal mold, brief and often incidental references to women in numerous and diverse literary sources likewise reveal cracks in the patriarchal system which is often assumed to have been watertight. Thus, the Gospels and Acts in the NT depict various Jewish women, even married ones, as quite mobile and active in public, as initiating litigation and pursuing their legal rights independently of any man, as managing complicated financial affairs, and even as serving in positions of leader-

⁶⁶This last fact explains why Philo could write so favorably about the Therapeutrides when, in general, he wrote so disparagingly about women. Because most of the women in this monastic community were unmarried, childless, and post-menopausal, they lacked all of the feminine qualities which for Philo symbolized the lower, sensate part of the soul. Having transcended these feminine traits, they had achieved the higher (i.e., masculine) state of the soul requisite to mystical union with the divine. See further Ross Kraemer, "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo on the Therapeutrides," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1989): 342-70.

ship.⁶⁷ The gender-determined roles assigned to the characters in the second century BC apocryphal book of *Tobit* largely conform to the patriarchal model, but once again there are significant variations which lead Bow and Nickelsburg⁶⁸ to speak of "patriarchy with a twist": in the parallel prayers of Tobit and Sarah, Tobit prays in a self-centered and whining tone, while Sarah emerges as the wiser, more unselfish, and more admirable of the two (3:1-6, 10-15); Tobit's grandmother teaches the Law to her grandson (1:8); Anna ventures into the public sphere and becomes the family wage-earner when her husband is incapacitated (2:11-14), and she freely speaks her mind and rebukes her husband when his priorities are misplaced (2:14; 5:17-19; 10:7). In *IV Maccabees*, the mother of seven martyred sons is accorded a status comparable to that of Abraham in the spiritual history of Israel. She is acclaimed "mother of the nation, champion of the Law, defender of true religion . . . more noble than men in fortitude and stronger than heroes in endurance . . . guardian of the Law" (15:29-31). Even Philo recognized that his ideal of secluding women was not realized in actual practice; his castigation of women for their behavior in public presupposes that they did regularly appear in public (*On the Special Laws* 3.31). Rabbinic anecdotes about other learned and resourceful women besides Beruriah likewise suggest at least some variation in women's status and functions.⁶⁹ The non-literary records to which we now turn reveal even more cracks in the patriarchal model.

⁶⁷See Mk. 5:25-34 (and par); Matt. 13:56; 14:21; 15:38; Lk. 1-2; 8:1-3; 18:1-8; and Acts 16:13-15. Neusner, "Thematic or Systematic Description," *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism*, 92, comments, "The women of Jesus' day and country seem to have had great liberty of movement and action."

⁶⁸Beverly Bow and G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "Patriarchy with a Twist: Men and Women in Tobit," *Women Like This*, 127-143.

⁶⁹See Hauptmann, "Images of Women in the Talmud," *Religion and Sexism*, 200-205, for a discussion of rabbinic anecdotes in which women display superior knowledge or other admirable traits. In addition to the cases cited by Hauptmann, Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 62a refers to a woman who is a *gizbarit* (treasurer) who makes disbursements from charity funds.

3. *Non-Literary Data*

Reconstructing a comprehensive picture of ancient Jewish women out of brief and disparate epigraphical and papyrological records is impossible. Nevertheless, these and other archaeological data deserve careful study as our only unbiased testimony to the way Jewish women actually lived. The following survey of the non-literary data focuses on two types of materials: inscriptions related to women's roles in ancient synagogues and the archive of Babata. Miscellaneous other non-literary items are cited only summarily to show that the surprising roles and activities of women in these sources are not at all unusual once one moves beyond the literary evidence to consider other data.

The non-literary materials bearing on our subject which have received the greatest attention are several inscriptions which imply prominent roles for women in ancient synagogues.⁷⁰ A second-century AD inscription from Smyrna in western Asia Minor reads,

"Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue, built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house. No one else has the right to bury anyone (here). Anyone who dares to do (so) will pay 1500 denaria to the sacred treasury and 1000 denaria to the Jewish people. A copy of this inscription has been placed in the (public) archives."⁷¹

Rufina is not the only woman to be designated ἀρχισυνάγωγος, "head" or "president of the synagogue." Sophia of Gortyn is called "head of the synagogue"

⁷⁰See the pivotal study of B. J. Broton, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (BJS 36; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

⁷¹J.-B. Frey, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, 2 vols. (Rome: Pontificio Instituto di Archaeologia Cristiana, 1936-52): no. 741. Vol. 1 has been reprinted (NY: KTAV, 1975). The translation of this and other inscriptions follows that of Ross S. Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

