

TAL ILAN

Integrating Women into Second Temple History

*Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism*

76

Mohr Siebeck

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Martin Hengel and Peter Schäfer

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Integrating Women
into Second Temple History

Mohr Siebeck

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*Dedicated
To my friend
Judith Romney Wegner*

Preface

This book is a third in a trilogy on Jewish women of the Second Temple and rabbinic periods. The first book, my Ph.D. dissertation, published in 1995 (*Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status*) was a rather traditional study of women in the settings in which we would expect to find them—the home, the marriage institution and in bed. When that study was completed I realized that women’s role in history should hardly be confined to these restricted domains, since women were part of the rest of history too—social, political, economic, intellectual and religious. My second book (*Yours and Mine are Hers: Retrieving Women’s History from Rabbinic Literature*) was a methodological study, suggesting criteria which could uncover women’s presence and historical significance in documents and settings of the rabbinic corpus in which one would initially assume their absence. Much data on women in unexpected circumstances began to unfold before my eyes in that quest.

That study also sent me on another expedition into the same and other texts and territories, with the hope of finding more traces and more evidence of women’s roles in the main political events of the period, and of the way their presence shaped these events. I began this quest in a number of articles published over the last six years, some of which I have collected, reworked and updated here. Half of this book is a collection of such studies. The other half consists of new studies completed specifically for this volume. I have called this book “Integrating Women into Second Temple History” under the inspiration of the title of Shulamit Magnus’ article “Out of the Ghetto: Integrating the Study of Jewish Women into the Study of ‘The Jews,’” *Judaism* 39 (1990) 28-36. There, on p. 31, Magnus wrote: “The sources for the study of Jewish women ... are largely the sources we already have. What will change is the questions we will ask of them.” I hope this book is an attempt to fulfill this vision. With its completion, the next frontier is to write a text-book history of the Second Temple period in which men and women will be equally represented. Such a project, however, lies in the distant future.

Many have contributed to the completion of this volume. First and foremost I must thank my friend and advisor, Prof. Judith Romney Wegner, who always reads my work before it is published and whose linguistic and professional comments are invaluable. Her attentive reading and understanding are

unparalleled. When she fails to understand me I know I must rewrite the entire piece. When she suggests a correction, I know she is right. It is for this reason that I have decided to dedicate this book to her.

Chapters of this book I discussed with or were read by colleagues prior to publication. These include my teacher and mentor Prof. Daniel R. Schwartz and Prof. Hannah M. Cotton, Prof. Anna Belfer-Cohen, all of the Hebrew University, Prof. Bernadette Brooten of Brandeis University and Dr. Ada Yardeni. I have profited much from their comments and suggestions. The final product, of course, is entirely my own responsibility.

The suggestion to produce this collection was put to me several years ago by Prof. M. Hengel of the University of Tübingen whose constant support of my work has been a source of great inspiration. Prof. P. Schäfer of the Freie Universität in Berlin, whose friendship and good opinion of my work I treasure, generously seconded it. Herr Georg Siebeck of J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) of Tübingen has proved a perfect publisher—careful, generous, patient. This second cooperation between us is proof thereof.

Five chapters of this book were published previously under the following titles:

Chapter 1: “The Attraction of Aristocratic Jewish Women to Pharisaism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995) 1-33.

Chapter 3: “Josephus and Nicolaus on Women,” in *Geschichte-Tradition-Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schäfer (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996) 221-62.

Chapter 8: “Julia Crispina Daughter of Berenicianus, A Herodian Princess in the Babatha Archive: A Case Study in Historical Identification,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 82 (1992) 361-81.

Chapter 9: “Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judaea: The Evidence of the Babatha Archive and the Mishnah,” *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993) 247-64.

Chapter 10: “Notes and Observation on a Newly Published Divorce Bill from the Judaeian Desert,” *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996) 195-202.

I thank these journals and publications for the permission to reprint them here.

For translations from the classics, I used the Leob Classical Library, unless stated otherwise. Translations from the Bible are usually from the Revised Standard Version. Translations of rabbinic literature are my own.