(ἀρχισυναγωγίσσα) at Kissamos on Crete in an inscription from the fourth or fifth century AD,⁷² as is Theopempte of Myndos in western Asia Minor in an inscription from the same period.⁷³ Women are also referred to as "elders" in inscriptions from Crete, Thrace, Malta, North Africa, and Italy in the early centuries AD.⁷⁴ The title "mother of the synagogue" is applied to women in inscriptions from Italy (Rome, Venetia, and Venosa).⁷⁵ Jewish "priestesses" are named as early as the first century BC in epitaphs from Rome, Leontopolis (Egypt) and Beth Shearim (Palestine).⁷⁶ An inscription from Thebes names a woman "leader" or "founder" (ἀρχήγισσα) of a synagogue.⁷⁷

What these titles suggest about women's roles in synagogue life is difficult to determine. Ἀρχήγισσα may designate a female "founder" of a synagogue rather than a woman "leader" with actual administrative responsibilities.⁷⁸ Similarly, the title "mother of the synagogue" may be merely honorific and not indicative of any official function.⁷⁹ However, not all of the titles can be restricted to honorific rather

⁷²CII, no. 731c.

⁷³CII, no. 756.

⁷⁴CII, nos. 400, 581, 590, 597, 731c; and *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 27 (1977), no. 1201. In addition to these seven inscriptions examined by Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 41-55, Ross S. Kraemer, "A New Inscription from Malta and the Question of Women Elders in the Diaspora Jewish Communities," *HTR* 78 (1985): 431-38, calls attention to two others, one yet unpublished. See also Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992): 118, and n. 76.

⁷⁵CII, nos. 496, 523, 639; possibly also nos. 166, 606, 619d. See Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 57-72.

⁷⁶CII, nos. 1514, 315, 1007. See Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 73-99.

⁷⁷CII, no. 696b. See Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 35-39.

⁷⁸So Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 38-39.

⁷⁹So Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Women in the Synagogues of Antiquity," *Conservative Judaism* 34 (1980): 26.

than functional significance. There is no reason to think that "elder" and "head of the synagogue" were merely titles transferred to women whose fathers or husbands functioned in these capacities, that they date from a period when the titles had lost their functional significance, or that they were functional only when applied to men. The inscriptions rather suggest that Jewish women, at least in some times and places, acted as bona fide heads of and elders of synagogues, filling all the roles filled by men who bore the same titles. These roles would include teaching, collecting the half-shekel tax, serving as a patron of building activities, arranging the services, fulfilling certain liturgical responsibilities, and perhaps dealing with outsiders.⁸⁰ Moreover, even if other titles such as "founder" and "mother of the synagogue" are honorific, they nevertheless indicate that the woman named had sufficient financial resources, influence, and prestige to play the kind of patronage role that would earn her such a title.⁸¹

Besides employing titles suggestive of leadership roles for women in ancient synagogues, numerous epitaphs and other inscriptions commemorate women's financial contributions to synagogues, often without reference to a husband. Women donors to synagogues are documented in Asia Minor, Syria, Cyrenaica, North Africa, and Judea.⁸² The donative inscriptions on the mosaic floor of the synagogue in Apamea in Syria suggest that the bulk of the contributions there were made by women.⁸³ In Jewish synagogues, as in the Greco-Roman system of benefaction generally, major donors—whether male or female—may be presumed to have had considerable prestige and influence, which their contributions both reflect and enhance.⁸⁴ This

⁸⁰Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 27-33, 46-55.

⁸¹Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 121.

⁸²Texts and translations of these inscriptions are conveniently collected in Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 157-65.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 158-59.

⁸⁴Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 119.

fact is especially evident in an inscription from Phocaea in Ionia which announces the gift of a woman named Tation. Tation is said to have paid for the construction of an assembly hall and the enclosure of an open courtyard with her own funds. In appreciation, the synagogue honored her with a golden crown and the privilege of sitting in the seat of honor.⁸⁵ This important inscription not only reveals the substantial wealth and prestige of a female donor;⁸⁶ it also contradicts the common assumption that women were separated from men in the ancient synagogue as they are in modern Orthodox Judaism.⁸⁷

Admittedly, the inscriptional evidence is too scattered geographically and chronologically for us to conclude that women regularly sat in the seat of honor or functioned as heads and elders of synagogues at the time of Christian beginnings. Even so, it must be remembered that the rabbinic texts in which women's roles are much more restricted are likewise very late and of dubious applicability to the way Judaism was actually practiced in most places in the Greco-Roman world. Neither the rabbinic deprecation of women nor the inscriptional evidences of more active and public roles for women should be taken as representative. Rather, these divergent images testify to the extreme

⁸⁵CII, no. 738.

⁸⁶This is true even if it is less than certain that Tation was Jewish. See Ross S. Kraemer, "Hellenistic Jewish Women: The Epigraphical Evidence," *SBLSP 1986* (ed. K. Richards; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986): 197-98.

⁸⁷Even though this assumption is still quite common, there is not a shred of evidence from antiquity that women sat in an upstairs gallery or other separate section. See Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 103-38. The gender segregation in the Therapeutic assemblies (Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 3) was probably rooted in the ascetic ideals of this group and provides no evidence for synagogue practice. That Philo even mentions the physical separation of men from women in this case may imply that such was unusual. The existence of the Women's Court in the Herodian Temple is also cited often in this connection, but this arrangement was obviously not motivated by a desire to segregate the sexes, since various events took place in the Women's Court that involved both men and women.

pluralism which characterized Judaism in the Greco-Roman era. Notwithstanding the rabbinic consensus, prominent roles of leadership for women in ancient synagogues are clearly, if sparsely, documented in inscriptional sources. To ignore these sources and consider only the more familiar patriarchal model attested in rabbinic literature would be to impose upon ancient Judaism a uniformity which never actually existed.

Rufina's inscription illuminates women's roles not only in synagogal life, but in the larger social and economic arenas as well. In addition to being the head of the synagogue, Rufina is a woman of considerable independence, wealth, and social and legal authority in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles. She is head of a large household. She owns real property and slaves. She has sufficient resources to commission a costly inscription on marble. She acts publicly and autonomously without reference to a father, husband, son, or any other male. She has sufficient authority to prescribe penalties for anyone violating the tomb.⁸⁸ On virtually all these points, additional inscriptional and papyrological evidence can be cited for comparable positions of Jewish women in economic and social life. Thus, epitaphs from Asia Minor represent other women besides Rufina as owners of family burial sites.⁸⁹ Like Rufina, other women had connections and influence in the non-Jewish community.⁹⁰ The wealth and independence of many Jewish women throughout the Mediterranean world is shown by the widely-attested and generous benefactions of women to synagogues. Egyptian papyri attest Jewish women's ownership of land and livestock,⁹¹ engagement in

⁸⁸See Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Women in the Diaspora World of Late Antiquity," *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, 43-67.

⁸⁹*CII*, nos. 762, 763, 775, 776.

⁹⁰*CII* nos. 606, 619d (inscriptions from Venosa, Italy) may indicate that Jewish women held public office there.

⁹¹V. A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957-64): nos. 28, 41, 47. See further Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Women in Roman Egypt (A Preliminary Study Based on Papyri)," *Reflections of Women*

litigation,⁹² payment of the Jewish tax,⁹³ arrangement of an even-handed divorce agreement,⁹⁴ and involvement in various commercial transactions such as leasing land (more often as lessor than lessee),⁹⁵ buying a house,⁹⁶ and contracting and settling debts.⁹⁷ Fifth-century BC papyri from Elephantine in upper Egypt reveal that women in this Aramaic-speaking Jewish community participated in religious ceremonies,⁹⁸ owned property and transacted business independently of father or husband,⁹⁹ and had the right to terminate a marriage.¹⁰⁰

The second major group of materials mentioned at the beginning of this section, the Babata archive, will be treated only cursorily, not at all because it is lacking in importance, but because scholarly investigation of it is still in the early stages. These thirty-five papyri in Greek, Aramaic, and Nabatean, document the life of a Jewish woman and her family and associates in the Judean Desert near the Dead Sea from AD 93 to 132. The bulk of these documents, although

in *Antiquity* (ed. H. B. Foley; New York: Gordon and Breach, 1981): 303-22; and *idem*, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt* (New York: Schocken, 1984).

⁹²*CII*, no. 19.

⁹³*Ibid.*, nos. 223, 227.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, no. 144.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, no. 453; and see editorial note, vol. 3, p. 10, n. 17.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, no. 483.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, nos. 26, 148. See further Kraemer, *Helios* (1986): 94-97.

⁹⁸A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923): no. 30.

⁹⁹See esp. the personal archive of Mibtahiah, daughter of Mahseiah (Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, nos. 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15). See also nos. 1, 20, 25, 28, 43, and the discussion in Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968): 235-63.

¹⁰⁰Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, no. 15; and E. G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953): nos. 2, 7.

found in 1961,¹⁰¹ were not published until almost three decades later.¹⁰² Gradually, studies are beginning to appear,¹⁰³ but conclusions are preliminary and tentative. All that can be attempted here is a brief description of these materials as they relate to our topic.

Babata's archive reveals a sad and complicated family history.¹⁰⁴ Widowed twice, she spent most of her life in litigation. However, Babata's misfortune is the modern historian's fortune, for Babata did not discard the documents recording her marriages, lawsuits, and property transactions, but meticulously arranged them in four bundles and packed them in a leather pouch, which she wrapped in sackcloth and tied with ropes. The result is "the largest single collection of ancient documents ever found in the Holy Land"¹⁰⁵ and a priceless source of legal, historical, geographical, and linguistic information on Palestinian Jews in the Greco-Roman period. Especially fortunate for purposes of the present study is the fact Babata and other women figure prominently in the social and legal maneuverings reflected dramatically in these documents.