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Abbreviations

<i>AJS</i>	Association of Jewish Studies
<i>BA</i>	Biblical Archaeologist
<i>BASOR</i>	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
<i>CBQ</i>	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
<i>CII</i>	Corpus Inscriptionvm Iudaicarvm
<i>CPJ</i>	Corpus Papyrorum Iudaicarum
<i>HTR</i>	Harvard Theological Review
<i>HUCA</i>	Hebrew Union College Annual
<i>IAA</i>	Israel Antiquities Authority
<i>IEJ</i>	Israel Exploration Journal
<i>JBL</i>	Journal of Biblical Literature
<i>JJS</i>	Journal of Jewish Studies
<i>JQR</i>	Jewish Quarterly Review
<i>JRS</i>	Journal of Roman Studies
<i>JSJ</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSOT</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
<i>JSP</i>	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
<i>JSQ</i>	Jewish Studies Quarterly
<i>LSJ</i>	A Greek English Lexicon (eds. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. St. Jones; 1940*)
<i>PEFQS</i>	Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement
<i>PEQ</i>	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
<i>RB</i>	Revue Biblique
<i>REJ</i>	Revue des Études Juif
<i>RQ</i>	Revue Qumrân
<i>SBL</i>	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>VT</i>	Vetus Testamentum
<i>ZNTW</i>	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>ZATW</i>	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>ZPE</i>	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

“Women are a nation unto themselves” (*bShabbat* 62a).

Introduction

In the Babylonian Talmud Ulla is reputed to have held the opinion that “women are a nation unto themselves (נשים עם לעצמן)” (*bShabbat* 62a). Because of the context in which it appears (Jewish Sabbath laws) it seems quite obvious that Ulla is in fact referring to *Jewish* women as being “a nation unto themselves.” Nations have a history, a territory, a language, a culture, a religion (or religions), literature, enemies, allies and a great many other attributes which identify them and distinguish them from other nations. Did Jewish women have all these? Of course not. Did they have any of these? Perhaps, but not very likely. Ulla, in this statement, was not giving a positive, factual assessment of what women were, but typically, and candidly, stating what they were not. Jewish women are not full members of the Jewish nation. I say “typically,” because when viewed from a feminist perspective, history (all history, including Jewish history) looks devoid of women. I say “candidly” because, unlike most, Ulla was willing to admit that in his opinion, there was a Jewish nation, with a history and all that went with it, and there were women—a nation unto themselves.

This book, however, puts into question Ulla’s statement. If Jewish women were a separate nation, we would be able to write their history separately. This, however, we cannot do. For example, we have no separate literature to fall back on for information on Jewish women as opposed to Jewish men. While it is true that nations such as the Idumaeans also do not have a separate literature that has survived (for their history we rely on Jewish sources), it is important to note the fact that the Idumaeans as a nation are now extinct. Jewish women, on the other hand, are not. Furthermore, if they have no literature, the Idumaeans have at least an archaeology.¹ Even if some may argue that Jewish women have a literature of sorts,² all would agree they have no archaeology.³

¹ For example I. Efal and J. Naveh, *Aramaic Ostraca of the Fourth Century BC from Idumaea* (Jerusalem 1996).

² Ross Kraemer, “Women’s Authorship of Jewish and Christian Literature in the Greco-Roman Period,” in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta 1991) 221-42.

³ Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford 1988) particularly 18-9.

Do Jewish women have a separate language, or a separate territory? No. They speak the same language as Jewish men and not only do they not live in a separate country, they are not even a minority living in another nation's country. For they have no cities or neighborhoods—they live with Jewish men in the same houses and even share the same beds. If their enemies are Jewish men, they are indeed “sleeping with the enemy.”

Do Jewish women perhaps have a separate religion? This is where our answers become more involved. They were certainly excluded to a great extent from the religion of Jewish men. Every morning a Jewish man is instructed to utter a blessing extolling the fact that he was not made a woman (*tBerakhot* 7:18), much in the same manner that he congratulated himself for not being a gentile, that is a member of another nation. The rationale behind this blessing is that women (like gentiles) were excluded from participating in the most important commandments of Judaism. The special commandments imposed on women, however, were not viewed as a blessing, but as a curse (*yShabbat* 2:4, 5b). These two sources indicate that Jewish men's religion was different from that of Jewish women.

Who was it, however, that formulated this women's religion? Surely its initiators rather than its detractors define a religion. We have no evidence that Jewish women defined their own religion. If ever they were asked what religion they belonged to, they would certainly have defined themselves as Jewish. In fact, we may safely assume that had they been allowed to participate in the religious life of the Jews, they would have done so willingly. Ulla's statement turns out to be more wishful thinking than description of a historical fact. Jewish women are not a nation unto themselves.

Because Jewish women are part of the entire nation of Jews, there is no way we can write a separate history for them. Their history is inexorably bound up with that of Jewish men. The sources we use to learn about men are the sources we will use to learn about women. The political events that shaped Jewish men's lives likewise shaped Jewish women's lives. The features that are typical of a given period affect women's lives just as they affect men's. Therefore, the search for women's history should not be conducted in regions other than those where men's history is found. Some events certainly evoked different reactions from men and women, or influenced them in different ways, but this does not mean that men and women were not there together. Women's history should not be confined to the home, the family or the bed, just as men's history should not be confined to the battlefield. This book is an attempt to move Jewish women's history out of its prescribed territories and place it in the public, political, literary, economic and social centres where the nation's consciousness and identity are shaped. It sets out to integrate Jewish women into Jewish history.

The task is not an easy one. All the sources militate against such an approach. Most of them, when dealing with politics, with war, with religion,

totally ignore women. When dealing with women, they confine them to the domestic sphere and identify them with the house, with the family, with child raising. The sources were, after all, written by men and for men. It is, therefore, no coincidence that most studies devoted to Jewish women also confine them quite naturally to the domestic sphere.⁴ Scholars are slaves to their sources. They may suspect them, doubt them, denigrate them, but ultimately they are guided by them.

This book too is guided by the sources themselves. However, in addition, it is guided by the most vital tool of feminist inquiry—that of placing women at the center of the events. The basic assumption in this book is that the women mentioned in the sources are not a means by which to explain the events but an end in themselves. When we discover them, we do not inquire how they explain the source or the event related in the source, but rather how the source explains their presence. By this process, sources in which women appear as remote or obscure, or which appear at first sight to be discussing something completely different, turn out to yield much material on women. With the help of such texts, we can find them involved in political activity, or at the centre of a literary or theological debate.

This book is, therefore, all about gender and Jewish history in the Second Temple and Talmudic period. The history of this period is characterized by sectarianism and theological debate. It is characterized by Jewish independence and by subjugation to foreign rule. Thus it is also characterized by the elation of the fight for freedom and the degradation of the refugee. It is characterized by the emergence of two separate corpora of Jewish literature—first the books known as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and then, with the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, the rejection and partial loss of these and the development of rabbinic literature. Furthermore, it is characterized by a daily life and a unique material culture, which are features of all periods, but differ in manifestation from time to time.

In all of these women were undoubtedly present. This book aims to seek them out in these territories and to expose their role. This, of course, is not always possible, and often, even when achieved, produces meager evidence, which could be brushed away as non-representative and misleading. In ancient history, however, one cannot often hope for more even in fields which are infinitely better documented. In some cases, however, I have been fortunate in that I was able to discover the presence of women where a less

⁴ Léonie Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (JSOT Supplement Series 60; Sheffield 1990); D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley 1993); T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 44; Tübingen 1995); M. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Brown Judaic Studies 303; Atlanta 1995); Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder CO, 1997).

zealous observer would have missed them altogether. These discoveries, then, form the foundation on which this book is constructed.

I have divided the book into three parts. Part one deals with sectarianism. As mentioned above, Jewish history of the Second Temple Period was characteristically sectarian. Women's roles in this phenomenon, aside from the cases where the sources mention them explicitly,⁵ has seldom been discussed. Yet, in a wider sociological context, one can observe that women have often been active in sectarian movements, especially when these were in opposition. Women's secondary status in ancient patriarchal societies, which renders them unfit for most offices society has to offer, makes non-establishment, radical groups an ideal field for women to make their presence felt.

Chapter 1 deals with women in association with the Pharisee movement of the Second Temple period. The enormous amount of secondary literature dealing with the Pharisees indicates just how important this group is for the study of Second Temple times. Whether this importance was real, or whether it is merely perceived because of the importance acquired by the heirs of the Pharisees after the destruction of the Temple, is largely irrelevant. Despite the fact that the allegiance of women to the Pharisees is mentioned more than once in the sources, the issue has never before been explored by scholars. Nevertheless, it appears that women followers were an accepted phenomenon on the Pharisee scene before the destruction of the Temple. I propose a sociological model which explains this within the framework of the attraction of women to marginal opposition groups. This model allows further discussion of women followers of two other Second Temple Jewish sects—Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Sect. With the model in mind, some interesting phenomena associated with these groups can easily be explained.