¹⁰¹See Yigael Yadin, "The Expedition to the Judean Desert, 1961: Expedition D—The Cave of Letters," *IEJ* 12 (1962): 227-57; and H. J. Polotsky, "The Greek Papyri from the Cave of Letters," *IEJ* 12 (1962): 258-62. See also Yigael Yadin, "The Life and Trials of Babata," *Bar Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Last Jewish Revolt Against Imperial Rome* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971): 222-53.

¹⁰²Naphtali Lewis, *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri* (JDS 2; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989). A few texts are in Baruch Lifshitz, "Papyrus grecs du désert de Juda," *Aegyptus* 42 (1962): 240-56; Naphtali Lewis, "Two Greek Documents from Provincia Arabia," *Illinois Classical Studies* 3 (1978): 100-14; and N. Lewis, R. Katsoff, and J. C. Greenfield, "Papyrus Yadin 18," *IEJ* 37 (1987): 229-50.

¹⁰³E.g., A. Wasserstein, "A Marriage Contract from the Province of Arabia Nova: Notes on Papyrus Yadin 18," *JQR* 80 (1989): 93-130.

¹⁰⁴See Yadin, *Bar Kokhba*, 233-53.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 225.

Women's ownership and management of property is well-documented in the Babata archive. In a deed dated AD 120, Shimeon (Babata's father) endows Miriam (his wife and Babata's mother) with his property in Mahoza, a village at the southern end of the Dead Sea in the Nabatean region, although Shimeon retains the use of the property during his lifetime.¹⁰⁶ Later Babata inherits this property from her mother.¹⁰⁷ A document from AD 127 has Babata, accompanied by her second husband, going to the capital of Moab to register her extensive holdings of property before the Roman district commander.¹⁰⁸ By AD 130, Babata's wealthy second husband, who owned property in both En-Gedi and Mahoza, has died and Babata has become the owner of several palm groves which had belonged to him. A record of her selling crops of dates from these orchards is preserved,¹⁰⁹ as are records of litigation over the rightful ownership of the grove in Mahoza.¹¹⁰

Babata's incessant involvement in litigation spans the entire period covered by the Greek and Aramaic documents from her archive. In court, she defends her interests against claims from various members of her late husband's family,¹¹¹ including the other wife of her second husband and the guardians of her son by her first husband.¹¹² The legal capabilities and initiative of Babata and other women in these documents are striking.

Among Babata's documents is also the *kethuba* (marriage contract) of her second marriage,¹¹³ which is important as one of very few such contracts from Palestine in

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 235-37. See also Lewis, *Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period*, no. 19.

¹⁰⁷Yadin, *Bar Kokhba*, 236-37, 245-46.

¹⁰⁸Lewis, *Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period*, no. 16.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, nos. 21-22.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, nos. 23-26.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*; see further Yadin, *Bar Kokhba*, 247-49.

¹¹²Lewis, *Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period*, nos. 12-15.

¹¹³Yadin, *Bar Kokhba*, 237-39.

the pre-Mishnaic period¹¹⁴ and therefore a rare first-hand record of a Jewish woman's legal status. This and the other remains of the Babata trove will be the subjects of intensive study for many years. In the meantime, it is safe to say with Neusner¹¹⁵ that "any picture of the Israelite [sic] woman of the second century as chattel and a dumb animal hardly accords with the actualities revealed in the legal documents of Babata."

Conclusion

Considerable diversity existed in attitudes toward and roles of Jewish women in the Greco-Roman period. Patriarchal patterns predominated among the Jews as among Mediterranean peoples generally. Yet, not all Jewish women were as oppressed and repressed as some stereotypes, both ancient and modern, suggest. Significant instances of active and public involvement of Jewish women in social, economic, political, and religious life are known.

Any study of women in the NT and early Christianity which proceeds on the assumption of a monolithic model of ancient Judaism is misinformed and distortive. Judaism existed in the Greco-Roman era in countless local varieties. Before comparing or contrasting ancient Jewish belief and practice with regard to women and some NT text on the subject, one must specify *which* Jewish text, or *which* group of Jews, is meant. This means, among other things, that the complimentary images and prominent roles of women in certain early Christian texts can no longer be considered radical departures from the Jewish heritage, for such can be documented in Jewish sources as well.

¹¹⁴See Lewis, *Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period*, no. 18; P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, *Les grottes du Murabbaat* (DJD 2; Oxford: Oxford Univ. press, 1961): nos. 20, 21, 115; and Léonie J. Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (JSOTSup 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990): 291-99.

¹¹⁵Neusner, "Thematic or Systematic Description," *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism*, 93.