Once Pharisaism became the defining factor in Judaism, women were pushed aside. Their support was, apparently, no longer required. In Chapter 1, some indication of this trend is revealed. Chapter 2 also deals with a body of evidence which points in this direction. It discusses the famous schism within Pharisaism—the rift between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. Pinpointing the rulings of the two schools on women reveals the striking fact that, in general, Beit Shammai promoted a more positive (or at least more egalitarian) approach to women's personhood and sexuality than Beit Hillel. Consequently, the rejection of the rulings of Beit Shammai was on the whole detrimental to women in the debate over their social and legal status in Judaism.

The historical identity of Beit Shammai is enigmatic. Scholars throughout the ages have identified them either with later-day Sadducees or with the

⁵ E.g. the Therapeutai, see Ross S. Kraemer, "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo on the Therapeutrides," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1989) 342-70.

freedom movements of Josephus' Fourth Philosophy (the Zealots?). The discussion of women and Beit Shammai affords us a brief exploration of the relationship between women and these two Second Temple movements, for which an initial survey of the sources reveals very little information. A second look, however, suggests that the field is not altogether barren. A discussion of women in the Fourth Philosophy also requires delving into the question of women and war, and women and martyrdom—two phenomena which are of paramount importance in Second Temple history.

Part two is devoted to the way women are presented by the sources. The object of this exercise, however, is not to paint a picture of woman's image in the literature, and with this image to extol or denigrate the authors of the sources (as in previous scholarship⁶) but rather, to understand how the image and stereotype of women distorts the actual role they may have played in the historical, political, social events of their day. Sometimes this role is, alas, lost forever, and a discovery of the distortion remains just that, but sometimes when the distortion is removed, a glimpse of the true events may be revealed.

Chapter 3 discusses Josephus' attitude to women. Naturally, because of the character of Josephus' writing, this discussion concentrates primarily on royal women of the Hasmonean and Herodian courts. The use of women as a "category of analysis" applied to the books of Josephus uncovers clues for the understanding of these writings and provides answers for questions which have long mystified scholars. My analysis reveals that there is a clear distinction between the attitude to women in material composed by Josephus himself and the attitude in other parts of his work where he borrowed from other historians, primarily Nicolaus of Damascus. This, for example, helps identify the point at which Josephus begins to utilise Nicolaus rather than other sources. Paying attention to the treatment of women thus generates several useful by-products.

All in all, having identified the bias of the author and discarded it as a-historical, some glimpses of the historical reality in which royal women operated come to light. Thus we learn, despite the confusion caused by the sources, that Mariamme, Herod's wife, was probably executed for political reasons, since she was rightly perceived by her husband as a threat to his royal power. Similarly, despite Josephus' protestations, Queen Shelamzion Alexandra ruled successfully and was admired by many of her subjects. The relevance of the queen's rise to power and her subsequent reign to the debate over women's suitability for such offices is the topic of Chapter 4.

In many respects Chapter 4 is the most speculative piece in the entire collection. It suggests a theory according to which the three dominant

⁶ Extolling: Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 240-5; Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis*, 244-9; denigrating: Ross S. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford 1992) 93-105; Satlow, *Tasting the Dish*, 332-3.

compositions on women which have come down to us from the Second Temple Period—*Esther*, *Judith* and *Susanna*—were in fact composed for the purpose of promoting the queenship of Hasmonean women, primarily Queen Shelamzion Alexandra. Unlike other claims of this sort made by previous scholars, this essay begins with a firm date which has been noted in the past but whose significance has been ignored—the date of the translation of *Esther* into Greek, just one year before the ascent to the throne of the aforementioned queen. The desired connection between this literary composition and Queen Shelamzion is thus concretized. The other connections suggested in this chapter are far more circumstantial, but the discussion of these three compositions against the background of Hellenistic views on women and power places the entire corpus in context.

Chapter 5 also deals with the image of women—this time women in general with reference to another composition, in which women feature prominently—*Ben Sira*. The question of *Ben Sira*'s misogyny has been the subject of some scholarly debate, and is, in any case, more a literary than a historical problem. In this chapter I explore the historical repercussions of *Ben Sira*'s attitude to women, by testing the extent to which his opinions on the subject were treasured and cited. For this purpose I explore the citations of *Ben Sira* in the Babylonian Talmud. As is well known, the book of *Ben Sira* enjoyed a special status with the rabbis, for although it was not canonized, it was often cited approvingly. It has, however, not been previously noted that the bulk of *Ben Sira* quotations cherished by the Babylonian rabbis were about women and displayed a marked misogynistic tone. This suggests two interesting conclusions. The first is that *Ben Sira*'s attitude to women was not “a voice in the wilderness,” but rather a chorus of disapproval, and the other is that his book was appreciated in Babylonian circles less for its infinite wisdom and more for its blatant misogyny.

As opposed to Chapter 5, which inquires about the reflection of ancient women's images in rabbinic literature, Chapter 6 deals with the image of one woman—Beruriah—within the rabbinic corpus. The quest for the “historical Beruriah” allows the use of by now well tried literary tools of criticism of the rabbinic corpus. The tannaitic corpus is discussed separately from the amoraic one, and tannaitic compositions are discussed individually, allowing for differences in outlooks and purposes of the various editors. The historical Beruriah in this chapter turns out to be quite different from the literary Beruriah identified by previous (feminist) scholars. Her importance for feminist studies is, however, in no way diminished thereby.

Finally, Chapter 6 deals with a different kind of source altogether. The data it investigates is skeletal remains of Jews buried in Palestine during the Second Temple period. The assumption of this chapter is that the bones are not completely silent and when asked the right questions, may tell us much about the realities of Jewish women's lives in the period under discussion.

The questions I ask concern sex ratio, child mortality, age at death and violence in the family. The answers the bones give are not always straightforward, but the large data base I have collected allows for a fairly balanced assessment of the data.

Archaeological remains are also the topic of the last part of this book. The importance of the Judaean Desert documents for the study of Jewish women's history is so significant, that it merits special notice. These documents include two complete women's archives, as well as other personal documents owned by women, which contain a rich repository of information. However, because this information is in general confined to questions of marriage, divorce and women's ownership or lack of property under male tutelage, most of the discussions that these documents generate belong to the traditional realm of family and marriage. For this reason, the first two chapters in this section propose a special methodology with which these sources should be approached. The methodology is basically very simple. It suggests that the documents be read not only in order to establish generalizations about women's legal position within this particular Jewish society, but should likewise be mined for the unique, the unexpected, the sensational. For this reason chapters 8 and 9 each discuss only one detail mentioned in one document. Chapter 8 discusses the unique and unexpected; chapter 9 discusses the sensational.

Chapter 8 discusses a woman, Julia Crispina, who is mentioned in the Babatha archive as an *episcopos* (overseer), but whose presence and role there have eluded previous scholars. In this chapter it is suggested that her name and exalted position single her out as a member of the Herodian family. This allows one to incorporate her into Jewish women's history and to solve a few historical, social and legal mysteries associated with the Babatha archive.

Chapter 9 discusses a clause in the marriage document of Salome Komaise (the other owner of an archive), which suggests that the aforementioned Salome had been living together with her husband prior to their marriage. This clause is discussed in conjunction with information derived from rabbinic literature and places the social reality it reveals in a historical (even chronological) context.

Chapter 10, although equally engaged in discussing the sensational, is both a discussion of a complete document and deals specifically with the institution of marriage, with which women are traditionally associated, and which I have therefore, in general, avoided in this book. I have included this piece, however, because the document it discusses is a bill of divorce which a Jewish wife sent her Jewish husband under the auspices of a Jewish court in an independent Jewish state. The idea that such a document could exist, that such an action by a woman could ever have been possible is so foreign to any conventional scholar of Judaism that this straightforward document has universally been misunderstood in previous scholarship. Furthermore, it so

radically alters our conception of the position of women in pre-rabbinic Judaism as to constitute a fitting finale for a book which proposes to revise, alter and fill in some gaps in our knowledge and understanding of women's role in Second Temple and Rabbinic Jewish history.

Part 1

Women and Sects

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